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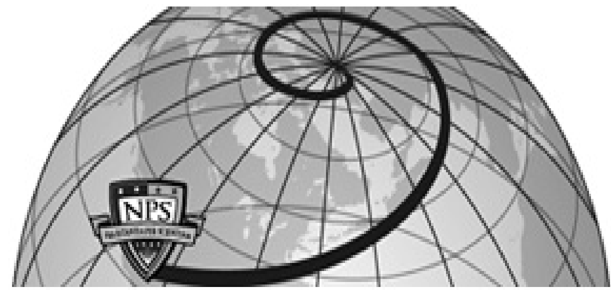

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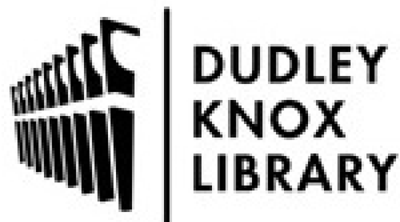

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Gauging Openness to Written Communication Change: The Predictive Power of Metaphor

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Abstract

This study gauges workers' degree of openness to significant changes in the organization, style, and design of a written report by analyzing metaphors that emerge from their talk about their report-reading and decision-making tasks. Workers at two work sites—in Maryland and in Washington DC—responded to two typical work reports: one written in the style currently in use and another in a fundamentally different style exhibiting features that make documents easy to read and understand. The dominant metaphor that the Maryland workers used was "the whole-man" approach, which represented the workers' flexible approach toward work tasks that resulted in their willingness to accept the fundamentally different report. In contrast, Washington DC workers used the metaphors "paint by the numbers" and "stay within the lines" when describing their work. These metaphors suggest the workers' adherence to organizational routines and

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uncomfortableness with change that caused them not only to reject the new reports but also to have strong emotional reactions toward them. These results indicate that assessing organizational talk, particularly the metaphors people use, is a useful tool in gauging workers' perceptions about and degree of openness toward communication change.

Keywords
communication change, communication norms, metaphors, organizational discourse, organizational interaction

Both practitioners and researchers claim that change has become a constant in organizational life. International competition, market alterations, new technologies, mergers and acquisitions, rapid new product cycles, and inefficient organizational routines require many organizations to significantly alter their processes, structures, and even cultures. In fact, Beer and Nohria (2000) made the dramatic claim that many organizations must change or die.

Even if organizations face extraordinary, compelling reasons for change, implementing it, particularly in large bureaucracies, can be extremely difficult. The change literature documents numerous change efforts that have failed, some with disastrous consequences (Kyriakidou, 2011). Choi (2011) observed that approximately two thirds of change efforts are unsuccessful. Burnes (2004) indicated that the change failure rate is probably much higher. Communication research on genre (Bazerman, 1994; Miller, 1984; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, 2002) and organizational metaphor, particularly an organization's root metaphors (Suchan, 1995, 2006), suggests factors that make communication change particularly difficult.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) provides a striking example of how difficulty with communication change caused a disastrous failure. In 2003, the Space Shuttle *Columbia* disintegrated over the southwestern United States, causing the deaths of its seven crew members. The Columbia Accident Investigation Board (2003) determined that the same cultural, communication, and organizational-structure problems that caused NASA to neglect O-ring problems, resulting in the Space Shuttle *Challenger's* fuel tanks exploding in 1986, were also responsible for causing NASA to downplay the danger of foam insulation sloughing off the launch's fuel tanks and damaging *Columbia's* wing. Despite the 1986 *Challenger* disaster, a highly critical Rogers Commission report, and significant

congressional and public scrutiny, NASA was unable to make the necessary significant changes to its communication processes and the culture that helped create and institutionalize those processes that might have prevented another disaster.

Organizations vary significantly in their openness, willingness, and capability to change. Gauging an organization's openness to change is critical if its leaders are to design change strategies and processes that its workers will understand, perceive as credible, and believe to be of value to themselves and the organization. Unfortunately, assessing an organization's openness to change has received limited attention in the organizational change and strategy literature and almost no attention in the business, managerial, and professional communication literature.

Research Purpose

My main purpose for this research is to begin the incremental process of generating knowledge about organizational openness to communication change. Specifically, I want to gauge workers' degree of openness to significant changes in the organization, style, and design of a written report by analyzing their language—their talk about their report-reading tasks that constitute most of their work—and the organizational root metaphors and their entailments that emerge from and steer or influence that language. From this research we can determine whether assessing organizational talk, particularly the metaphors that people often use, would be useful in gauging workers' perceptions about and degree of openness to communication change.

In the following sections, I review the literature assessing organizational openness to change in order to derive a baseline definition to ground our understanding of this concept; assess the managerial and professional communication research on change; explicate root metaphor theory to provide a framework for discussing and analyzing the research data; describe the research context, design, and methods; analyze the interview data, particularly the metaphors members used to describe their communication tasks and how those metaphors reflect individual and collective attitudes toward change; and discuss the implications that the research findings have for communication researchers, consultants, and organizational leaders.

Literature on Openness to Change

Change researchers have just started systematically investigating openness to organizational change (Kyriakidou, 2011). Because this research is

formative, there is no agreed-on language to describe this individual or organizational state. In fact, researchers have used terms such as *openness*, *readiness*, *capability*, *capacity*, and even *resistance* to describe this individual or organizational receptiveness toward change somewhat interchangeably, causing conceptual confusion (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Jansen, 2004). To help mitigate this confusion, Chawla and Kelloway (2004) divided change into attitudinal (cognitive) and behavioral responses. Openness and readiness toward change relate to attitudinal or cognitive responses whereas resistance, capacity, and capability relate to behavioral responses.

Fishbein and Azjen (1975) pointed out that individuals' attitudes precede and affect their behavior; consequently, their degree of openness toward change can predict their overt actions. To put it another way, the degree of openness that an individual feels toward change is the cognitive precursor to that individual's behaviors of either embracing or working toward implementing a change effort or resisting and even actively undermining that effort (Choi, 2011; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994). Research, then, enables us to define a worker's *openness to change* as a psychological state reflecting a positive attitude or perception toward change that influences the worker's willingness to implement a particular change effort (Axtell et al., 2002; Devos, Buelens, & Bouckenooghe, 2007; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). This causal relationship between attitude and behavior is important; it enables us to make a clear distinction between openness and resistance to change. This distinction has practical value because it allows change agents to diagnose the degree of organizational openness to change before crafting a change strategy. That degree of openness can influence the timing of the change, the framing of the change message, the amount of change that can be expected from each change effort, the number of change champions required to drive the change, the communication change strategy, and a number of other factors.

