

Rituals in Organizations: A Review and Expansion of Current Theory

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Rituals in Organizations:
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Abstract

This paper integrates material from the study of rites, rituals and ceremonies in order to apply these constructs to the study of organizations. A brief history of the study of the constructs is offered. Theories concerning the components, types, and functions of rites, rituals, and ceremonies are described, followed by a survey of field research in organizations that applies these theories. Conclusions about the current state of knowledge in the field are followed by implications for future study.

Key Words:

Organizational Culture, Symbolic Management, Organizational Change, Ritual

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Actions in organizations have been characterized as displaying a dual significance (Pfeffer, 1981). The tangible character of actions can be seen in the way they are used instrumentally to attain profits, promotions, and calculated goals. On the other hand, actions also display a symbolic, expressive element through which beliefs, emotions, and identities can be formed and changed. This symbolic character, in addition to affecting individuals, also plays an important role in maintaining and reinforcing social structures and incorporating individuals into a larger social entity (Trice, Belasco and Alutto, 1969). Recognizing this symbolic element in the maintenance of social life gives the scholar a theoretical tool to classify and study behavior which at first glance might seem irrational or counterproductive (Trice and Beyer, 1984), but reveals itself, upon further analysis, to be based on the symbolic life of a group.

Implicit in the above view is what we may term a “dynamic” treatment of symbols. That is, research has often considered symbols as objects that represent organizations, such as organizational dress (e.g. Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) or logos (Biggart, 1977). However, *actions* may also be considered to have symbolic functions (e.g. Bordia, Jones, Gallois, Callan & Difonzo, 2006; Dandridge, Mitoff & Joyce, 1980); behaviors, sets of behaviors, and occasions for behavior can act as symbols when they occur in the proper social contexts (e.g. Radcliff-Brown, 1952, Bordieu, 1977). In this paper, I will consider rituals as a form of symbolic expression that takes place in organizations. Specifically, I will review relevant literature in order to answer the question, “What do we currently know about rituals in organizations, and in what direction should research focus in order

to optimize future knowledge?” First, I will discuss how various authors have defined ritual behavior, giving a brief history of the theoretical roots of ritual study and the methods used. The discussion will then turn to the structure and functions of rituals, exploring specific cases where symbolic actions have been exposed in the workplace and discussing their effects for the structuring of social systems and individual beliefs and values. Finally, I will attempt to synthesize these elements in order to evaluate the state of our knowledge and prescribe future directions in research.

Definition of Rituals

Within organizational studies, the most clearly articulated statement of terms with which to study symbolic forms of behavior was given by Trice and Beyer’s (1984) treatment of *rites* and *ceremonies* in organizations. Trice and Beyer’s definition provides a useful starting point in clarifying the discussion to follow, and attempts to show how rituals are similar to but different from related concepts.

Trice and Beyer (1984, 1988, 1993) described rites and ceremonials as discrete enactments that have a beginning and an end, and give expression to a culture’s values and beliefs. The terms rite and ritual are closely related (the Latin noun *ritus*, of which the adjective form is *ritualis*), the latter being the general idea of which the former constitutes the specific instance (Grimes, 1990). Accordingly, some prominent scholars have used the terms somewhat interchangeably (Turner, 1969), although this practice has been debated (see Trice and Beyer, 1984). In addition, Trice and Beyer (1984, 1993), use the term *ceremonial* to describe the contexts in which rites occur. Thus, for example, a “rite of passage” (Van Gennep, 1960) is an instance of ritual, which takes place within a

ceremonial context (e.g. Moore & Myerhoff, 1977). Studying rituals therefore entails examining various rites and their expression in organizational ceremonies.

Trice and Beyer (1984) identified 12 frequently studied cultural forms: rite, ceremonial, ritual, myth, saga, legend, story, folktale, symbol, language, gesture, physical setting, and artifact. Each of these forms holds potentially useful information about a culture; however, most of these artifacts demand an in-depth, long-term research commitment in order to provide a “true ethnographic” account of their use and scope (Trice and Beyer, 1984). The choice to focus on rituals expedites the research process because, within these forms, it is possible to examine culturally rich phenomena compressed into relatively short periods of time.

Thus, a working definition of rituals may be constructed, based on its enacted nature, its symbolic content, and its discrete form. *Ritual action*, it is proposed, *is a form of social action in which a group’s values and identity are publicly demonstrated or enacted in a stylized manner, within the context of a specific occasion or event.*

Examples of this phenomena might include a formal speech, a graduation ceremony, or a dinner for new employees. These examples are similar in that they are conventionalized enactments, rather than spontaneous behaviors, and contain clear-cut beginnings and ends.

The Study of Ritual Behavior

Interestingly, 16 years after Trice and Beyer’s initial prescriptions for research, relatively little empirical work has dealt with the relations between rituals and other variables of interest, and despite the proliferation of organizational culture theories since the 1980’s, large areas of inquiry are still left open.

A possible explanation for the lack of attempts at systematically studying these relations is the methodological divide which has often separated cultural theory with more traditionally quantitative areas of inquiry (Denison, 1996). Given its roots in anthropology, it is not surprising that the literature on organizational rites, rituals and ceremonies tends to rely heavily on qualitative research. In fact, of all empirical work reviewed, only one study used only quantitative methods (Meyer, 1982), and this study did not address rituals directly, but rather compared the effects of structures versus ideologies across organizations. Other cross-organizational methods included Harris and Sutton's (1986) study of parting ceremonies, which used structured interviews across private and public sector organizations.

