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The role of rituals and fantasy themes in teachers' bargaining

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The Role of Rituals and Fantasy Themes in Teachers' Bargaining

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This study treats collective bargaining as a social construction of reality. Adopting the framework of symbolic convergence theory, this investigation examines the rituals and fantasy themes of bargainers and team members collected through observations of teachers' negotiations and interviews with participants. Fantasy theme analysis reveals that both school districts develop symbolic convergence on common enemies and past negotiations. This convergence instills similar values and motives for the negotiation process. However, the two districts and the labor-management teams differ in the meanings that they hold for the bargaining rite.

L ABOR-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS are crucial to the effectiveness of any organization. In unionized organizations, collective bargaining is a ritualized activity through which management and labor make legally binding decisions about salaries, fringe benefits, working conditions, and organizational policy. As an organizational rite, bargaining is more than a way to reach a contractual settlement. Rather, it is a process of constructing social reality—a means of negotiating shared meanings between labor and management. Through interactions and interpretations of these interactions, labor and management enact their bargaining culture.

Specifically, negotiation teams communicate separately to interpret the other party's position and to anticipate moves that the opponent might make. The two teams then construct a new collaborative social reality from their interactions at the table and their reactions during caucus meetings. Thus, meanings develop from revising expectations and interpretations of messages and merging two distinct social realities (Bullis & Putnam, 1985). In this sense, integrative bargaining is not simply a form of joint problem solving; it is a way of constructing collective meanings of the bargaining process, the contractual issues, and labor-management relationships. This process of constructing meaning

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parallels the formation of shared consciousness that emerges from engaging in ritualistic activity and sharing narratives.

This study adopts symbolic convergence theory to analyze the stories and rituals that form the shared consciousness of bargaining teams and of labor-management relationships. Using a case comparison approach, this study highlights the similarities and differences in the fantasy themes and bargaining rights of two teachers' negotiation units in two school districts. The overall purpose of the analysis is to uncover the emotions, values, and motives embedded in the fantasy themes, to ascertain the degree and nature of symbolic convergence within and between teams, and to depict the bargaining rites that characterize negotiation in each district. Finally, through the psychodynamic qualities of these symbols, this study makes some inferences about the way bargainers deal with their underlying differences.

BARGAINING AS ENACTING SOCIAL REALITY

Bargaining is a process in which two or more parties who hold incompatible goals engage in a give-and-take process to reach a mutually acceptable solution (Putnam & Jones, 1982). Since the two parties are interdependent, each one has the potential to block the other party's goals. This dependence on the other party in the presence of perceived opposite goals means that cooperation and competition occur simultaneously—making bargaining a mixed motive activity. The potential to block the other party's goals gives both parties a power base in the negotiations. Typically, bargaining occurs through giving provisional offers, discussing and debating these offers, and reaching mutual agreements on disputed issues.

Since bargaining is a strategic activity, many theorists characterize it as an economic game, a social exchange activity, or a form of rational decision theory (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). This study departs from traditional models of formal negotiation by viewing bargaining as an interpretive process, one socially constructed through the symbol system of participants and constituents. Unlike social interaction theorists who concentrate on strategies, tactics, phases, and cycles (Gulliver, 1979; Walton & McKersie, 1965), interpretive approaches center on the meanings or interpretations of the process through the study of symbols, such as rites, rituals, narratives and myths (Putnam, 1985). Moreover, when participants make sense of their own and their opponent's messages and when they invoke meanings about their past or their environmental context, they engage in an interpretive process (Bullis & Putnam, 1985; Gray, 1987). Hence, an interpretive approach to negotiation focuses both on the meanings of symbols generated in the process and on the way participants engage in individual and collective sense-making about their endeavors.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Symbolic Convergence Theory

A theory of communication grounded in the social construction of reality seems particularly suitable for this investigation because of its emphasis on group consciousness as a mode of convergence on the meaning of an event (Bormann, 1983, 1985). Symbolic convergence is a general theory that accounts for the creation and maintenance of a group consciousness through shared motives, common emotional activity, and consensual meanings for events. "Symbolic convergence creates, maintains, and allows people to achieve empathic communion as well as a meeting of the minds" (Bormann, 1983, p. 102). Symbolic convergence consists of three parts: (a) a discovery of the way communicative forms and practices evolve into structured patterns that create shared consciousness, (b) a description of the dynamics of people sharing group fantasies, and (c) an explanation of why people share group fantasies (Bormann, 1983, p. 101). Convergence, as a form of consensual meaning, refers "to the way that two or more private symbolic worlds incline toward each other, come more closely together, or even overlap during certain processes of communication" (Bormann, 1983, p. 102).