Developing methods to assess organizational openness to change poses an interesting methodological challenge. The few studies on change openness (only five in the last 30 years) have used quantitative techniques (primarily surveys) to determine how organizationally specific context factors—trust in senior managers and direct supervisors, information received about the change, perceived ability (self-efficacy) to cope with the change, and participation in the change-decision process—positively affect openness to change (Axtell et al., 2002; Devos et al., 2007; Miller et al., 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). But McCall and Bobko (1990) recommended using qualitative techniques for studying workers in dynamic, fluid

environments such as organizations. In particular, they suggested that to understand workers' attitudes or perceptions, analyses that interpret organizational semantic, symbolic structures—particularly the metaphors used in organizational talk—are very useful. For example, Jansen (2004) observed that workers in some organizations rigidly follow organizational routines, repeating, often clinging to, past actions and patterns of activities. Significant individual and organizational energy is spent maintaining these current organizational processes, resulting in limited psychological energy for change and a lack of openness toward new ways of thinking and acting. This lack of openness can be heard in informal organizational talk and formal presentations and is represented in metaphors contained in documents and other written messages. Qualitative methodologies best capture such interaction data.

Because organizational change researchers have just started grappling with the construct of openness toward change, they have not yet examined if organizational semantic and symbolic structures, particularly organizational talk and metaphor, can serve as a barometer to assess workers' degree of openness to change. Furthermore, many change researchers have not yet taken what management studies often call the linguistic turn; consequently, they tend to view language as merely instrumental—as a conduit that explains change, not as a barometer that gauges degrees of openness to change.

Genre Research and Communication Change

Recent research in genre provides insight into the organizational challenges of changing communication norms though this work has yet to address worker attitudes that cause those challenges. During the last 20 years, genre research has moved beyond characterizing messages (business proposals, shareholder reports, presentations, etc.) solely by their formal, structural features to embracing a broader view that emphasizes the social actions that writers and readers perform as they create and respond to written and oral messages (Bazerman, 1994; Miller, 1984). According to this view, a genre's purpose is socially constructed by organizational members' perceptions of it, and the community's expectations about purpose and form (media choice, message design, and message organization and style) govern the ways that members typically create or respond to a genre (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994; Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, 2002).

Over time a genre's purpose and form create communication habits or routines. In fact, Orlikowski and Yates (1994) described a genre as an

"institutionalized template" (p. 542) that continuously shapes communicative action through workers' ongoing use. Their view of genre suggests that its purpose and form act as an organizational control system that both enables and constrains communicative behavior through members' ongoing appropriation of genre norms. Workers often unconsciously draw on these norms from habit to simplify interaction and presumably guarantee communication success. For example, Navy officers routinely turn to electronic files of point papers, a unique Navy genre, that superiors have approved in order to mimic prior papers' style, organization, and depth of analysis regardless of the situation. Such habitual appropriation of genre norms can ossify behavior about genre use so that it is difficult to make any meaningful changes to a genre's purpose and form.

But a genre is not by definition determinate; it is constraining and malleable, or, to put it another way, softly determinate (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). Genre researchers, though, have different assessments of the degree of constraint that genre templates and workers' genre-use habits impose on a genre. For example, Forman and Rymer (1999) claimed that a genre is dynamic, that genre users can readily change genre rules in response to shifts in organizational context. On the other hand, Yates and Orlikowski (2002) were more guarded about workers' ability and willingness to tacitly or explicitly change genre rules. They indicated that small-order incremental changes, often inadvertent, are fairly common. But significant changes, or second-order changes, are far more difficult to achieve (Barley, 1986).

Although these genre studies help researchers understand constraints to changing communication behavior, they do not delve into attitudinal factors that cause a genre to be deeply institutionalized, taken for granted, and habitually enacted in some organizations and viewed more provisionally—as something that can be significantly modified according to internal or external influences—in other organizations. This perception of genre malleability is a product of workers' interpretive schemes or mental models. These schemes act as personal and organizational maps that help workers organize and make sense of their workplace experiences and influence their interactions. A wide range of organizational factors create these interpretive schemes, including structure, reward systems, control systems (policy and formal rules and regulations), resource availability, and, most important, the alignment of these organizational systems. Furthermore, many softer factors, such as organizational rituals, stories, and metaphors, are instrumental in forming these schemes. Organizational metaphors in particular provide a useful entrée to understanding these schemes. These metaphors reveal workers' attitudes that influence their reactions to attempts to change

well-established communication genres or organizational communication practices in general. Furthermore, as McCall and Bobko (1990) suggested, these metaphors and workers' explanations of their significance provide insight into the organizational factors that shape their attitudes toward communication change.

Managerial and Professional Communication Research Focusing on Change

Communication instructors (particularly in master of business administration [MBA] and executive MBA programs), researchers, consultants, and in-house professionals often try to change inefficient, dysfunctional communication practices by helping workers to alter their thinking processes, improve their communication strategies, and develop new skills. But these professionals often encounter resistance from workers because their communication habits and the genres resulting from those habits have become entrenched routines that continually reaffirm the purpose and form of the established communication practices. Thus, workers or their superiors often resist attempts to change communication practice because the changes represent a significant organizational intervention. Despite this ongoing challenge of changing inefficient workplace communication habits, only a handful of studies have addressed communication change and the power of language to create or restrain such change.

My earlier study (Suchan, 1995) on the influence of organizational metaphors on writers' perception of and approach toward their tasks indicates that these metaphors provide insight into workplace communication practices. I found that writers at three of an organization's largest field sites viewed themselves as "ciphers" or "conduits" and described their composing processes in mechanistic terms. These metaphors complemented the mechanistic language that management and staff commonly used to describe the organization's various systems (e.g., reward, control, structure, and resource) and processes, thus reaffirming the influence of these metaphors on their written communication practices. Specifically, writers' lack of awareness or concern about their readers, extensive use of passive voice and convoluted sentence structures, lack of attention to document design, and other dysfunctional communication practices were direct outgrowths of their viewing their work role as that of a cipher or conduit. Consequently, to alter these writers' communication habits would be a major intervention requiring a change in the organization's dominant metaphors and its organizational systems.