The majority of research on rituals in organizations has taken the form of case studies. These are usually conducted through external observation of natural settings (e.g. Ashforth, Kulik & Tomiuk, 2008; Gephart 1978), complete participant observation (Vaught & Smith, 1980) or mixed researcher/participant observation (Van Maanen, 1973, 1975). While all of these studies are qualitative, cases of "true" ethnographic research, with long-term, complete participant immersion methods, are declining in the field of organizational culture in general (Bate, 1997). This may be due to the extreme amount of time required for such research, as explained above. Studying rituals in organizational contexts is one possible remedy for this difficulty, given Trice and Beyer (1984) recommendation of studying rites and ceremonials as a way to access "compressed" versions of cultural forms which would otherwise be unwieldy to researchers (Bate, 1997).

Rites, Rituals, Ceremonies in Theory and Practice

Before turning to cases of workplace rites, rituals, and ceremonies, it will be useful to cover ways in which these events have been framed theoretically, with regards to the variety of ritual behaviors, their components, and their functions. This will allow us to recognize the diverse forms of organizational phenomena that function as rites, as well as illustrate how some workplace events differ in their consequences based on how they represent different types of rites (Trice and Beyer, 1984). I will then turn to empirical findings in interviews and in the field, to show how these theoretical constructs become manifest in the modern workplace.

The Historical Roots of the Study of Rituals

The study of rituals has its roots within the sociology and anthropology literatures. Durkheim (1961), in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, explained the creation of a mass social consensus through religious ritual and ceremony. Ritual thus mediates between individual actions and beliefs and social norms, bringing together potentially opposing forces within the community. Although Durkheim (1964) argued that modern life was less able to establish such symbolic consensus through ritual than primitive societies, his notion of ritual as a device for social organizing has influenced many contemporary approaches in the social sciences.

Durkheim's description of rituals as mediators between individuals and society was met with mixed responses (Bell, 1987). Mum (1973), for example, identified Durkheim's theory as providing an important mechanism for understanding how individual-level cognitions interact with cultural-level norms. Evans-Pritchard (1965), however, found the notion of ritual fundamentally ambiguous, difficult to identify as

either an individual or a social phenomenon. Similarly, Levi-Strauss (1945) and Marshall Sahlins (1976) concluded that rituals in Durkheim's view were more impositions of social order than true mediators, the arguing that Durkheim had not properly understood how symbols are appropriated and used by individuals (Bell, 1987).

Van Gennep (1960), in his key work, *The Rites of Passage*, contested Durkheim's claim that ritual did not play as great a role in modern society, arguing that rites were equally important in social transitions in the "urban world". Although Van Gennep conducted his research mainly with tribal or traditional cultures, he stressed that rites are universal, and that their underlying structures are cross-culturally uniform. In addition, diverging from Durkheim, he saw the purpose of these rites not simply as maintaining consensus among members of society, but as structuring the transition of individuals from one social role to another. Because of this micro analysis of role transitions, Van Gennep addressed some of the criticisms in the earlier view. Thus, "life crises", such as marriage, adolescence, and death (or their possible equivalents in organizations, selection, promotion, turnover), would be framed in terms of social rituals, to mark the end of one life period and the transition to the next. Thus a "rite of passage" (here, a general term for all rites), was composed of a pre-liminal phase, in which the individual is removed from his/her previous role, a transitional, or liminal, phase, in which he/she resides between roles and is temporarily devoid of a socially accepted identity, and a post-liminal phase, in which he/she is incorporated into the new role. Fundamentally, Van Gennep argued, the function of this ritual framing of transitions was to restore equilibrium to the social order in the face of an ever-changing environment. To link these stages to organizational life, we might invoke typical worker transition periods such

as hiring (preliminal), training (liminal), delegation of responsibility (post-liminal/integration). Similarly, we might draw a parallel with Pratt's (2000) stages of sensebreaking followed by sensegiving in organizational socialization.

Turner (1969), following Van Gennep, focused on the notion of ritual as a way of negotiating between stability and change. In Turner's view, society has a need for some kind of structural differentiation (e.g. hierarchy) in which different members hold separate roles. On the other hand, there is also a need for individuals to acknowledge a fundamental bond between members, without which no society would be possible. Turner termed this bond *communitas*. Through ritual, individuals can momentarily forego social differences and reaffirm their sense of *communitas*, or basic, shared social membership.

The theoretical basis outlined above, which was still used primarily with respect to pre-modern social structures, formed the basis for the study of symbolic action outside the religious sphere. Moore and Myerhoff (1977) speculated on the applicability of Durkheim's original ideas in secular, highly differentiated social systems: "Are [secular ceremonies and rituals] indicators of islands of collective "beliefs and sentiments" in seas of heterogeneity? Clearly, in a complex specialized and differentiated society, rites often have this character and are used to show a limited commonality, or even to create it. (p.6)"

The idea of a holistic community integrated through ceremony thus shifts to that of social subsystems which use symbolic transactions to build within-group cohesiveness. Similarly, Baum (1990) argues that in a highly fragmented and differentiated system of social groupings, ritual works to negotiate differences within unequal status groups, and

that the modern corporation does not work in terms of unified consensus and values. Moore and Myerhoff (1977), continuing in the tradition of scholars like Turner, ascribed rituals the function of not only periodically affirming social values and power relations, but also sees them as endowed with the power to shift social process by redefining or shifting attention to new issues. This apparent disjunction is reflected in subsequent literature, some of which ascribes symbolic behavior a system-maintenance function (e.g. Van Maanen, 1975; Vaught and Smith, 1980), and some of which ascribes it a system-transformational function (e.g. Biggart, 1977; Gephart, 1978).