This theoretical perspective runs counter to the rational models of negotiation such as game theory and social exchange theory and it moves beyond the cognitive models of negotiated meaning such as coorientation processes, scripts, and negotiated order. Moreover, as a coherent framework for examining bargaining interaction and practices, it is particularly suitable to the context and goals of this study. This study centers on group and intergroup interactions as products of and simultaneously producing the bargaining event. The analyses of group fantasies in small group interaction and their link to the symbolic meaning of the bargaining rite makes symbolic convergence theory applicable to this study. Moreover, fantasy theme analysis, as a rhetorical form of storytelling, centers on the sharing of narratives and on the psychodynamic elements of group process. In effect, symbolic convergence theory offers a model for investigating how people construct meanings together, one that focuses on the motives, emotions, and consciousness of group members.

Organizational Stories, Fantasy Themes and Fantasy Types

Since no study of collective bargaining employs a narrative framework, research on organizational stories, in general, and fantasy themes, in particular, guides this investigation. Stories are narratives that reflect a folklore quality (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, 1983), an oral history of the past (Bormann, 1983; Martin, 1982), and a paradigm for human existence (Fisher 1984, 1985). Stories can develop from actual events or they can be fictional. In either case they constitute a symbolic reflection of the beliefs, values, and ideologies of organizations.

Stories perform vital functions for organizational members. These functions include socializing newcomers (Brown, 1985; Louis, 1980), solving problems (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1976), enhancing bonding and cultural identification (Martin, 1982; Trujillo, 1985), glorifying heroes and identifying villains (Kirk, 1970), legitimating power relationships (Bormann, Pratt, & Putnam, 1978; Mumby, 1987), providing entertainment (Kirk, 1970), and providing organizations with an historical context (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982). Brown (1990) synthesizes these functions into three categories: reducing uncertainty, bonding and identification, and the management of meaning.

Of particular relevance to this study are stories that manage the meanings of organizational activities. Stories shape organizational meanings through functioning as retrospective explanations (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983; Wilkins, 1984), through uncovering implicit control mechanisms such as "cultural givens" (Kelly, 1985), through serving as evidence in arguments and persuasive appeals (Rowland, 1987; Weick & Browning, 1986), through constituting frames of reference or interpretive systems (Shrivastava & Schneider, 1984), and through merging contradictions in subculture value systems (Glaser, Zamanov, & Hacker, 1987; Reimann & Wiener, 1988). This study centers primarily on the latter two forms of managing meaning—providing a system for interpreting events and serving as a means for negotiating subculture values and motives.

Research on organizational stories, however, centers more on the functions of narratives and less on the dynamics of storytelling. Fantasy theme research, in contrast, begins with the enacting of dramas in small group sessions. Dramatizing messages in fantasy theme analysis are stories that take place outside the here-and-now setting of the communicators (Bormann, 1986). In a small group these messages often dramatize a situation in the past, one in the future, or a current one outside of the group (Bales, 1970; Bormann, 1975). The results of sharing the telling of a story may lead to a *group fantasy,* in which several dramatizing messages chain together to form dramatic imagery, plot lines, villains, heroes and heroines, settings, and emotional intensity. A group fantasy, then, emerges from the psychological process of being caught up in a dramatizing message or of having sympathy with the leading characters, demise for the antagonists, and suspense for the outcome. A *fantasy theme* refers to the content of a group story that ignites the chaining out of the narrative. Fantasy themes, then, are organized into an artistic form as opposed to being an example or an illustration (Bormann, 1986).

Organizational members who share fantasy themes begin to develop similar attitudes and emotional responses. Shared fantasies provide members with coherent accounts of their past, visions of their future, and values and motives for actions. Fantasy themes are always biased, ordered, and interpreted to convey particular views of social reality.

Since they incorporate meaning into group experiences, they aim for *symbolic convergence* or an integration of the values, attitudes, and meanings of group members (Bormann, 1983, p. 104). Through sharing fantasies, organizational members become aware of their group identity, particularly when fantasies distinguish the "we" from "them" (Bormann, 1983, p. 106).