Not until 11 years later did I describe processes needed to change dysfunctional communication practices in a large, complex organization (Suchan, 2006). Borrowing heavily from the literature on organizational change and development, I proposed a theory-based framework that focuses on steps toward understanding workers' interpretive schemes that shape their thinking about communication, the organizational underpinnings that form those schemes, the alterations in language and thinking required to alter those schemes, the communication training that workers need in order to make these necessary alterations, and the realignment of organizational systems to support the communication change. This research, though, has a significant shortcoming. It does not assess workers' and the organization's attitudes and openness toward change.

Several other communication researchers have examined the relationship between language and change. But this research fails to build on each other to develop a more comprehensive understanding of that relationship, particularly between language and communication change. Jameson (2001) found that chain restaurant managers collectively transformed problems into stories that indicated cause-and-effect relationships. This process and the stories that resulted helped these managers advocate change and persuade important stakeholders of the rationale for the change. Anderson (2004) examined the role that writing can play during an attempted organizational change. He found that writing fixes and stabilizes ideas from conversation into textual objects that help people understand and focus on what needs to be changed. Faber (2002) demonstrated through several case studies the power of language, narratives, and organizational stories to create change. Somewhat similar to Jameson's work, Faber's case studies showed that generating change requires creating a new, compelling organizational story that is more meaningful than the existing one. Finally, Dulek and I assessed the role that discourse community norms have on perceptions of message clarity (Suchan & Dulek, 1990). We discovered that these norms acted as a barrier to communication change even when change would result in written communication that was easier to read and understand (see also Suchan & Colucci, 1989).

These studies merely suggest the relationship between language and communication change. The next section, building on research in organizational communication and organizational theory, describes the power of root metaphors and their importance in assessing degrees of openness to communication change.

The Role of Root Metaphors in Gauging Openness to Change

An increasing number of organizational theory and communication researchers claim that organizations are discursive constructs because discourse—talk and text—is central to individuals' interpretation of their work, provides a guide for action, and helps affirm organizational identity (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Ford, 1999; Heracleous, 2002; O'Connor, 1995). Taylor and Van Emery (2000) even claimed that communication constitutes organization, that organization emerges from conversation and textual interaction. Analyzing organizational discourse, particularly the metaphors that people habitually use, can provide us with insight into the concepts and attitudes of an organization's workers. Specifically, determining and assessing an organization's root metaphors can help us gauge workers' degree of openness to change, which in many cases may be tacit.

Root metaphors are macrolevel, linguistic organizing frameworks that enable workers to code, sort, and make sense of their organizational experience. Gergen (1999) described these metaphors as forestructures that workers create and use to interpretively shape their organizational world. We can also compare these metaphors to lenses that help workers focus and foreground what they see and guide how they interpret it. Inns (2002), in fact, defined root metaphors as "the dominant or defining way of seeing" (p. 309).

What extends the power and influence of root metaphors are its *entailments*—similar or corresponding metaphors that are connected to the root metaphor. Entailments provide an audience with rich additional knowledge about the root metaphor by detailing and thus helping to illustrate it. In its strength and organizational influence, a root metaphor is similar to a dense, tightly coupled social network: the greater the number of entailments (nodes) and their connectiveness to each other and the root metaphor (e.g., network density), the greater the root metaphor's strength and ability to influence workers' attitudes and actions. Lakoff and Johnson (2003), for example, claimed that one dominant root metaphor in the U.S. culture is "argument is war." What makes the war metaphor powerful is its dense network of entailments: we "win or lose" arguments, "defend" positions, "attack" weak positions, "demolish" claims, "shoot down" arguments, plan and use "strategies," and abandon positions to take "new lines of attack." This root metaphor and its large number of entailments, Lakoff and Johnson suggested, steer communicative interactions during meetings, negotiations, one-to-one exchanges, and question-and-answer sessions after

presentations. Since this root metaphor is so deeply embedded in our thinking, attitudes, and actions, we are often unaware of how it shapes our communication practice let alone how it restricts our thinking about argument in different ways (e.g., argument as dialogue, a conversation, or even a verbal dance).

Marshak (2002) claimed that organizational language can be either a prison or a liberating force. That is particularly true of root metaphors; they can provide either a means for control or potential for change. In an organization such as Disney Enterprises, the "other land" and "happiest place on earth" root metaphors and their entailments (visitors are "guests" who interact with "security hosts" or "cast members" who are always in "costume" when "on stage" at the "park") serve as a tight control system that constrains thinking and action. Disney Enterprise has consciously institutionalized this unique vision through language, training, and rewards and punishments that are aligned to support each other. Put another way, veteran "cast members" have so grooved and regrooved the other land metaphor and its entailments into their language, thinking, and practice that entertaining other possibilities for talking about and doing their work is difficult. In contrast, in other organizations, such as the Medic Inn, a branch of the Cleveland Clinic, and the Marine Corps, their root metaphors—"5-star customer service" and "three-block war," respectively—are generative. These generative root metaphors have the paradoxical capacity to simultaneously guide thinking, attitudes, and practice and create potential for new language, new perceptions, novel thinking, and different action (Schon, 1993). In short, these metaphors both reflect and help generate an openness to change. To illustrate a generative root metaphor, I will briefly discuss the Marine Corps's three-block war metaphor.

In the late 1990s, the Marine Corps, under the leadership of General Charles Krulak, adopted a new metaphor, the three-block war, to reshape soldiers' thinking and actions so that they would be better prepared for radically new operations and missions called military operations other than war. This new metaphor indicates that within three city blocks and a short time, a Marine may be required to conduct full-scale military action, engage in peacekeeping operations, and provide humanitarian relief. In other words, all Marines—officer or enlisted—must be capable of analyzing complex, evolving, time-critical information to determine if they should function as a civil military negotiator, a source of humanitarian relief, a liaison with tribal or small local government officials, or a warrior. The metaphor "strategic corporal" soon evolved as an entailment of the three-block war metaphor to indicate the new leadership, contingency-planning, and

decision-making capabilities that lower ranking soldiers must have. Soon afterward another important entailment of this new root metaphor developed: The Corps now describes itself as the "911" of the military, capable of quickly responding to any crisis requiring a swift, flexible, yet measured response. The three-block war metaphor and its entailments suggest that soldiers require different modes of thinking and new skills, particularly in communication, to be successful in this ever-shifting environment. Furthermore, this new environment makes it impossible to develop standard operating procedures or prescribed routines to deal with situations in the field. As one corporal commented, "acting the same way twice can get you killed."

