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INTRODUCTION

. Complex organizations develop ideologies to foster member dedication and to glorify the organization to the outside world (Blau & Meyer 1956; Sutton et al 1956; Bendix 1956; Kamens 1977). A related subject concerns secrecy and disclosure in organization communications (Steele 1975). "Organizations systematically provide accounts for their members .. or make available accounts for actions taken toward clients" (Scott & Lyman 1968 54). Accounts serve to restore order and prevent conflict between action and expectation. A university administrator justifies extra library funds on the basis that books and periodicals are vital resources for quality teaching. A business manager tells laid-off employees that the lay-off is due to decline in sales. A branch of the armed forces announces changes in training practices in response to charges of brutality in training.

. Most human action consists of communication whereby meaning and information are transmitted. Open systems theorists emphasize communication as the essence of a human organization. Such systems receive, use, and distribute information (Katz & Kahn 1966 223).

CRISIS & ORGANIZATION ACCOUNTS

. Accounts are necessary to an organization's stability and survival. Many crises which confront organizations result in elaboration of accounts.

1) An organization may suffer an image crisis. Government agencies may face an image crisis in which the public is unaware of agency objectives and believes that its officers are corrupt (Janowitz et al 1958). The agency may respond to this negative image by attesting its commitment to goals, morality, and people.

2) Vital resources of capital,

labor, and raw materials may be scarce, and accounts to secure and protect these resources may be devised. American businesses protect their economic resources by making accounts which stress ideals and business requirements of capitalism (Seider 1974).

3) Role strain arises from the difficulty of an organization simultaneously to manage several contradictory demands which may produce a crisis. Ideologies often develop to justify contradictory aspects of society. American businesses develop ideologies to cope with the antinomy of efficiency and humane flexibility.

4) Disturbances in the organization due to conflict of staff with line, over-control or under-control and inadequate structures for reward and administrative succession may generate accounts to restore cooperation, morale and productivity.

. Crises may arise in the internal system, within the organization or in the external environment. "Winning support of organization goals is not confined to communication within the organization .. The need to justify .. goals, to explain social functions of the organization, is seen daily in public relations activity" (Thompson & McEwen 1958).

. Accounts are not the only acts of organizations when crises come up. Other actions, such as expanding goals, liquidating departments, changing reward systems and work roles, or making ties with influential outsiders may be used. Accounts may legitimate these actions or may make them unnecessary. Account making and account using in organizations is part of the social routine when there is no threat of crisis.

TYPES OF ORGANIZATION ACCOUNTS

. Theorists of the interaction dramaturgic perspective describe accounts in interperson behavior. When interaction is no longer smooth-running, actors engage in ".. remedial work .." to change ".. meaning that otherwise might be given to an act, transforming

what could be .. offensive into what is .. acceptable" (Goffman 1971 109). An account is ".. a statement by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior - his own or that of others, and whether the proximate cause for the statement arises from the actor .. or from someone else." The two types of accounts are 1) excuses and 2) justifications. Excuses mitigate or relieve responsibility when conduct is questioned, and justifications assert responsibility for the act but deny the pejorative quality associated with it" (Scott & Lyman 1968). Vocabularies of motive are situationally relevant and acceptable terms by which social actors interpret conduct (Mills 1940 904). Quasi-theories are explanations people give to restore order and hope to problematic situations (Hall & Hewitt 1970;1973). Disclaimers are prospective, define the future in the present, to make potentially problematic events unproblematic when they occur (Hewitt & Stokes).

. Accounts may be retrospective, or they may be devices to establish order, anticipating the future. They are not belief systems per se, but refer to verbal communicative acts which may be based on ideology. Ideology is more simply stated, and may include appeal to the emotions (Sutton et al 1956). Organizational accounts are elaborated primarily when a disruption appears to threaten the organization's survival.