But fantasies rarely exist as isolated stories. *Fantasy types* are stock scenarios or similar plot outlines, characters, and situations shared by members of a group. Because fantasy themes are stored in the mental and emotional memories of group members, they can be triggered by brief allusions to symbols like the insider's joke (Bormann, 1986). Frequent and shorthand references to these themes builds fantasy types or stock narratives with similar characteristics. *Rhetorical visions* are the fantasy themes and types that individuals in a large community come to share. Although Bormann (1983) contends that rhetorical visions stem from small group experiences, the data for analyzing them emanate from public messages in organizations and society at large. Since this study draws its data from bargaining interactions, small group caucus meetings, and interviews with participants, it focuses primarily on group fantasies, fantasy themes, and fantasy types.

Rites and Rituals

Fantasy theme analysis addresses the substance and the nature of shared consciousness within a group. Rites and rituals, however, concentrate on the events or the behavioral practices that enact, alter, and reflect this consciousness. Even though rites and rituals originate through group practices, they can alter the symbolic meaning of fantasy themes and form a bridge between fantasy themes and public messages about ritualistic practices and ceremonies. In effect, participant meanings of a rite or ceremony may influence the public interpretation of a rhetorical vision.

A rite is "a relatively elaborate, dramatic set of activities that consolidates cultural expressions into one event" (Trice & Beyer, 1984, p. 655). This event is typically carried out through social interaction and for a designated audience. Rites and ceremonies involve deliberate planning, careful management, and rehearsed sets of behaviors (Kluckhohn, 1942; Van Gennep, 1960). As sets of observable activities, they occur repeatedly, usually at regular or patterned time intervals (Chapple, 1970; Fontenrose, 1971). Rites and ceremonies are public events such as retirement dinners, award ceremonies, and orientation sessions for new employees (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Trice & Beyer, 1984).

Since rites and ceremonies make public the private values and attitudes of a group, they constitute a way of extending fantasy themes into rhetorical communities (Bocock, 1974; Deal & Kennedy, 1982;

Fontenrose, 1971). They perform both instrumental and emotional functions that lead to technical and expressive consequences. For example, the conferral of tenure in universities serves as an instrumental evaluation of faculty performance (technical consequences) and an emotional anointment of social identification (expressive consequences).

Nested within this framework of rites and ceremonies are ritualistic behaviors that serve as norms, sanctions, and rules to enact rites. Rituals, like rites and ceremonies, are routinized and repeatable, but they stem from scripted rather than planned behaviors and they rarely take on the public significance of a rite or ceremony (d'Aquili, Laughlin, & McManus, 1979). Since rituals are acted out within ceremonies, however, the concepts are often used interchangeably. Examples of rituals include a handshake or embrace as a greeting, coffee breaks, gift giving, staff meetings, and Friday afternoon bull sessions.

Fantasy themes that are recounted at formal and informal organizational meetings may become ritualistic behavior. That is, some organizational rituals are enacted through the sharing of fantasy themes and types. For instance, lunch and coffee breaks may entail the regular sharing of such fantasy types as political conspiracies, motives of organizational leaders, or gossip and rumors embellished in narrative form. Company staff meetings might begin or end with a ceremonial fantasy theme about the founding of the organization, its charismatic leaders, or its loyalty to customers (Mitroff & Kilmann, 1976). Fantasy themes that form oral histories of significant events might be shared at award ceremonies and orientation meetings.

Of particular relevance to this study, bargaining is often treated as a rite of conflict reduction comprised of ritualistic procedures and interactions (Trice & Beyer, 1984). The archetypal rite of bargaining casts the union and management as adversaries with an inherent conflict of interest. Both sides engage in such ritualistic behaviors as presenting long lists of extravagant and divergent demands, facing off at the conference table, use of hostile or firm behaviors, and "false fights." When a settlement is near, the union negotiator threatens to leave the scene. Management responds in a ritualistic manner through reducing tensions, finding compromises, and pointing to areas of cooperation. Conflict is reduced through a "willingness to bargain in good faith."

This description of the archetypal bargaining rite provides a point of departure for comparing the fantasy themes, ritualistic behaviors, and meanings of bargaining as an event. This investigation, then, poses the following questions: What fantasy themes and types surface in group interactions in the two bargaining districts? What motives and values underlie these themes? What ritualistic behaviors and symbolic meanings characterize bargaining in the two districts? How similar and different are these fantasy themes, ritualistic behaviors, and meanings of the bargaining rite? How do enactments of the bargaining rite compare with the archetypal model that Trice and Beyer (1984) depict?

METHODOLOGY

Participants and School Districts

The participants in this study were members of two school districts in the state of Indiana. The first district was a large suburban township which employed 485 teachers and 25 administrators and included 10 schools that enrolled approximately 8,055 students. The district was 80% unionized, with approximately 389 teachers belonging to the local and state National Education Association affiliate. The administrators had negotiated informally with the teachers eight years prior to the passage of Public Law 217, the state Public Employee's Bargaining Act, and seven years following the passage of the act; hence the district had a long history of administrative-teacher negotiations. This history produced a 120-page contract, one vaunted by the union as "the most complete contract in the state."