As maintenance and change of ideology are directly relevant to smooth running of organizations (e.g., Pfeffer, 1981), it is no surprise that scholars began to study rites, rituals and ceremonies in the context of organizations. This movement took place primarily in the 1970's and 1980's, within the domain of organizational culture. The first scholars to attempt an integration and categorization of the various treatments of organizational culture, and to suggest rites and ceremonies as a window into cultural knowledge, were Trice and Beyer (1984). Acknowledging the influence of anthropologists such as Van Gennep, Trice and Beyer set out to categorize and apply rites and ceremonials to organizations, linking cultural constructs with well researched domains such as commitment, social identity, and performance:

All of these phenomena have been studied before, but few have been studied from a cultural perspective. By connecting them to cultural meanings expressed in rites and ceremonials, the typology provides some new variables that could help to explain previously unexplained variance in these phenomena. (p. 665).

Thus, Trice and Beyer attempted to use the construct of rituals as a tool for integrating diverse psychological and social process within the context of discrete events that provide meaning for organizational actors.

A common feature of the foundational approaches in anthropology described above is their tendency to look for basic structural features of ritual and pay less attention to specific features of ritual within particular settings (Staal, 1991). While Trice and Beyer do not explicitly critique this approach, their attempt to taxonomize particular types of ritual makes some headway into re-inserting the specific into more general theories, while maintaining some cross-applicability through categories of rituals. However, because general theories of ritual have not been properly addressed in organizational contexts, this paper attempts to create a common model through which these categories, and specific instances of organizational ritual, may be understood. After presenting this model, we attempt to apply it to the specific categories to create a picture of rituals that embraces both the specific and the general.

Toward a Theory of Organizational Rituals

Moore and Myerhoff (1977) describe rituals as designated more by their formal properties than content features. For example, the type of reward given at a ceremony or ordeal undertaken by new members may be less important than the fact that an award was given or an ordeal was passed. The fact that certain forms of behavior, such as ordeals or awards, occur systematically in these types of events makes the particular occurrences within a specific event meaningful, but the fact that the specific behavior follows a set form makes the event ritualistic. It is because of this aspect of rituals that they can be

said to exhibit cross-situational uniformity, and can be used to perpetuate different messages in diverse social contexts:

It is our contention that certain formal properties of that category of events ordinarily called collective ritual (or ceremony) all lend themselves singularly well to making ritual a “traditionalizing instrument”...collective ceremony can traditionalize new material as well as perpetuate old traditions. (p. 7)

According to this scheme, all rituals (a) contained an element of repetition, either of content, form, or occasion, (b) were “acted out”, in planned, rather than spontaneous, ceremony, (c) contained behavior that was out of the ordinary, used ordinary behavior in special ways, or overtly drew attention away from mundane uses of behaviors, (d) were highly organized, where even chaotic elements were given prescribed places within the ceremony, (e) used evocative presentation to draw and hold attention, and (f) were aimed at collective, never individual, consumption².

To exemplify these characteristics in organizational life, we may use as an example Gbadamosi’s (2005) analysis of consulting as ritual. In the consulting act, standard narratives of problem diagnosis and solution implementation are enacted through the charismatic, “outside” figure of the consultant, who, according to Gbadamosi, plays a shamanic role in the social group. The act is thus both standardized though meeting former expectations and norms, and evocative through the out of the ordinary context of the presentation.

To say that rituals are often highly structured and orderly, however, is not to say that this structure necessarily arises from the manifest intentions of organizational actors. For instance, managers in an organization might plan an awards ceremony in a very

structured and scripted manner; this, however, does not imply that the managers are cognizant of the underlying individual-organizational relationships that are being negotiated in the ceremony. In this vein, Conrad (1983) distinguished between deep and surface power structures manifest in rituals, echoing Trice & Beyer's (1984, 1985, 1993) distinction between manifest and latent consequences of organizational actions. The distinction is as follows: manifest, or surface structure, functions are based on openly agreed upon reasons for embarking on a course of action. For example, a committee may be formed in order to formulate an organizational mission statement. The latent, or deep structure, concerns the negotiation of unspoken roles and priorities within the group. In the previous example, the formation of the committee allows certain issues to be brought to the forefront and prioritized, and for certain individuals to be deemed responsible for the framing of organizational priorities.

Thus, while all rituals involve manifest actions, the proper level of analysis for a ritual is in the latent, underlying meanings of those actions. In other words, given that "culture" is often conceptualized as a shared world view composed of systems of shared, underlying meanings (e.g. Smircich, 1983; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983), rituals may be seen as discrete events that work to create and organizational culture by establishing public interpretations for interpersonal behavior (e.g. Nugent & Abolafia, 2008). According to Smircich and Stubbart:

The task of strategic management in this view is organization making – to create and maintain systems of shared meaning that facilitate organizational action.

(Smircich and Stubbart, 1985, p. 724)

What is key in Smirchich and Stubbart's statement is the emphasis on the process of creating social meanings and values through organizational enactments, and thus shaping members' views about organizational reality. Berg (1985) emphasizes such a view of organizational life as a constant flow of experience, organized by individuals by designating points of reference that function to break this experience into meaningful segments. For example, a graduation ceremony or a final exam serve as references in relation to which the rest of the academic year may be planned. These key points in the academic schedule are akin to Van Gennep's "life crises", and explain the temporal importance of ritual events.