To summarize, root metaphors and their entailments are important barometers that can indicate an organization's or workers' degree of openness to change. As the Disney metaphors exemplify, root metaphors and their entailments can significantly constrain people's thinking and actions, causing them to have an attitude that reflects a lack of openness to change. In contrast, as the Marine Corps metaphor demonstrates, other root metaphors can create, invite, or even demand possibilities for new thinking and actions that generate an attitude of openness to change. I am not suggesting that root metaphors are determinate, that workers' degree of openness to change is defined entirely by an organization's root metaphors. They are, though, an important linguistic indicator that can help reveal conscious as well as unconscious or tacit attitudes toward change.

Study Context, Design, and Analysis

I conducted this study at a medium-sized public sector agency with multiple locations. The organization's mission is to determine whether people who perform sensitive tasks should be given access to proprietary information. These decisions are important because they help ensure information security, and they affect people's careers: A worker denied information access is very difficult to promote.

Information contained in written reports provides the sole basis for these decisions. Report assessors (RAs), the target group for this study and the primary end users of the report information, read these reports, ranging from 20 to 50 pages, and then decide to grant or deny information access. The reports are filled with complex financial, personal, and workplace performance information that requires careful interpretation. These reports are a well-established communication genre. Their purpose and form—style, format, organization, and document design—have been fixed for decades.

Previous research has described the unique, creative strategies that RAs use to organize, interpret, and assess these reports, whose organization, style, and document design make them difficult for outsiders to understand (Suchan, 1998).

Study Context

This agency's organizational policy instructs RAs to use the specific criteria contained in its *Report Assessment and Determination Manual* (*RADM*) to guide their information-access decisions. This seeming lack of autonomy that RAs have to use contextual factors and their own judgment to make decisions is supported by the organization's structure as a functionally organized bureaucracy with power relationships that are defined by its hierarchical structure and clearly defined job roles. But as I will explain later, not all of the agency's work sites interpreted policy and acted on these constraints in the same way.

Senior management believed that the document design, organization, and style of the reports that RAs currently read affected the quality of their decisions to approve or withhold information access. These managers based their perceptions both on anecdotal information from RA supervisors and on the increasing number of decisions to deny information access that were being challenged in the courts. Furthermore, because new technology and cost-cutting measures would soon make it necessary for RAs to read these long reports on computer screens rather than on paper, the senior managers believed that significant changes in report organization, style, and document design were necessary and would be forthcoming in order to make these reports easier to read and interpret on screen. These managers claimed that they had effectively communicated these concerns to RAs through their first-line supervisors; however, in my interviews with RAs, they raised doubts about the effectiveness of senior management's communication about the importance of these changes.

Study Design

This research is embedded in a larger study that analyzed the differences in the quality of RA decisions between those based on the current reports and those based on the revised, high-impact reports (Suchan, 1998). Because the two studies are interrelated and their research designs tightly connected, I first briefly describe the research design of the decision quality study and then the design for the openness-to-change study.

Decision-quality study design. In the larger decision-quality study, 30 RAs from three agency locations—Ohio, Washington DC, and Maryland—participated. After carefully reading over 50 reports from the organization's report clearinghouse, I chose two reports, which I named Czarnek and Rokitka, that represented typical reports. I then revised the reports using as criteria results from numerous research studies, pinpointing the organization, style, and design factors that make documents easy to understand. I called these revised reports high impact (HI) and the original reports low impact (LI). I also took great care to ensure that the revision did not change the content of the original reports. Two experienced, senior-level administrators reviewed the revised reports and determined that there were no important differences in content, though they stated that the reports "looked and read differently." In addition, I was trained as an RA by a senior administrator so that I would have a solid understanding of RA work tasks. Furthermore, I conducted six talk-aloud protocols with RAs (two at each site) to better understand their report reading and decision-making processes. These experiences and my numerous informal interactions with RAs (over coffee, lunch, and drinks after work) gave me insight into their work and enabled me to develop a degree of credibility and gain their trust.

Next, I conducted a quasi-experimental study at the RAs' work spaces. At each site, the RAs were randomly divided into two groups, with each group assessing two reports. Group 1 received the revised HI treatment of the Czarnek case and the original LI treatment of the Rokitka case. Group 2 received the original LI treatment of the Czarnek case and the HI treatment of the Rokitka case. This 2×2 design ensured that each RA responded to two different reports: one written in the typical LI style and one in the revised HI style.

After reading each report, RAs completed a questionnaire that asked for their report decision—to grant access, deny information access, or request additional information—and the rationale for that decision. To determine the "correct" report decision, I conducted protocols with six senior supervisory RAs from the three assessment sites using the same 2×2 design. All six RA supervisors would have granted information access for both cases. This grant decision was the study's measure for decision quality.

The results were surprising. At two of the three sites there were no statistically significant differences in the decision results between the HI and the LI Rokitka and Czarnek cases. But the Maryland RAs made different assessment decisions, statistically significant at the .01 level, than did their counterparts at the other sites (Suchan, 1998).

Openness-to-change study design. To assess openness to change, the focus of this study, I conducted 18 semistructured individual interviews (6 each from the Maryland, Washington DC, and Ohio sites) with RAs almost immediately after they assessed the two cases. Time and RA work commitments prevented me from interviewing the 10 RAs at each site. Each interview lasted 20 to 55 minutes, with the mean time being 32 minutes. I either taped the interview ($n = 14$) or took notes ($n = 4$), which I transcribed within 12 hours of the interview.

Approximately 3 months later, I returned to each site and conducted group interviews with all the RAs (10 from each site) who assessed the reports. During these interviews, I reported the study results and gathered RAs' additional perceptions of and reactions to the HI report treatments. To jog RAs' memory of the task and the reports, I provided copies of the reports that they assessed. These interviews, which I taped and then had transcribed, lasted between 95 minutes and almost 3 hours. In addition, I took field notes during these group interviews. Finally, I obtained additional reactions from RAs to the HI reports during meetings with them at lunch and over coffee. During these unplanned chats, I was able to talk with 15 of the 18 RAs that I initially interviewed. Although the RAs knew that these conversations were on the record, these individual and small-group conversations were informal. To preserve that informality, I merely jotted notes during these conversations; however, I took detailed field notes immediately afterward.

Textual Analysis Procedures

I analyzed the language in the transcriptions from the meetings, paying careful attention to the metaphors used and the context of those metaphors. During this stage of analysis, I viewed the transcripts as a closed textual system, focusing exclusively on language, particularly metaphors, and their patterns and interconnections. I looked for common or broad-based, overarching metaphors—what the literature calls root metaphors—and metaphoric clusters, commonly called entailments, that support or clarify these overarching metaphors.