The second district was a rural community that employed 155 teachers, with approximately 68% union members. The corporation included six schools, four elementary, one middle school and one high school, under the auspices of a five-member elected school board and a centralized administration. In contrast to the first district, administrators and the school board refused to negotiate with teachers prior to the law. Collective bargaining had occurred for seven years since Public Law 217 passed. The contract in this district was approximately 30 pages in length and had been ridiculed as one of the least complete contracts in the state.

Under Public Law 217, the administration had to bargain on issues of salary, hours, fringe benefits, grievance, and arbitration of unresolved grievances. Also, they had to discuss working conditions, curriculum, class size, pupil-teacher ratio, reduction of personnel, job benefits, and budget appropriations, but they were not required to include these issues in the contract. However, once these items appeared in the contract, they were open for negotiation from year to year. If a settlement was not reached in either district, the bargainers could employ fact-finding or mediation, but strikes were disallowed by law. Also, neither district had binding arbitration as an option for third party intervention. Although Indiana as a state ranked 48th in its aid to public education, teachers in both of these districts typically received raises that were either equal to or higher than the state average.

Procedures

Two researchers observed the negotiation sessions, planning meetings, and caucus interactions of both districts. For the first district, this included 40 hours of bargaining at the table, interspersed with an additional 14 hours of caucus meetings. Bargaining sessions covered a period of 11 days and ranged from 3 to 15 hours per session. The

administrative team consisted of six people—Charlie, the assistant superintendent and chief negotiator, three principals crossing high school, middle school, and elementary education, one assistant principal, and one staff employee from the central office. All but one of the members had served on a previous bargaining team; most of them had served for four or five years. The administrative team reported to an elected school board, one that delegated most decisions to the bargaining team, with the exception of approving percentages for raises.

The teachers' team was comprised of six members—the local union president, Sallie; the union past president; and four elected representatives from elementary, middle, and high schools. Only two of these six had served on previous negotiation teams. The union president was the chief bargainer and had never negotiated a contract before this session. The teachers' team worked with a uniserve director, a hired union official for this district. He helped them prepare their contract proposals and served as their consultant throughout the negotiations.

The second district held its negotiation during one 10-hour marathon meeting that included caucuses and side-bar sessions. The teachers' bargaining team consisted of a professional negotiator, Dan, who was the uniserve director for this district, and 11 teachers, elected by the local teachers' union to represent elementary, middle, and high school interests. Four of the 11 teachers had five years of previous bargaining experience; one of them was the local union president and one was the designated leader of the negotiation team. The teachers acted in an advisory capacity in working with Dan and surveying teachers about issues in the contract. The school board and administrative team consisted of Jim, a hired professional negotiator; the president of the board; the corporation's financial officer; four board members; the principals of the high school and middle school; and the superintendent of the corporation. Dan and Jim were seasoned representatives of their respective teams. Jim had represented the administrators during all seven years of bargaining and Dan had represented the teachers for the past four years. The two professional negotiators worked opposite one another in other school districts throughout the state.

In both districts, teachers, administrators, and school board members described these bargaining sessions as high in trust. Participants indicated overall satisfaction with their settlements.

Data Collection

The researchers employed a multimethod approach in collecting data. Four methods were used—observations and detailed field notes (approximately 1300 pages for District 1 and 325 pages for District 2), interviews, survey questionnaires, and document analysis. Two observers took extensive field notes in the bargaining and caucus sessions. Field notes contained a near-verbatim dialogue of interactions as well as notes

on the general atmosphere. Field notes were expanded and typed into full notes shortly after the observations.

Seventeen one-hour interviews in District 1 and 22 interviews in District 2 were conducted with negotiators and members of the bargaining teams. Interviews sought information on bargaining history, perceptions of the negotiation process, origin and perceptions of bargaining issues, and links between bargaining issues and organizational communication. Interviews were audio recorded and researchers had transcripts typed for each interview.

Data Analysis

In the first stage of this analysis, the researchers read through the bargaining field notes and interview transcripts to get a feel for the negotiation context. First, we extracted and analyzed all dramatic messages, examples, or illustrations of situations that revealed digressions from the here-and-now deliberations of the interactions. We then sorted out stories into non-fantasy themes, chained or group fantasies, and fantasy types. Non-fantasy themes were examples, analogies, or stories that did not chain out in or between the groups. Fantasy themes were stories that were shared by more than one group member or bargainer. Fantasy types included recurring themes, abbreviated references to fantasies, inside jokes, and short-hand language.