That ritual and ceremonial behavior work to shape perceptions of an organization is at least implicit in virtually all the studies described later in this paper. However, authors have differed as to how this process functions in the organizational structure. Two broad theoretical standpoints are apparent, and were touched upon above. In the first, symbolic manipulations are used by managers in order to maintain and reinforce dominant social values through socializing individuals into prescribed roles (Gluckman, 1962; Trice et al., 1988; Van Gennep, 1960); in organizations, this equates to gaining support for managerial policies and actions (Pfeffer, 1981). On the other hand, some authors also see ritual as a medium for social change, allowing communities a ceremonial forum in which to formally communicate dissatisfactions and tensions in the status quo (Conrad, 1983; Moore and Myerhoff, 1977; Turner, 1969). These two functional paradigms are not mutually exclusive, however. Both may function simultaneously in organizations, for three reasons listed below.

First, given that organizations display a need for both stability and change (Turner, 1969; Leana and Barry, 2000), the use of ritual to secure organizational solidarity does not necessarily equate with the function of maintaining status quo attitudes and values. In times of organizational transition, merger, or even death, organizational ritual and ceremony can be used not only to transition individuals into new roles, but more generally to move the organization into a new phase (e.g. Harris and Sutton, 1986). In other words, given that the dominant organizational structures themselves are not static, it is not inconsistent to say that a ritual helps shift group values away from previous norms and yet does not subvert the social order of the organization.

Second, treatments of rituals and ceremonials often frame these actions as management-driven (Beyer & Trice, 1988; Kamoche, 1995; Pfeffer, 1981; Rosen, 1985; Trice & Beyer, 1984, 1985, 1993; Van Maanen, 1989). However, researchers have also looked into rituals performed by groups which originate informally among the workers (Hallier and James, 1999; Vaught and Smith, 1980) or are directed away from top-level managerial goals (Van Mannen, 1973, 1975). Thus, the functions of rituals may depend just as much on which group is responsible for perpetuating the rituals as what the larger organization values.

Third, a distinction may be drawn between the intended functions of symbolic actions and their actual functions within the organization. Moore and Myerhoff critique both Van Gennep and Durkheim in framing socialization practices as automatically placing members into prescribed roles, which assumes the effectiveness of socialization. Instead, they argue, effectiveness can vary from situation to situation. For example, one possible consequence of the imposed hardships (or “hazing” practices) on trainees, for

example, may be breakdown or rebellion, rather than increased commitment (Hallier & James, 1999; Pratt, 2000). A similar situation occurs when committees are formed as a rite of renewal. The committee, whose function is intended to placate opposing voices, may end up functioning as a real soundboard for those voices, causing organizational change which was not initially intended (Conrad, 1983).

[Figure 1 about here]

Based on the discussion above, a general theoretical model may be formulated to specify the bases of rituals, their internal structure, and the social functions that they perform. Figure 1 presents such a model in schematic form. As discussed above, organizational requirements for both stability and change give rise to the need to manage shared meanings. This need becomes manifest in organizational actions which symbolically work to change people's understandings of their world. These actions have a tripartite structure. In the first stage, symbols and symbolic actions are used to divest individuals of their formerly held categories (see, for example, Pratt's 2000 discussion of "sensebreaking"). The bringing into question of these formerly held categories results in a "liminal" period, in which categories and identities are ambiguous. Finally, the categories are reinstated, and are invested with truth-value by the authority of the social group. This process functions to establish identities, fix beliefs and attitudes, and allow the perception of change and flux within the organization, while managing tightly the progression of events. As discussed above, within this general model, variations may occur, such as whether the instilled categories are identical to formerly held categories or are new, whether they are driven by top management or by subgroups, and whether the messages transmitted through the ritual are accepted or rejected by the viewing public.

Summary

The preceding discussion allows us to take a broad theoretical position on how ritual behavior can function in organizations. Rituals, according to the aforementioned arguments, are structured to promote both stability and change, and more specifically, to allow individuals or groups to transition between organizational roles, to maintain organizational status, or to build solidarity within the organization, depending on the specific ritual involved. These outcomes are achieved with varying degrees of success, and are based on the ability to construct social meanings, values and attitudes out of an otherwise ambiguous flux of experiences within the organization. Finally, ritual events may originate between group members, or may be management driven.

It is therefore quite evident that rituals can embrace a very broad spectrum of possible organizational outcomes. In order to demonstrate how rites, rituals, and ceremonies are related in practice to these outcomes, it is necessary to look at actual instances of these events to examine how they work differently in diverse situations.

Cases in the Workplace

Trice and Beyer (1984, 1985, 1993) created a taxonomy of organizational rituals that began with Van Gennep's basic conception of rites expanded it into six different types. *Rites of passage* are treated the same as the above scheme, and include the same three components. *Rites of degradation* are used to strip individuals of their social roles and move them to a role associated with lower status. These rites are also characterized by three stages - separation, discrediting, and removal - which amount to an inversion of the stages of rights of passage. These rites often take the form of an allegation of wrongdoing or failure, followed by a process of rationalization or reason giving to show