. Accounts arise from situations and interpretive processes, and they may or may not be honored. A decline in annual profits of a business may be communicated in different ways to investors, to customers, to competitors, to union officials, and to lower level staff due to the differing expectations and power of these audiences vis-a-vis the organization. Different types of industries convey different ideological themes to audiences. Defense industries play on patriotic themes. Industries whose products are closest to the consumer, as in retailing and

service, stress their concern for social responsibility in business (Seider 1974).

. Actors interpret accounts. Organization members must recognize that a crisis threatens or has occurred. This perception could be accurate, or totally mistaken. It may be assumed to be moderate or crucial in importance. The crisis may be interpreted as severe though it is trivial in an objective sense. Interpretation involves choosing relevant audiences, creating the account, and noting whether the account is honored (Hewitt & Stokes 1975). Accounts are honored when the moral character of the offender is maintained or restored. Whether communicative acts are honored depends on the offender's moral worth, penitence, and status relative to the audience and the degree of offense (Goffman 1971; Scott, Lyman 1968; Blumstein 1974).

. Organizations use many types of accounts, which may be carefully planned or spontaneous, directed toward internal or external systems, sent personally or by mass media, in written or oral form, intimate, casual styles used among friends and insiders may be single words and pat phrases to communicate ideas. Since members share common ideas and experiences, such styles are more effective among themselves than to external audiences. The formal, frozen styles are used when the audience is too large for continuous interaction, or when material or social barriers separate sender and receiver. In this case statuses may be rigidly defined. Frozen accounts are usually rehearsed, written in advance, and used in various situations.

FORMS OF EXCUSES

1) Organizations use "accidents of nature" as excuses. An electric utility company may send customers a letter excusing a price hike as due to unusually cold weather.

2) Appeals to defeasibility excuse action due to lack of information. An army may blame a defeat on

insufficient information on enemy conditions. 3) Biological drives afford the excuse that "human nature is like that." People assume that bureaucracies are naturally large, complex, and full of paper work, and that the client must live with it.

4) Scapegoating excuses misconduct by shifting responsibility to someone else.

FORMS OF JUSTIFICATION

. There are six types of justification used as "techniques of neutralization (Sykes & Matza 1957).

1) Denial of injury claims that the act was harmless or unimportant. An airline might tell environmentalists that jet noise is at "acceptable levels".

2) Denial of the victim argues that the misconduct was acceptable because the victim deserved what he got. After charges of brutal and unlawful treatment of demonstrators at the 1968 Democratic nominating convention, the Chicago Police Department said that these people had no business being in the city, and that most of them were "shiftless".

3) Condemning the condemners justifies an act by stating that others do the same or worse without being condemned. A company officer tells a Senate investigating committee it pays large bribes to foreign officials is a standard, acceptable business practice.

4) Appeal to loyalties maintains that an act is right because it serves the interest of another to whom there is an unbreakable obligation of allegiance or affection. The Central Intelligence Agency, when challenged to explain its coverup of criminal acts by its agents claimed that "national security" demanded such cover-up.

5) Sad tales justify misconduct by relating and distorting a dismal past. School superintendents answering charges that they graduate incompetent and uneducated students describe their school's economic and social misfortunes.

6) Self fulfillment justifies behavior as it enriches the company

and its members. Charges that a company exploits workers through picnics, bowling leagues, and therapy groups is countered by the claim that these things aid morale and permit communication among members.

DISCLAIMERS There are 4 types of disclaimers. 1) Hedging agrees that the policy may fail, but can be tried. 2) Credentialing starts with credit, and follows with criticism. "Your work is good, but you should do it on time." 3) Cognitive disclaimers deny exact knowledge, but make a proposal. 4) Suspension of judgment asks the audience: "hear me out before you explode." Organizations use disclaimers to ask forbearance for acknowledged misconduct. A gas company spokesman tells a senate committee that the company will have to bend a few "minor" safety rules in order to ensure enough fuel, which is a type of sin-licensing. When an appliance company gives a buyer a "limited warranty", it signals minimal and tentative commitment to responsibility in the future, as a type of hedging. Organizations often use formal written disclaimers to head off future challenges.