We then examined the plot lines, characters, and scenes of the fantasy themes and types that emerged in the interview transcripts. Each fantasy theme or type was identified by district and by source such as caucus meeting, bargaining table, or interview. Then we isolated routinized procedures or rituals that characterized the way each district enacted the event. Rituals included such activities as opening and closing behaviors, format of the sessions, language or coded behaviors, concession behaviors, and behaviors that characterized the bargaining climate. Fantasy themes and rituals were then plotted onto large computer sheets and tracked for each team in each district. Finally, we noted the similarities and differences in fantasy themes and bargaining rituals for the two districts.

Next, we examined emotions, motives, and values represented in the constellation of fantasy themes and types. This second-order data provided evidence of symbolic convergence with divergent interpretations of the bargaining rite. Finally, we noted similarities and differences in symbolic convergence and in bargaining rites between the two districts.

RESULTS

Fantasy Themes and Fantasy Types

District 1: Third party intervention. Administrators in District 1 shared group fantasies in which villains and heroes dominated the plots.

These themes surfaced in caucus sessions and through stories told during the interviews. In the administrators' caucus meeting, three different stories on third party intervention chained out. In the second year of Public Law 217, the administrators hired a professional negotiator, a lawyer with a doctorate degree in labor relations. He came in with a chip on his shoulder as the authority who "knew it all" about public sector bargaining. Several members of the group smiled with glee when Dave noted, "how humble this 'hot shot' became when none of his suggestions worked." Another member of the team exclaimed, "This outsider didn't know what was going on. He couldn't relate to the problems that educators faced and he didn't have to go back and face the teachers the next school year." Feeling excited about his team's bargaining expertise, Phil jumped in with the comment, "Yea, and he was expensive to boot."

Next year a fact finder, Doug, was called in as Big Brother to give the teachers "advice." He recommended 1% less than the administrators were offering and then he threatened to take his recommendation to three different city and state newspapers if the teachers refused to accept it. The teachers knew that taking a recommendation with facts and figures to the community was like "twisting the arms of the board." "Funny thing," Dave exclaimed, "we reached agreement in a hurry after that. We started at 4 p.m. and went until 3:00 a.m." Phil lamented, "I wish they [the union] wouldn't do this. Every year we go through it. We are 4 or 5 hours down to the wire and we end up where we would have been before. We didn't need Doug. We could have made it on our own." Interview data revealed that one year an outside lawyer advised the teachers to test the contract through arbitration hearings. In the end they lost after an expensive fight.

Both the teachers and the administrators developed a common fantasy theme in their description of John, the accountant, who was kicked off the administrators' negotiation team. Although John held the purse strings of the corporation, he was a seedy character who could not be trusted. One teacher exclaimed, "Nobody understands John, not even the administration." Another teacher responded, "he has a way of complicating an already complex budget by using 18-month fiscal reports for a 12-month time frame. He is always talking around the figures and questions." A third teacher spoke with a laugh, "Yea, he typically takes his vacation in Florida in the middle of the negotiation. The board has to contact him long distance to see if it's okay to go with a particular salary figure." The first teacher lamented, "No one, not even the administrators, trust the accountant."

Although each group fantasy referred to a different situation and a different villain, these stories contained a similar plot and functioned as fantasy types for both teams. The basic plot was that third party neutrals or outside experts entered the negotiation to help the teams reach a settlement. Instead of facilitating the process, however, they

made it far more difficult for the disputants to function effectively. Each theme engendered emotional reactions of disdain for the arrogance of experts, frustration with third party interventionists, and pride in the teacher-administrator efforts in handling deep-seated conflicts. The bargainers found it ironic that state-appointed interventionists were meddlesome and detrimental to the negotiation process. Yet, it gave both teams a sense of pride to realize that they could handle the bargaining themselves. Both teams used this fantasy type (i.e., "remember Doug," "we don't need lawyers") to reiterate their shared values and to reaffirm their desire to reach a negotiated settlement on their own.