that the target member is responsible for the alleged offense, and the subsequent public removal through ceremony of the individual to a lower status (e.g. Gephart, 1978). Examples of this type of rite include ceremonies such as layoffs of managers or leaders (Trice and Beyer, 1993). *Rites of enhancement* are elaborate ceremonials given to those members of an organization who perform exceptionally well or who personify company values or attitudes. The high profile nature of these rites gives away its functional role of drawing attention to the “model” employee and demonstrating how his/her behaviors or attitudes lead to public recognition and reinforcement. *Rites of renewal* consist of symbolic actions that are periodically staged in order to reassert the dominance of certain organizational values. Examples include annual meetings or functions (e.g. Mechling and Wilson, 1988; Rosen, 1985) in which members socialize or discuss activities of the organization. Trice and Beyer (1993) also characterize organizational development activities, such as feedback programs and team building workshops, as having renewal aspects, as they are geared towards reaffirming existing structures rather than promoting real system change. *Rites of conflict reduction* consist of public attempts to resolve conflict or address issues of importance, in order to send the image that “something is being done”. Examples of this include collective bargaining rituals, which send an impression of cooperative negotiation of interests (Bok and Dunlap, 1970) and committee formation, which sets up a symbolic group that meets to solve problems (Pfeffer, 1981). Finally, *rites of integration* attempt to bring different groups within the organization together that may not normally interact. These rites address Durkheim’s above claim about the modern inability to organize mass consensus to values, and attempts to make something like Turner’s (1969) *communitas* possible through such rites as student-faculty

mixers and Christmas parties (Trice and Beyer, 1993). Trice and Beyer add to their working taxonomy other possible categories, such as rites of creation (Trice and Beyer, 1985, 1993), which entail establishing new roles within the organization, rites of transition (Trice & Beyer, 1993), which accompany changes in structure or technology in the organization, and rites of parting, (Trice & Beyer, 1993), which accompany permanent loss of organizational culture through death or merger.

While I will use the above taxonomy to review organizational research, it is important to remember that while the rites described by Trice and Beyer are relevant in specific organizational settings, they all hold in common the basic features of rituals analyzed above. Specifically, they are all concerned a.) with transformation, or the shifting of the social positions/statuses of organizational actors, and b.) with stability, or the maintenance of a communal set of cultural beliefs and values. Trice and Beyer's taxonomy highlights the fact that these two basic processes can take place through a shift of social position (enhancement vs. degradation), a "re-initiation" into an existing position (renewal), a shift from a contested to a harmonious position (conflict resolution), or a change from exclusion to inclusion or vice-versa (integration vs. exclusion/degradation).

I will now describe research findings on the use of rites, rituals and ceremonies in specific workplace instances. In order to structure this examination, I will use Trice and Beyer's (1984, 1985, 1993) taxonomy for describing rites and rituals. This scheme is theoretically useful because it classifies rites according to their functions in managing change or reinforcing norms. It may be noticed that many of the examples do not fit neatly into one or the other category; this is to be expected. Trice and Beyer (1984)

proposed the six types of rites and rituals as a working taxonomy that could spur future research in the area, streamlining and revising the original categories. They later added possible new rites such as rites of creation, but did not formally revise the original table of six categories. I found no such revisions or alternate schemes within the organizational behavior literature. Thus, showing which cases tend to overlap categories may be a first step towards creating an empirically based taxonomy of ritual constructs. In addition, based on the findings presented, I will present several general propositions about the operation of ritual events.

Rites of Passage

One of the most cited studies of rites in organizations are Van Maanen's (1973, 1975) studies on the socialization of policemen. Van Mannen, with a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, observed 4 stages of police socialization: an entry stage, in which a tiring and lengthy selection procedure insured the strong commitment of accepted officers, an introduction stage, in which attitudes of the recruit, weakened by the stress of the preceding stage, are quickly shifted to the cultural norm of the group, an encounter stage, in which the recruits initial experiences while working orient him/her to the priorities and reward/punishment contingencies of the culture, and a metamorphosis stage, in which recruits have fully integrated the values of the work group. Hallier and James, (1999) found similar processes with air traffic controllers (ATC's), who went through a stressful and somewhat abusive validation process, followed by a disconfirmation of all previous experience. However, instead of integrating and condoning the culture which had just put them through these trials, the ATC's felt distance from their mentor, and suppressed their emotions on the job.

Applicable here is Moore and Myerhoff's (1977) critique that not all rites are effective at socializing participants, which allows researchers to then ask "why" and begin forming empirical hypotheses. One explanation may be that the police recruits had never served as policemen, while the ATC's were simply transferring within departments. That the ATC's already had confidence in their identities in the given role may have hindered the effectiveness of separation rites meant to disengage them from their previous group affiliation, and revealed a testable boundary condition. Thus:

Proposition 1: Rites of passage link an actor to a new social positions through a process of a.) divesting the person of a former or contradictory identity though devaluing or separation from that identity b.) allowing the actor to achieve a new identity through an arduous initiation process.

A second expected relation is based on threat to the group; as external threat to the group increases, solidarity may become more important and members may "put up" with more abusive rites of passage. This hypothesis is consistent with Vaught and Smith's (1980) study of initiation among coal mine workers. The miners worked in a situation that was dangerous in both long and short terms, that was literally removed from all other forms of society, and that necessitated intense cooperation to avoid injury. Rituals of socializing new members in the coal mines entailed forms of ridicule and humiliation of a violent and often sexual nature, violating both personal and legal boundaries³, yet met with few complaints from the workers themselves (after the rites were over, that is). This suggests:

Proposition 2: Rites of passage will be more successful when inclusion in the group facilitates the avoidance of some external threat.