Next, I carefully reviewed my field notes, again paying careful attention to metaphors revealed in quotes and my observations about how RAs described the two reports and their emotional and task-related reactions toward them. Just as important as the metaphors that these field notes, the transcripts, and my familiarity with the sites revealed was the insight that they provided into the personal and organizational context that helped

spawn the metaphors. These contextual factors included information about job autonomy, task flexibility, the importance of organizational learning, job satisfaction, group dynamics, trust between coworkers and between workers and their supervisors, the ways that supervisors exercised power, and group and organizational politics. These factors were key to understanding the different root metaphors at each site, the reasons for their development, the RAs' reactions to the HI reports, and the RAs' degree of openness to change.

The Results: Different Root Metaphors at Different Sites

The Maryland RAs used fundamentally different metaphors to interpret their information assessment tasks and organizational environments than the RAs did at the other two sites. Maryland RAs frequently described what they called the "whole-man" or "whole-person" approach to assessing reports. These RAs mentioned this approach in every individual interview, repeatedly during the group interview, and often during informal discussions. In contrast, the Washington DC RAs discussed the need "to paint by the numbers" and stay within the lines. And the Ohio RAs referred to their assessment process as "look and cook": Read the report (look) and follow the criteria in the *RADM* (use the recipe to cook). These linguistic constructions represent the root metaphors at these three sites. Supporting these root metaphors are a constellation of metaphoric entailments that I will integrate into my explication of these root metaphors.

The Maryland Site: The "Whole-Man" or "Whole-Person" Approach

The Maryland RAs' "whole-man" or "whole-person" language may not meet the rhetoric discipline's typical definition of a metaphor. But this language is a *conceptual metaphor* (a concept from linguistics) in which an unfamiliar, generally abstract idea is expressed in familiar terms in order to better understand and emotionally connect with the concept or idea (Kovecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). For these RAs, the *RADM*, with its checklists of decision-making criteria that seem to fragment and dehumanize people, represents the abstract and thus unfamiliar concept whereas the terms whole man and whole person represent the familiar and affective complex person described by the report and, most important, the RAs' approach to assessing that report. Given their strong commitment, indeed devotion, to their work and the importance of their assessment decisions,

the Maryland RAs could only understand and apply the *RADM* criteria by generating their whole-man and whole-person metaphors to humanize and thus transform these standards.

To avoid needless repetition, I am limiting my analysis here to the Maryland and Washington DC interview data. Even though the Washington DC RAs' paint by the numbers and the Ohio RAs' look and cook are different metaphors, I found that both root metaphors indicated a similar lack of openness to change that was influenced by a similar set of contextual factors. In short, my Ohio RA analysis offers no additional insight about openness to change in written communication.

Maryland RAs' Initial Reactions to the New Reports

After the Maryland RAs completed their assessment of the HI and LI report cases, I asked each RA the same open-ended question: "What are your reactions to the [Czarnek or Rokitka] report?" For each interview, I chose the report written in the HI style. Each RA was eager to talk about the "new" (HI) reports. The following three interview snippets illustrate the content and the tone of the six interviews:

> Who wrote that report [HI version]? It wasn't no IG [information gatherer]. That report threw me . . . but after a couple of pages it started to make more sense than the other one [LI report]. You know . . . I found myself thinking more about that fellow Czarnek [HI report] than that other one [Rokitka LI report]. That's good. . . . That helps [me] to see the whole person.
>
> Seeing those two reports back-to-back was real interesting. The new one [HI version] might make me better at my job. . . . I can really pay attention to all the stuff . . . the details . . . help me see the whole man instead of just figuring out what's going on.
>
> That was a very different exercise. . . . The differences [in reports] was . . . startling. But you know I could better see patterns in that new one . . . see all the issues that create the total package . . . you know, the whole person. I need that [to understand the whole person] to make the right decision.

Although most RAs reported that they were initially "thrown" by the HI reports because of their novel design and organization, they quickly saw ways these reports would help them more effectively do their jobs: process information more easily, focus more on the person being assessed, see information patterns more easily, and reduce work stress. Not one Maryland

RA mentioned that the HI reports violated organizational norms, policy, or guidelines. Furthermore, no one mentioned senior management's belief that the current LI reports required change. These RAs demonstrated an open, flexible, even somewhat imaginative response to the novel HI reports. Key to understanding that openness and flexibility was the whole-person or whole-man metaphor that RAs mentioned during their individual interviews. That metaphor, which seemed like a slogan because RAs mentioned it so frequently—21 times during the 6 interviews—became a focus of discussion during the group interview conducted 3 months later.

Maryland Group Interview

I returned to the Maryland site approximately 3 months after my individual interviews with the Maryland RAs to discuss the decision results from the HI and LI report-assessment experiment and to gain additional insight on the RAs' degree of openness to the HI case treatments. To refresh the RAs' memories of the experimental task, I provided copies of the HI and LI treatments of both cases. The decision results, which I provided in a handout, indicated that the Maryland RAs made different assessment decisions (statistically significant at the .01 confidence level) than the RAs did at the other agency sites. Specifically, the RAs who read the HI Rokitka report made better quality decisions (ones that matched those of their superiors) than did those who read the LI Rokitka report.

I used the handout listing the decision results from all sites as a prompt to start the discussion, and as the discussion progressed, I asked additional open-ended questions. The Maryland RAs reveled in the decision differences between their site and the others. They explained these differences by referring to the whole-man metaphor and other similar metaphors (entailments) to characterize how they approached report assessment. One RA's comment well summarizes their explanation, "Look, you've been around us for a while now—drank coffee, had lunch, sat with us when we did our work. We talk about this [whole-man approach]. That's how we approach the work." They claimed that RAs at other sites merely followed the "rule book" [the *RADM*] and were "slaves to the rules because they're so damn political," which resulted in their being "rigid," "kind of mechanical," and "not using judgment that comes from real-world experience" in assessing reports. When I asked them how they knew how RAs in other agencies approached their work, one RA replied a bit sarcastically, "We do get out and talk to other RAs. . . . We're not kept down on the farm." The Maryland site is rural, and the RAs are somewhat sensitive

about being thought of as lacking "big city sophistication." Another RA indicated that once a year, the RAs attend a conference where they interact with RAs from other agencies and "swap lessons learned and best practices and just talk about the work."