District 1: Opponents. Both teams also generated fantasy themes about their opponents. In their caucus sessions, the administrators cast the teachers' team as naive, hard working, but very inexperienced. Stories were told about the initial sarcasm of Sallie, the teachers' negotiator who came in sounding like a tough, hard-hitting union mimic with weak and illogical arguments in the early stages of negotiation. These group fantasies provided entertainment and tension release during the caucus meetings. In another instance when the administrators were sizing up the teachers' reactions to their proposals, Phil initiated, "What's with Ann, the elementary teacher?" Tom jumped in, "Yea, her head keeps nodding yes, no matter what we say." With eyes bright and in an excited manner, Dave added, "Reminds me of that bird you see on a cup. You've seen the kind that sit on a drinking glass and go up and down all the time?" Moved by this image, Phil laughed and exclaimed, "she's just like a woodpecker on a rotten log back there, her head bobbing up and down. I wonder if she's going to sleep." In addition to providing entertainment, this group fantasy unified the team and instantiated consensual meaning that the teachers were inexperienced negotiators.

This interpretation of the teachers' behaviors made a significant difference when the teachers retracted a concession that they had previously made. Although several administrators wanted to get tough with their opponents, to make strong demands, and to accuse them of bargaining in bad faith, other administrators suggested that the teachers might not realize that they had reneged on the proposal; that is, it might be an innocent mistake. Charlie, the assistant superintendent, decided to take a soft approach and to question the teachers indirectly. By adopting an interpretation that gave the teachers the latitude to err, the administrators avoided what could have become a destructive attack and an escalating conflict.

In like manner, the teachers told stories about the administrative team, casting them as well-intentioned, but disorganized and ill-prepared. They noted the number of repetitive arguments, their slowness in generating counter-offers, and their general disarray in following the agenda. These interpretations ruled out explanations of distrust and manipulation that could have accounted for their opponents' behaviors. Ironically, both teams accepted each other's idiosyncrasies as a given,

even though they used them to release tension, to build solidarity, and to enhance their own image. Hence, group fantasies instilled values of tolerance, flexibility, and team unity as the ideology that guided negotiations.

Charlie, the administrators' negotiator, surfaced as the hero for both teams. Administrators depicted him as "keeping a steady hand on the tiller" and building esprit de corps among the troops. Dave commented, "He holds the ranks together by showing us we're on a divine mission—with a corner on the truth." The teachers cast Charlie as the pivotal force in the negotiation. Although he was sometimes defensive and had a high need for control, he was reliable and generally trustworthy. With Charlie as the hero of their enterprise, both teams were confident about the negotiation process.

District 2: Past negotiators and bargaining history. The group fantasies that emerged in the second school district also centered on villains and heroes. Teachers recounted stories which cast Jim, the administrators' professional negotiator, as condescending and difficult in the early years. In one of the caucus sessions, Roger noted, "Yea, ole Jim had it made. He pulled up in his big Cadillac with a smile on his face and let us have it." Another teacher added, "he made his big bucks and left the scene." "For Jim, it was showtime, let's bargain again," echoed a third teacher.

But Jim, as the teachers observed, was only doing his job since he was hired by the real villain—Ron, a board member who had a strong adversarial view of negotiation. Both the teachers and the administrators chained out group fantasies about Ron's behaviors and his influence on the early turbulent years of negotiation. In one group fantasy, Ron insisted that the board give an opening offer of a $1.00 raise. The teachers countered with a request for a 35% raise. A nasty conflict spiral ensued in which few concessions were given and both sides held their opponents accountable for problems in the negotiation. The teachers claimed these hostile, extreme offers agitated the other side and represented "the immaturity of the teams."

Another villain of early years was the teachers' first negotiator, Steve. In an interview with three of the board members, Garyl commented, "Steve was a real hard-lined uniserve director." Sharon jumped in, "I remember when Steve came into the first session. He said, 'God, you have the worst contract I've ever seen.'" "He was a nice enough guy, personally, I guess," Garyl added. "We almost had a strike when he was here. Only two or three votes away from it." Fred remarked, "Yea, they sent him to Parkerville after he left here and look at the mess they're in now. He's a real militant."

These tales of villains were interspersed with fantasy themes dominated by action; for example, "everybody was ready for war"; a 20-minute walkout, and a shopping center in which teachers recruited

community support for their position. The administrators recalled the year when the teachers nearly went on strike. The line was drawn in the sand and it looked like a bloody battle. The newly hired teachers' negotiator, Dan, came in right before the alleged strike and like a "knight in shining armor" rescued the district in the midst of a 20-minute walkout. From that day, he became the hero, for both the administrators and the teachers. Two similar fantasy themes were shared in the administrators' caucus as reminders to avoid such scenes as teachers handing out leaflets at shopping malls or parents bombarding individual board members with phone calls. These stories became fantasy types that appeared in shorthand form when one of the board members wanted to hold out and to make the teachers be the last to compromise. The motive of this fantasy type was to maintain high morale and to keep peace in the family, even if it meant the administrators must go the extra mile to get the settlement.