The importance of rites of passage may be seen from the symbolic effects of unsuccessful rites. Beyer (2000) examined the aftermath of the Texas A& M tragedy, in which 12 people were killed by the collapse of a log structure used in an annual bonfire ritual. The bonfire, according to Beyer, symbolized the passage of students from their former lives to adult status. After the accident, outrage resulted from students and alumni at the proposal to discontinue the tradition, which served no instrumental purpose outside of its ceremonial value. Even parents of the deceased students lamented at the loss of the bonfire ritual. All rites of passage, however, do not have to be carried out on such a mass level. Lortie (1968) describes the initiation of new professors, citing practice teaching and similar activities as ordeals that are carried out “individually”, systematically integrating initiates into new roles without large-scale public ceremonies.

Rites of Degradation

Because of the notion of status loss that is the basis of rites of degradation, one would be tempted to categorize ceremonies and rituals associated with organizational death as rites of degradation. Such a conclusion may or may not be warranted. Harris and Sutton (1986) conducted a cross-organizational study of ceremonies in dying organizations, in which members of these organizations tended to reaffirm their bonds and make future plans while also discussing reasons for the organizations death, blaming a takeover organization, and internalizing that “it’s really over”. The first two behaviors typify renewal or passage rites, where the emphasis is on solidifying bonds, whereas the final two behaviors represent the cognitive and affective disengagement typical of degradation ceremonies. Trice and Beyer (1993) proposed the term *rites of parting* to deal with just this situation. A more clear-cut example of a degradation ceremony is the

firing of the head of a student organization leader (Gephart, 1978). This ceremony takes place at a committee meeting where the leader is accused of inappropriate conduct, thus creating a tension of inconsistency between the leader and the group norm. Reasons are given that lay responsibility on the leader, and he is deposed, thus regaining equilibrium. In these two studies, the main difference seems to be that in the first, all members were losing their previous status, whereas in the second, the degradation was occurring without the dissolving of group coherence. Apparently, rites of degradation serve not simply to remove members from role status, but also to build cohesion and consistency from the group:

Proposition 3: Rites of degradation will be more likely when the group is threatened by individual failure within the group than when the group as a whole is failing.

This conclusion may be of use to managers who are faced with degradation issues such as layoffs. Layoffs may be the result of top-level financial considerations rather than individual actions, and may affect a large number of people simultaneously. This poses a double threat to cohesiveness because (a) The status degradation is not the result of a group threat but itself poses a group threat, and (b) The threat is not directed at an individual, but at the group as a whole (as in a dying organization), thus promoting sympathy among those who stay for those who do not, creating a disequilibrium. Martin (1988) described the symbolic effects of layoff procedures, and attempts by management to handle the situation diplomatically. These attempts included making layoffs the “last possible option”, renaming the layoff “work force reduction”, and emphasizing that the

position, not the person was the target of termination – in other words, “de-ritualizing” the situation. A resulting hypothesis, then, related conceptually to the last, would be:

Proposition 4: For degradation ceremonies to build group solidarity, two conditions must be present: (1) The symbolic degradation must not encompass a large portion of the group, and (2) The degradation must be based on restoring the well-being or equilibrium of the group (e.g. through giving reasons that the target individual is responsible for a threat or disequilibrium).

Rites of Enhancement

Rites of enhancement are arguably the most visible ceremonial acts, as they are deliberately public embellishments of correct or commendable behavior by workers or managers. These rites are intended both to provide a model of behavior for the rest of the workers, and to link the exceptional behavior of the individual to the organization, thus allowing credit to be taken by the group (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Thus, while all rites in are concerned with such affairs as easing tensions, reproducing the status quo, or transitioning individuals between roles, rites of enhancement achieve their goals primarily through the publicity of their display.

The dual functions of rites of enhancement are observable in Schumacher’s (1997) ethnography of a high-tech corporation, “Camelot”. Rites of enhancement included recognition in company newspaper articles and annual reports, giving of plaques and awards, and ceremonial dinners in which top employees were recognized. Workers received gifts such as t-shirts with logos, and plaques shaped like floppy disks. Thus, the company identity, represented through logos and such, formed the background for individual recognition, linking behavioral excellence with the company name. Thus:

Proposition 5: Rites of enhancement serve the function of demonstrating the merits and achievements of individuals or groups to bolster the status of the organization as a whole.

Rites of Renewal

Rites of renewal have a stabilizing function within the organization, “rejuvenating” and reproducing accepted values over time (Trice & Beyer, 1993). They thus take a cyclical or periodically recurring form. Rosen (1985) studied the annual breakfast ceremony of an advertising agency. The background for this event was a gourmet restaurant, itself affirmative of the “good life”, associated with the economic goals of the advertising employees. Similarly, speeches reflected “rags to riches” and other achievement-friendly discourse, as well as each department relating success stories in their part of the organization. In some cases, these success stories differed markedly from actual experiences over the year. Similarly, presentations of “public service” activities may have been used to hide the hegemonic status of the managerial unit (Rosen, 1985). Kamoche (1995), in studying ritual in a Kenyan car firm, found a similar ritualistic avoidance of bad news. We may attempt, then, to generalize about rites of renewal:

Proposition 6: As reinforcers of status quo structures, rites of renewal present current social positions as desirable, and work to mask differences between members.