The RAs used a network of other metaphors that complemented and provided additional insight into the RA-constructed meaning of the whole-man approach, the attitude toward work that the metaphor both reflected and further reinforced, and the behaviors that resulted from this attitude. To interpret a report well and make a good assessment decision, RAs stated that they had to "go beyond the words on the page," "not be a slave to the RADM," "be open and flexible to people's [individuals being assessed] circumstances," "hold off judgment while reading the report," "be the person in the report," "be open to surprises—good ones and bad ones," and the paradoxical "judge while being nonjudgmental." This language reflects a collective cognitive script—a mental model or interpretive frame—that steers the RAs to interpret novelty, difference, or change in an open, flexible, nonjudgmental manner.

The RAs clearly demonstrated the impact of this whole-man root metaphor on their openness to change and new learning when I asked them (3 months after their initial exposure to these reports) for their reactions to the HI reports. The RAs indicated that they now believed the HI reports more clearly told the story of the person's life and that they could "better figure out the whole person . . . spend more time *thinking* about what they did . . . than trying to *figure out* [emphasis added] what they did." The RAs pointed out that they did not realize until they read the HI reports that they had spent so much time trying to untangle the story line in the LI reports: "I didn't realize the drain on me it was reading these [LI] reports. A lot of us use different colored markers, sticky notes, a whole bunch of things to help us read these things. . . . All that takes time." Another RA added, "We make real good decisions here . . . because, you know, we talked about this before. . . . We take a whole-man view . . . but I'd bet that after a while we'd be able to make better decisions on really complicated cases with these new reports."

The Maryland RAs' openness to and support of the HI reports surprised me because I had encountered strong resistance toward the new reports from RAs at the other sites. I asked the Maryland RAs why they were so accepting of the HI reports. One RA was taken aback by the question: "Look, we're interested in anything that could help us do our jobs better. . . . These new reports could help." Another said, "We're pretty flexible here, though most probably wouldn't think so. We're given a lot of

room by our bosses to do our jobs." Finally, the most senior (in job tenure and age) RA commented, "We're older . . . confident at what we do . . . pretty mature . . . not defensive about things. The new reports were just different . . . not a real threat to anything."

I next asked if their whole-man approach had anything to do with their openness to the HI reports. Initially, the RAs were silent; the question seemed to surprise them and perhaps caused them to think about the approach in a way they never had before. Finally, one RA speculated, "Probably the whole-man approach is more than about making assessment decisions. . . . It's probably about how we look at a lot of things . . . at life." Another RA answered, "[She] might be onto something here. . . . This whole-person way of looking causes us to see things differently. . . . We hear about how we always want more facts . . . more stuff. . . . before deciding. Maybe we do see things differently and these new reports are just another different thing."

I reported to the Maryland RAs that their counterparts at the other sites were strongly opposed to the HI report treatments, believing that the new reports violated agency policy about information gatherers (IGs) making assessment decisions and that the new reports could cause their jobs to be downgraded to a lower pay classification. The Maryland RAs laughed. One stated, "Compared to us, those RAs are inexperienced. They're scared, they're young, they follow the rules because they want to jump [work for another agency], and they probably have [supervisors] beating them over the head to make sure they follow the rules. I can see why these new reports would make them nervous." Another RA added, "Those RAs don't have confidence. . . . Now everyone here is confident they can do the job . . . so when we see something like this new report, we think, 'can this help us do the work better?' It's [HI reports] not a threat." One RA well summarized how the way they see their job affects their attitude toward the HI reports: "I guess if you think about the job as following the rules in the *RADM*, then I can see why the new reports would make you nervous. But the whole-man way . . . we've talked about it a lot today . . . is about judgment, experience, reading what's not there and what's there. No difference in the way a report is written can replace that."

The Maryland RAs' whole-man metaphor, then, is a generative, or growth inducing, root metaphor that both reflects and reinforces through ongoing use a mental model or interpretative framework for their way of thinking about, attitude toward, and behavior at work. As we have seen, this whole-man approach is a flexible, contingency-based approach to reading, interpreting, and ultimately assessing a report in which RAs call on their

own lived experiences, values, and ability to see the report as a complete information set rather than merely discrete facts to apply to the rigid criteria in the *RADM*. Because these RAs saw themselves as having flexibility and autonomy in their work that allowed them to make the best assessment decisions, they were able to be open to the novel HI reports. Indeed, as the RAs comments indicate, their whole-man approach both reflects and helps to continually reinforce their openness and even predisposition to change—as long as they can see the value of that change.

An important subtext throughout the interviews helps explain the RAs' interpretation of the whole-person root metaphor and their openness to the novel reports: the RAs' belief that supervisors valued their work, trusted their assessment decisions, provided numerous opportunities for them to interact and learn from each other (e.g., conveniently arranged work spaces, coffee break rooms, formal best-practices meetings), and gave them latitude in using the *RADM* to make decisions. These contextual factors helped RAs to be able to review and modify their assessment practices in complex cases without fearing that novel actions would cause them to be sanctioned or even punished. In essence, the Maryland RA supervisors helped create an environment and culture that provided opportunity for individual and organizational learning, and the RAs' commitment to and belief in the importance of their work caused them to take advantage of that opportunity. This learning environment fostered the RAs' attitude of flexibility, their willingness to consider something new—that is, their openness to change—that would help them do their jobs better. This attitude is captured in their use and interpretation of the whole-person root metaphor and the entailments that complemented that metaphor.

The Washington DC Site: "Paint by the Numbers" and "Stay Within the Lines"

During my individual interviews with the Washington DC RAs immediately following their assessment of the two cases, two RAs made comments that best capture the site's root metaphors:

> You know this work isn't really all that difficult.... You just have to learn to paint by the numbers. You know what I mean . . . those old paint sets . . . the ones that had pictures with numbers on them. You match the number with the paint and fill it in. That's about what we do here.

> If you stay within the lines . . . you know what the *RADM* says . . . you'll stay out of trouble and get the job done. No one will be breathing down your neck.

These "paint by the numbers" and "stay within the lines" metaphors reflected the RAs' beliefs that the *RADM* provided rules rather than guidelines and that it was politically strategic to rigidly apply those rules when assessing reports.

The RAs mentioned these two metaphors and others very similar repeatedly in individual interviews immediately after they completed their case assessments and 3 months later in group interviews when I reported the decision results and gathered additional information about their reactions to the HI reports. For example, one RA said she had to make sure she did not "color outside the lines" when assessing reports while others nodded in agreement. Several RAs indicated their need "to stay within the box" created by the *RADM.* Finally, another group of RAs indicated they needed to make sure they did not "go out of bounds" when assessing reports. These metaphors, fundamentally different from those at the Maryland site, indicate a tight, seemingly unforgiving control system that discourages change and new learning.