Bargaining Rituals and Rites

Fantasy themes in both districts functioned as ritualistic behaviors that set limits on negotiation behaviors, formed common enemies, and unified the teams. This section describes the way the two districts conducted their sessions, including their opening and closing behaviors, format of the bargaining, concession rituals, language or coded behaviors, and bargaining climate.

District 1. Negotiation in this district began with the administrators reacting to the teachers' proposals. The session opened with the requisite greeting and joking that set an informal tone to the deliberations. Negotiations consisted of one-hour sessions at the bargaining table interspersed with 30-to-45-minute caucus meetings. District 1 avoided sidebars or private meetings between negotiators without the presence of team members. Bargainers walked through the proposed contract chronologically by giving arguments for and against each proposal. When the two sides concurred on an item, they would mark it with a tentative agreement. Both sides used caucus sessions to prepare written proposals and counterproposals, to "bad mouth" the other side, to release tension, and to interpret their opponent's behaviors. A turning point in the negotiation came when the teachers followed a ritual introduced by the administrators the previous year. They presented a "bottom-line" proposal that stripped their package to bare bones, eliminating most buffer items.

The bargaining rite in this district was mildly conflictual, but neither side expressed strong hostility. Both parties were careful not to violate the "good faith bargaining" that had developed in recent years. Charlie, the assistant superintendent, was particularly good at controlling the language and exact wording of the settlement. In this way, the administration exerted control over the final document. Rather than

typifying the archetypal rite of conflict reduction (Trice & Beyer, 1984), this bargaining session resembled two vendors who were trying to iron out the legal technicalities of a sales contract. Considerable time centered on working out the syntax, language, and written description of the proposals.

District 2. To provide a common foundation for the negotiation, the second district began with a prenegotiation meeting between members of opposing teams to share financial calculations. The teachers gave the administrators their proposal and the board met with the administrators in a two-hour planning session to react to the proposal. The two teams met briefly at the table and then the professional negotiators met in four separate side-bar sessions in which each one laid "truth and beauty" on the other side. Sandwiched between the side-bar sessions were lengthy caucus meetings in which agreements were ironed out. The two sides quickly dropped issues that were "give away" items, settled the easy items first, and then began problem solving on the challenging ones. Although neither side exchanged written counterproposals, the two negotiators found ways to package items, splinter issues, and construct new alternatives to meet the needs of both teams.

Although there were "heated" moments between the two sides, the interaction in the second district resembled a courtroom debate rather than an archetypal bargaining rite. The two sides developed common language patterns and norms that set boundaries for the conflict. The rituals of labeling items as "money" versus "language" and developing formulas for tradeoffs between these two labels facilitated a quick settlement. Neither side discussed "affordability," rather they centered on what the other side was "willing" to accept. Thus, rather than engaging in a ceremonial dance, the bargaining rite in this district resembled "shuttle diplomacy" in which the negotiators as ambassadors for their respective sides worked out options, returned to their "home bases" to get reactions, and either persuaded the other side or their own team to accept certain offers. In effect, frequent and prolonged side-bar sessions, negotiating until "wee hours of the morning," and maintaining low profile bargainer roles were rituals that facilitated a fast settlement.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The two districts differed in the content and nature of their fantasy themes and in their bargaining rites and rituals. In the first district, negotiators engaged in the collective development of a legal document, complete with written proposals, ongoing deliberations at the table, and judgments of precedent cases. In contrast, the bargaining rituals in District 2 resembled shuttle diplomacy between two top secret teams who sent ambassadors to work behind closed doors. Fantasy themes in District 1 focused on third parties, professional negotiators, and opponents while in District 2 fantasy themes centered on past negotiators and historical scenes.

An examination of the motives and values of the fantasy themes, however, revealed more similarities than differences. Although District 2 valued professional negotiators and made them members of their teams, they shared District 1's motive to reach a satisfactory settlement without the interference of outsiders. Both districts preferred bargaining in isolation of the public, the accountant, fact-finders, or mediators. Both operated with limited guidance from the state or national associations. Members of caucuses in both districts would share fantasies of turbulent times in the past or of villainous outsiders just when particular team members were beginning to hold firm or to claim that a settlement was unlikely. These fantasies spurred the teams into action to generate new ideas, to make concessions, and to consider the dire consequences of not reaching agreement. Opposition to outsiders, unification through common enemies, and references to the turbulent past united the two sides and deterred them from overt expression of their differences and hostilities. Fantasy themes and rituals then surfaced as superordinate symbols that enjoined the parties in their bargaining rite.