Ironically, this end may in fact be achieved through apparent subversive or dysfunctional activities at the surface level (Conrad, 1983). Working from the previous example, a comedic slide show given to the theme of “Star Wars” and a skit containing a “burlesque” portrayal of company interactions allowed members to vent as a group to

ease tensions and build community by the very act of mocking their own community. On a similar note, Wells' (1998) study of dysfunctional behavior at a girl scout camp showed such behavior to be group affirming. The girl scouts, making fun of camp counselors and administrators by interjecting profane lyrics into camp songs, were not, according to Wells, rejecting the camp culture or ideology. Rather, by using esoteric knowledge only known to camp members, they were forming a sub-group identity while still retaining group identity with the camp. Thus, renewal does not negate sub-group identity, but nests it within a larger group identity. Vaught and Smith (1985), in the coal mine study mentioned above, found that idiosyncratic nicknames were given to each worker, working to highlight individual differences and attributes, yet affirm group membership by conferring an identity that exists only within the context of the group. The subsequent conclusion, then is:

Proposition 7: Dissenting voices do not undermine the effectiveness of rites of renewal as long as they affirm underlying affiliation or legitimation of the group.

The last two examples also demonstrate the often informal nature of rites of renewal. As there is no great transition associated with these rites but simply a fine tuning of the system, there need not be any grand ceremonial context. Firth (1972) studied rituals of greeting and parting, focusing on the significance of affirming personal identity as well as group bond (again, individual distinctiveness without losing group membership), yet this would not have to be done in a formal manner. In the coal mines, in addition, often rites of renewal would simply mimic rites of passage that had taken on a repetitive nature; thus, "Hey, Fatty hasn't been greased yet" (passage into group role)

and “Hey, Fatty hasn’t been greased in a while”(renewal of role) would be all that was needed to distinguish the two types of rites.

Rites of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is a dimension of all rites, whereby tensions in the culture are resolved by either a transition to different roles, a degradation of status, or other actions depending on the type of rite. Because of this, rites of conflict resolution may overlap significantly with other forms of rites. For example, Barley (1986) studied interactions between radiologists (higher status role) and technologists (lower status role) in changing hospital settings. He found that even in cases where technologists knew more about a topic than the higher ranking doctors, they often deferred to the opinions of the radiologists, so as not to threaten existing power structures. This reaffirmation of existing structures could be seen as symbolic conflict reduction, but also as a renewal rite, reproducing the status quo. At RCA, initiates would be told both positive and negative aspects of the organization upon entry, diffusing tensions which could be created by experience contrary to socialization messages (Kreps, 1983). Here, a symbolic conflict reduction becomes a part of a rite of passage.

Rites of conflict reduction, however, can be more than simply mechanisms for easing tensions (Trice and Beyer, (1993). Kamoche (1995), expanding from Gluckman’s (1962) analysis, explains that conflict, when integrated and ritualized in social relations, can work to solidify rather than fragment a community⁴. Collective bargaining provides a classic example. A manager who wants to expedite the negotiation process by bypassing collective bargaining may infuriate union members, even if the offer made is reasonable (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). In fact, Strauss (1982) listed both managers and

union workers as being opposed to worker participation schemes; it could be that such schemes would eradicate the manifest need for collective bargaining practices, but the latent, symbolic need for a rite of conflict reduction would be unfulfilled.

Proposition 8: Rites of conflict resolution, as collective representations of tension reduction, increase the effectiveness of the negotiation process independent of the content of the negotiation.

Rites of Integration

Rites of integration are very similar to rites of renewal, in that they both attempt to restore a communal unity within the organization. However, they seem to be differentiated by the fact that while rites of renewal attempt to reaffirm organizational ideologies and values, rites of integration work to establish an emotional unity or community bond. I find it difficult to tease apart (within the context of rituals) emotional commitment to an organization and ideological commitment, as almost all treatments of ritual presented thus far take for granted that strong emotional manipulations, inherent in rituals, are used to forge an individual's adherence to group norms and roles. Thus, the group venting through humor during Rosen's (1985) annual dinner, while it would be typical of a rite of integration, would also have ideological effects of renewing the group structure. In Rosen's study, for example, uniform dress was used to mask organizational status differences, creating a unity which differed from, but provided a foundation for, social differentiation (i.e. Turner's *communitas*). Integration here serves as a tool for renewal. In short, although it is important to acknowledge emotional bonds in organizations, I would question the category of rites of integration as distinct from rites of renewal.

Accordingly, Firth's (1972) study of greeting rituals, as well as Rosen's annual breakfast study, would be rich in rites of integration. Through the processes discussed above, emotional bonds are made and community is built. Another example of a rite of integration is Picnic Day at UC Davis (Mechling and Wilson, 1988). According to this analysis, the university commemorates its history as an "aggie" school with parading animals and various human/animal activities. Through various animal jokes and puns, the community re-identifies itself with its roots, while reinforcing its beliefs about human-animal relationships.

Proposition 9: Public ceremonial displays of shared affects, values, or attitudes will reinforce and increase the strength of these affects, values, or attitudes, and will also increase the collective perception that these attributes are shared.

Siehl et al. (1992) studied rites of integration and psychological involvement with respect to service jobs. They frame different types of services (e.g. fast food vs. doctor's office) as requiring different levels of information processing and psychological involvement by customers. For example, a lawyer's services may require high amounts of information processing during the server-customer interaction in comparison to a restaurant service, thus necessitating higher personal involvement. They propose that rites of integration can be manipulated to promote high, medium or low amounts of involvement, depending on the information processing needs of the interaction. This type of model is useful in that it allows operationally states the dimensions of ritual, thus providing specific criteria for a phenomenon which is often left vague in its definition and conceptualization.