Washington DC RAs' Initial Reactions to the New Reports

As with the other two sites, I individually interviewed 6 of 10 Washington RAs after they completed their assessment of the HI and LI report cases. I asked each RA the same open-ended question, "What are your reactions to the [Czarnek or Rokitka] report?" For each interview, I chose the report written in the HI style. These RAs not only were resistant to the HI reports, but they also had a strong emotional reaction to them:

> That new report violates policy. Whoever wrote that report . . . I bet it wasn't one of the IGs . . . was making decisions . . . was interpreting financial . . . That's our job. You just can't do that! We have our box of crayons . . . they [IGs] have theirs. . . . You can't mix them . . . you can't!

> Come on now. You've got to be kidding. . . . That report was trash! It breaks the rules how these things need to be done. . . . It's outside the lines. You'd have to rewrite the *RADM* and change our jobs . . . our job descriptions before those types of reports could be used.

> Didn't like it, period . . . too outside the box. The new type reports screw with the work we do. We do the analysis . . . the assessment—not the reports. I can't see using them [HI reports].

> I dismissed the report [HI version] when I saw it . . . it was too out of bounds. . . . No way would it work around here.

Unlike the Maryland RAs, who quickly saw ways that the HI reports could help them do their work more effectively, the Washington DC RAs viewed these reports as violations of their communication-genre norms (“outside the box,” “outside the lines,” and “out of bounds”), their job roles, and their organization’s policy. Not once during these interviews did a Washington DC RA mention a possible advantage or benefit of the HI reports or appear to be open at all to its potential for improving decision making, decreasing report-reading time, or reducing the stress caused by difficult-to-read reports. And not one RA mentioned senior leadership concerns about decision quality and whether the HI reports could improve it.

While having lunch (a serendipitous event) with five of the RAs the day after the initial interviews, I mentioned the dominance of this root metaphor, asking them if they were aware of how often they used this kind of language to describe their work and what caused them to talk about their work that way. They laughed when I mentioned the prevalence of their talk about painting by the numbers, staying within the lines, and not going outside the box and seemed unsure of the significance of these metaphors. One quipped, “We’re all K-mart Picassos here.” Another said, “Look at all the different-colored markers we use to figure out what’s going on in these reports.... When I’m done marking up one of these reports, it looks kinda like a painting.” These RAs mentioned that they did not create these metaphors, so they must have been part of the typical talk at the organization when they started working there. One RA commented, “We jump [change jobs] a lot ... so these words was [*sic*] something I picked up here. That’s just how people talk ... no big deal.” The other RAs nodded in agreement.

Although the RAs lacked insight into the significance of their customary metaphors, they did provide important contextual information about why these metaphors became an important part of their discourse. They pointed out that they work in a “fish bowl,” a political environment caused by being within the “beltway” (a Washington DC area within the interstate highways encircling the city where much high-visibility government business is conducted). They also observed that most people, particularly younger ones, working in the agency are “agency jumpers”: They move fairly often to different agencies and jobs for better career opportunities. Consequently, as one RA pointed out, “We all try to keep our noses clean ... not just us but our supervisors too.” Another RA believed that “it could be dangerous to step out and try something new [a more nuanced way of interpreting information].... If it blew up, you’ll be in trouble.” These RAs suggested that getting a poor performance review or developing a reputation for being “troublesome” could make it difficult to switch agencies. Consequently, to

maintain their career flexibility, these RAs believed they had to paint by the numbers, stay within the lines, or stay within the box. In their current jobs, that meant carefully following the decision guidelines in the *RADM*.

These RAs also claimed that they are competitive and know how "to play the game." They seemed to be almost exclusively focused on doing what was best to further their careers. The demographics help support this claim: All had college degrees, were 28 to 35 years old, had worked for several agencies, had between 2 and 3 years of experience as an RA at this agency, and were mostly single, which, they claimed, provided them with job flexibility. For most of them—and their immediate supervisors—this job was merely a way station, a stopping point, in their career journey.

The root metaphors paint by the numbers and stay within the lines and their entailments capture a work attitude, perhaps even a work philosophy, that causes these RAs to be suspicious of change and to see it as a potential cost, particularly to their careers. These metaphors indicate that the RAs perceive their work as a series of rigidly defined organizational routines that, if performed correctly, provide them with protection from supervisors who might use their power unjustly or unethically and auditors who might have a strict compliance mentality. Furthermore, these metaphors imply a lack of organizational trust, which was likely caused by the transient nature of the work relationships due to the RAs' and their supervisors' agency-jumping habits, a hierarchic control system that created the perception that errors would be dealt with harshly, and a strong focus on careerism. This lack of organizational trust contributed to a climate that was political, averse to risk, and thus suspicious of change.

Washington DC Group Interview

As with the other two sites, I returned to the Washington DC site 3 months after the individual interviews to discuss the decision results from the HI and LI report-assessment experiment and to gather additional information about the RAs' initial, emotional reaction to the HI reports. All 10 RAs attended the group interview, which lasted 2 hours and 40 minutes. As with the Maryland group, I provided copies of the HI and LI treatments of the Rokitka and Czarnek cases to refresh their memories of the experimental task that they had completed 3 months earlier. After I described the decision results that were listed in the handout I had provided, the RAs then animatedly discussed their reactions to the HI reports and their reasons for those reactions.

The RAs were surprised to learn that there were no differences in their decision results between the HI and LI cases. Their reasons for being surprised baffled me. They thought that RAs reading the LI reports would make better decisions than would those reading HI ones. When I asked why they thought that, the RAs once again focused on their misgivings about the HI reports. All but one of the RAs had serious concerns about the HI reports. The following RA comment well represents these concerns:

> You know after you left . . . that was about 3 or so months ago, right? . . . we continued to talk . . . between ourselves . . . about those new reports. We couldn't get past the fact those reports changed the job. You have to try to understand . . . those reports didn't make sense to us. Sure we could read and understand them, but it was too outside the box.

All but one of the RAs, then, had agreed that the HI reports "didn't make sense"; they were "outside the box" and were "out of bounds." And after 3 months, they still looked and felt that way. In other words, these RAs categorized the HI reports as "abnormal" or deviant discourse that short-circuited their sense-making processes.