In addition to similar motives, both districts held common values that typified the fantasy themes. Both districts wanted bargaining to be open and honest, to avoid game playing and unnecessary posturing, and to operate in a climate of mutual trust and respect. Both districts made reasonable opening offers, adhered to the procedural rituals and norms for their respective groups, and relegated hostile and angry reactions to caucus sessions.

Although the two districts held similar emotions, values, and motives, they interpreted the bargaining rite quite differently. The administrators in the first district viewed bargaining as a tradition that keeps people thinking that everything is normal. It was a ritual like going to church on Sunday morning. The contribution of this rite, however, was "not the outcome or the contract—since few teachers ever read it anyway." Rather it was the symbolic process of sharing unsolved problems, releasing tensions, and working with the other side on a document. The teachers in District 1 concurred with this interpretation, but they added that bargaining was an important communication forum in which the lowest level of the organization sat across the table from top management to discuss crucial problems.

Administrators in the second district viewed bargaining as "a necessary evil" or "a distasteful process" forced on them by the law. The significance of the rite was fulfilling the legal requirement and reaching a quick and efficient settlement. Administrators had a responsibility to maintain control of the district by "not giving away the store." Bargaining was a way to reach realistic settlements within the available funds while keeping the contract to a bare minimum. Teachers in District 2, in contrast, saw bargaining as an evolutionary process in which the union received incremental gains—little by little. They

believed that negotiations would eventually get to a point in which teachers gained power over their working conditions.

Since the labor-management teams and the two districts converge symbolically on the motives and values that underlie negotiation, this divergence on the symbolic meaning of the rite seems peculiar. One explanation for this difference may reside with groups in conflict. Weick (1979) contends that groups coalesce around means but not ends. To achieve their diverse ends, individuals engage in concerted, interlocked actions. Bargaining teams who define their relationship through conflicts of interest may rely on group fantasies and ritualistic behaviors to build common ground. Common ground then stems not from consensus on the meaning of bargaining but from enacting rituals and fantasies together.

Divergent meanings of the bargaining rite may also accrue from the multiple functions that negotiation serves. This study demonstrates that bargaining performs functions other than conflict reduction. These functions include facilitating communication, signaling problems, enhancing solidarity, appeasing troops, and balancing power. Perhaps participants coalesce around a wide array of very different meanings for the bargaining event.

This study has implications for research on fantasy themes and for the role of conflict and power in negotiations. Consistent with past research on fantasy themes, this study uncovers signs of symbolic convergence and the residue of fantasy types. Symbolic convergence occurs within teams through common villains and shared emotions. Moreover, teachers and administrators in both districts share stock narratives of villains in their caucus meetings and in interviews with the researchers. Although the two districts differ in the content of their fantasy themes, they hold similar values of minimizing game playing and of reaching a settlement without intervention from the public, consultants, or third party neutrals.

The findings of this investigation also have implications for research on rhetorical visions. Specifically, in response to Mohrmann's (1982) critique of symbolic convergence theory, rites and ceremonies may provide a medium for linking public presentation of fantasy themes to the narratives generated in small groups. The fantasy themes shared during caucus sessions and in interviews with team members may appear in ratification sessions or in other public meetings about the negotiations. Researchers might track these themes or fantasy types from public forums to the enactment of rites and ceremonies through small group communication.

Finally, this study has implications for latent and manifest elements of conflict in organizations. Most organizational conflicts are only managed or settled temporarily rather than reaching full resolution. The underlying sources of difference or the latent elements of a conflict usually surface indirectly rather than emerging as topics of interaction

(Pondy, 1967). A psychodynamic analysis of the fantasy themes in this study may indicate displaced conflict. That is, fantasies about third party intervention and past negotiations may channel or hold in check the teachers' real frustrations with the lack of control over their work environment, with low pay, and with levy limitations that constrain local school boards. In like manner, administrators' frustrations with being forced by law to engage in bargaining may be funneled into fantasies that attack outsiders.

Public sector bargaining is an important arena for examining the role of fantasy themes in an organizational rite. Future studies in this area might center on the power relationships and the subtle ways in which narratives, rituals, and rhetorical visions serve the appearance of empowerment while maintaining control of the bargaining ideology and relationship (Mumby, 1987). Fantasy themes and bargaining rituals may help both sides cope with feelings of frustration and futility as they struggle to improve the overall plight of public education.

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