ACCOUNTS Organizational structure affects the making, altering, and discarding of accounts. In small businesses and voluntary associations, accounts are mostly informal. In organizations lacking formal mechanisms, the formal and informal structures combine to affect the speed of making and altering accounts, how much information goes into accounting activity, and which roles and role players are concerned with accounts.

. The size and complexity of organizations are indicators of the kind and amount of resources mobilized for accounting. Large specialized organizations have departments of marketing, personnel, and public relations designed precisely for gathering and interpreting information (Katz & Kahn 1966 247). Centralized control structures restrict participation in

accounts by other departments and personnel. In professional organizations, participative management encourages organization-wide participation in accounts.

. Some groups in an organization may use accounts to impress their group's importance for organization functions, and to bolster the power position. Argyris (1957) emphasized the importance of human personality in organizational behavior, where the calculating person may incorporate his own individual problems into the making of organizational accounts.

. The organization's accounts may cause restructuring the organization. In the aftermath of the Watts, Newark, Detroit, and Tampa race riots of the 1960's, the denials of injury, denials of victim, and other such accounts given by police departments for racist tactics and brutality were dishonored by many citizens, civil rights groups, and prominent political leaders. Some police departments, in response, underwent restructuring, with new crowd control and training programs, and creation of special committees to review and resolve citizens' grievances. The causal order of structure and accounts goes both ways and the underlying principle is that the structure and accounts must conform to each other. If they are incongruent, crisis reactions may develop (Kamens 1977).

THREE STAGES IN ACCOUNTING

1) Assessing the crisis. Any member of the organization, regardless of rank, may be concerned with crisis and resort to an account. Primary positions for organizational accounts are those which code incoming information, and those in authority such as executives, public relations officers, and supervisors who can act as official voices of the organization. They gather and assess information about the problem, its causes, the audiences targeted for accounts, and their position within and outside the system. A vital question for deciding about an account is whether or not the audience has potential impact on

the organization's survival.

. The chosen strategy may be to give no account, since it is a risky venture which may be dishonored. The audience can later use disclosed information of the account against the organization, which may shield itself from accountability. The promise that "the real purpose of our action will soon become clear" is an example of avoiding accounts.

2) Developing & presenting the account. Information gathering continues, but the organization centers on the best strategy, such as the best type of account, linguistic style, theme, vocabulary, method, and media for presentation. The strategy may be one of concealment, duplicity, or deception. Military leaders during the Viet Nam war intentionally underestimated the size of hostile forces (Adams 1975). The number of converts in the religious crusades were grossly exaggerated in the Middle Ages (Altheide & Johnson 1977). At first such tactics aid the survival of the organization. But duplicity is hazardous if the audience discovers the fabrications. Usually strategies consider the common factors across audiences, and the account is based on the organization officer's perception of crisis, secured information, and optimal strategy.

3) Interpreting audience response

. When the account is published, the organization wants to know whether the audience honors the message. The audience may not honor some or all of the account, and may misconstrue it. Honoring may tell the organization that no further action is needed. If the account is unsuccessful, by dishonoring or misconstrual, the exchange between organization and audience may have many cycles, in the course of which the organization reworks the accounts for better effect.

CONCLUSION Future study should be focused on how different types of organizations vary in accounting actions. As they differ in history, goals, images, resources, and structural factors, so their

accounts vary in form & content. Many accounts offered by organizations contain inaccurate, impractical, fanciful, and even nonsensical content, yet are honored by audiences. Researchers should turn to cultural beliefs and values to find why certain account strategies work. Researchers should also study what audiences successfully challenge organizations to give accounts.

. We contend that only audiences with power over an organization's existence are likely to receive accounts. Finding the relation among major problems and current issues and organizations' accounting actions is important. Popularizing the ecological crisis in the 1960's and 1970's produced a flood of accounts from industrial and government organizations. The velocity and method of such accounts should be investigated. And researchers should focus on how changes in organization structure or accounts affect changes in the other, where structure and accounts are not congruent.

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