Discussion/Future Research

The study of rites, rituals, and ceremonies allows researchers to study processes in organizations that might be overlooked in rationalistic, means-end approaches to behavior. However, the effects of group solidarity and integration of individuals into existing norms have been dealt with a great deal elsewhere in the organization behavior literature. A critical question a review such as the present one must ask is whether the effects explained by rites, rituals and ceremonies cannot be explained equally well with constructs more central to the field, such as organizational commitment (e.g. O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), social modeling (e.g. Bandura, 1997), or organizational socialization (e.g. Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). For example, could the process of ceremonially giving an individual a reward for high performance be just as well explained as an attempt to promote Bandura's (1997) mastery modeling by other employees, or do we gain something by calling this act a "rite of enhancement"?

I would answer that the field does in fact gain something by this type of construct. Even if one were to assume that all the social and psychological issues related to rites, rituals and ceremonies could already be adequately explained by existing streams of theory (a claim which, to my knowledge, has not appeared in the organizational literature), the concept of rites would still be useful as a medium through which the above theories were integrated in specific organizational enactments. That is, the viewpoint that cognitive or affective processes cause such outcomes as organizational identification or commitment may be complemented by a perspective which views such outcomes as mediated by sense-making events or enactments by social groups (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985).

A related point concerns the joining of organizational culture perspectives, based largely in qualitative, field based analysis with positivist-based psychological theory. This cooperation has, in the opinion of Denison (1990), been prevented by “paradigm wars”, or the view that the two perspectives are mutually exclusive when, according to Denison, they are in fact simply different methodological approaches to similar substantive issues. Both sides of this apparent divide may profit from insights on the “other side”. For example, the ethnographic character of culture research examines individuals in relation to their natural organizational contexts; Bate (1997) argues that this establishing of a link between individuals and their contexts allows researchers to bridge the gap between “macro” and “micro” perspectives, a need whose urgency has been echoed by House et al. (1995). On the other hand, outside of rites, rituals, and ceremonies, researchers in organizational culture have used quantitative methods to link cultural concepts with such processes as cognitive attributions (Silvester et al., 1999) and performance (Ritchie, 2000), for instance. In this author’s view, there does not seem to be any reason that rituals cannot be, in principle, quantifiable, as they were originally formulated to be generalizable across contexts (Van Gennep, 1960), and not limited to content specific situations. At the same time, this does not mean that researchers should forego the depth of in vivo field experiences.

In addition, future work should address issues of refining the categories of rituals and ceremonies. As mentioned before, Trice & Beyer (1984) presented their taxonomy as a way to aid the study of rituals while at the same time continuing to work on valid new categories or refine the existing ones. Such work simply has not been done, and

work which refers to the taxonomy often uses it without questioning the basic categories or adding new results back into the process of finding dimensions.

By contrast to the relative lack of work on rituals in organization studies, a rich history of ritual studies in the social sciences more generally both provides much room for integration of concepts within our field. At the same time, this richness has brought along with it many critiques of early conceptions of ritual which must be addressed by organizational scholars. Such critiques have tended to come from post-modern and post-colonial schools in anthropology (e.g. Bell, 1987, 1997; Clifford, 2002; Goody, 1961), and tend to displace ritual from its former place at the head of anthropological studies, while retaining some value for the analytical use of the concept.

For example, Goody (1961) initiated a wave of critique by claiming that rituals were essentially analytical tools, but were often confused with “true” descriptors of cultural data. According to this view, the slippage from using ritual to organizing anthropological data into using it to describe real-world properties of cultures is fallacious. Similarly, Bell (1997) questions the fundamental difference between ritual action, which is meant to be “meta-conventional” in the sense of originating cultural agendas, and regular quotidian activity. Following Austin’s (1962) analysis of linguistic performatives, the distinction between ritual and quotidian actions ultimately breaks down because all actions have a ritual element, and rituals, in turn, are as affected by pre-existing conventions as vice-versa. For this reason, Bell prefers to use the word “ritualization” to refer to ritualizing activity rather than to identify ritual as an ontological category separate from the rest of culture.

Second, it has been noted by Bell (1987) that ritual analyses begin by breaking cultural tensions into dichotomies (e.g. individual/society, order/chaos, maintenance/transformation), and in a second move, using ritual to reunite these fractured cultural elements, explaining this unification as the ultimate social function of rituals. Of this charge, the current paper is clearly guilty, as it bases its view of rituals on a “change within stability” function of rituals. Subsequently, it is subject to some critiques from anthropologists (e.g. Ortner, 1995) that traditional dichotomous thinking is a convenient simplification of the cultural world, whereas contemporary cultural studies should look at the world in a more multifaceted and disjointed way.

In essence, all of these critiques rest on a similar basis in that they problematizes the use of simple dichotomies to explain complex cultural realities. We agree that this is problematic, but also agree with Ortner (1995) when she says that such analysis are not “exactly” wrong, and in fact make interesting stories, as long as they are understood as simplifications. In this sense, our paper presents and elaborates on an analytic tool, but must avoid the “slippage” that Goody warns against.

This said, a great amount of interesting ideas have been produced in the last 30 years on the topic of symbolic actions in organizations. This topic is one firmly rooted in the history of the social sciences, and has a strong theoretical and research basis in anthropology. For these ideas to be most useful both to the theory and practice of organizations, it is important for links to be drawn from these roots to current organizational contexts, and for a general framework to be created that tells researchers what to look for when searching for ritualistic patterns in the field.

Endnotes

¹ While Van Gennep (1960) generally discussed “life crises” as necessary transitions such as adolescence, marriage, and death, he also mentioned occupational specialization as a site of rites of passage, and researchers have used his concept of life crises in organizational transitions such as layoffs (Harris and Sutton, 1986).

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Figure Caption

Figure 1. *Conceptual Model of the Organizational Ritual Process*