I asked what could be done to have the HI reports make sense and not seem outside the box. One RA shook his head and said rather dramatically, "You'd have to blow up the whole damn place . . . change everything . . . the *RADM* . . . our job descriptions . . . how the IGs [report writers] do their jobs . . . everything. And I do mean everything." Another RA added, "You'd also have to change the assessment rules . . . the *RADM* . . . and our job descriptions too. All those different things would have to be lined up before these new reports would fit in." Finally, an RA offered this suggestion:

> Look, I'm always looking over my shoulder, covering my six. If all the people who write up and sign off on my evals were to say here's what you want me to read, then I'd do it. Those are the people who tell me here's your box of crayons and this is how I want you to color. I gotta be honest, and I bet a lot of you feel this way, but what interests my bosses fascinates the hell out of me.

Clearly, the organizational environment at the Washington DC site promotes following routines. And adhering to the document design, organization, and style of the customary LI reports is merely one, albeit an extremely important one, of a series of routines that the RAs rely on at this site. Because they so strongly rely on routines, they rarely review or reassess

their work practices and assessment processes. This lack of review and reassessment retards organizational learning and fosters an attitude toward change that sees it as a threat rather than a necessary condition of adapting to changes in an organization's internal and external environments. As we have seen, the root metaphors that these RAs use capture their suspicion toward change and resistance to new learning. The RAs ongoing use of the paint-by-the-numbers and stay-within-the-lines root metaphors and their entailments both represents and reinforces current organizational routines (e.g., the value of the LI reports) and provides an interpretive lens that causes the RAs to be suspicious and even somewhat hostile toward the change represented by the HI report. Unlike the Maryland RAs, the Washington DC RAs, when provided feedback about their use of these metaphors, appeared either incapable or unwilling to assess the effect that these metaphors had on their thinking and actions.

Final Observations

Determining ways of gauging workers' openness to change, particularly to significant change in their organization's communication practices, is an overlooked area in the business and managerial communication literature. This study has indicated that one useful approach to gauging such openness is through analyzing workers' organizational discourse. Themes and in particular metaphors in workers' everyday discourse can reveal their both conscious and tacit attitudes toward change that can predict if they will strongly resist, even deliberately sabotage, change efforts or actively support, even champion, those efforts. As this study has shown, the root metaphors and their entailments that emerged from the discourse of two different agency sites—Maryland and Washington DC—indicated that the respective workers at these sites had vastly different degrees of openness to changes in a report's organization, style, and design. The Maryland RAs' whole-man root metaphor both reflected and helped reaffirm an open, flexible attitude toward organizational work that resulted in their willingness to entertain the value of the novel HI reports. In marked contrast, the Washington DC RAs' root metaphors—paint by the numbers and stay within the lines—both reflected and reaffirmed their misgivings about changes in organizational routines, resulting in their lack of openness, indeed strong resistance, toward the HI reports.

Such root metaphors and their entailments emerge from an organization's complex cognitive scripts—sometimes referred to as mental models or interpretive schemes—which provide the collective templates that shape

workers' attitudes toward and influence their actions at work. These scripts take form and become explicit in workers' interpretation of organizational policies, their reactions toward organizational control systems, their attitudes toward organizational structure in general and hierarchy in particular, and their perception of power and politics in their organizational relationships, particularly with supervisors. Furthermore, the unique personal characteristics of the RAs at the Maryland and Washington DC sites—their ages, levels of maturity, career goals, loyalties, and so on—interact with their organization's cognitive scripts to create a complex organizational context. The root metaphors and their entailments in the RAs' discourse reflect their interpretation of this context and thus provide a window into their attitudes and reactions toward change.

This study may create the impression that the differences in the discourse between the two sites are stark and would be obvious to anyone outside these organizations. But that is not the case. First, the research design of this study brings into sharp focus certain unique aspects of each site's discourse by examining it during two specific and unique circumstances: soon after the RAs had completed assessments of two reports (HI and LI) and 3 months afterward when I reported the results. Furthermore, the rhetorical conventions of presenting new knowledge in a research article in a coherent, structured manner preclude capturing the messiness and true complexity of the RAs' organizational talk that focused on a wide variety of work and personal issues and took surprising and unclear twists and turns.

These results were also not immediately clear-cut to me. When I gathered the data, I did not have a theoretical framework (e.g., the degree of openness to change) to assess the organizational talk and the metaphors that emerged from it. To be blunt, I did not know what to do with the data I had gathered. I only knew that there was a connection between the metaphors at the different sites, the RAs' reactions to the HI reports, and the power of discourse communities to shape their members' perceptions of communication effectiveness. I did not make the connection between these metaphors and the RAs' openness to change until much later when I was teaching an MBA managerial communications course. To illustrate the difference between the efficiency and the perceived effectiveness of written communication as well as the power of language communities, I was showing excerpts from the HI and LI reports used in this study and the metaphoric language that the RAs used in their reactions to the novel HI reports. One student observed that his organization strongly resisted change, and he provided several common organizational aphorisms and slogans that contained metaphors implying that lack of openness to change. This student went on

to observe he would have a difficult time implementing in his organization many of the communication strategies we discussed in class. That student's insight—a eureka moment for me—caused me to turn to the change literature to provide the overarching theoretical framework for this study.

While conducting this work, I unearthed a large number of additional research questions. Here are the questions that I believe are the most important:

- Is a significant intervention necessary in order to change organizational communication norms? In efforts to change communication routines, is there a point at which the change becomes so great that it triggers significant resistance?
- Do management and executive communication-development programs, particularly if they are one-shot efforts, have any significant impact on or value for communication? Do these programs need to be embedded throughout organizational systems—for example, feedback and reward systems—in order to support changes in communication practice?
- Are we actually attempting to make our MBA and executive MBA students communication-change agents in the workforce since the communication strategies and practices we often teach will likely run counter to the communication norms of the organizations in which they will work? If that is the case, should we incorporate change theories and strategies into our managerial or leadership communication instruction?
- How much power or agency do individual or small groups of workers have in changing dysfunctional language norms? Must a cataclysmic failure in communication occur to create a sense of urgency that shakes the organization out of its communication routines?
- Are communication-development professionals within an organization capable of assessing their organization's openness to communication change by assessing organizational talk and the metaphors that emerge from that talk? Because that talk is so embedded in their own language, will these organizational members not notice its uniqueness? Is there a need to bring in outside consultants to assess an organization's openness to communication change?

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