

ABSTRACT

TURNAGE, ANNA KIMBERLY. Identification and Disidentification in Organizational Discourse: A Metaphor Analysis of E-mail Communication at Enron. (Under the direction of Dr. Victoria J. Gallagher).

This project is situated within the interpretive tradition in organizational communication research, focusing on organizational discourse. It goes further by bringing the discussion into the 21st century through examining how communication technology--specifically e-mail – plays a role in the linguistic practices that help create, maintain and change organizational discourse. The overarching theme driving my research borrows from Conrad's (1985) notion of coordination and control, and the dialectical tensions related to this concept, specifically, identification/disidentification and power/resistance. The texts analyzed in this project were drawn from a database of e-mails from the now defunct Enron Corporation. The project is centered on three overarching questions:

- *How did metaphor help create, maintain, and provide opportunities for potential change in dominant discourses at Enron?*
- *How did metaphor help employees at Enron bridge dialectical tensions related to coordination and control?*
- *To what extent, and how did e-mail function to help enable Enron employees to bridge dialectical tensions?*

The first question is addressed through a rhetorical analysis of the metaphors used by employees in Enron e-mails. This analysis demonstrates how metaphor directed attention to certain ideologies and values and deflected attention away from others during two different time periods in the company's life – during its heyday as a Fortune 500 company, and as the

company began to collapse. The results of the rhetorical analysis are then used to address the second question through a theoretical analysis of how the use of metaphor between the two time periods illustrates employees' attempts to identify or *disidentify* from the organization. This in turn illustrates how the use of metaphor helped employees to bridge the dialectical tensions of coordination and control by directing attention away from dominant discourses, making room for different perspectives.

To address the last question, I conduct a theoretical analysis of Enron e-mail use through theories of extended agency, which are “grounded in action” approaches to organizational discourse stating that objects have agency just as people do in the process of organizing. People and objects combine to create a “hybrid agent” that can reinforce or disrupt certain powerful discourses in the ongoing process of organizing. The analysis demonstrates how e-mail, at the very least, served as a form of “techno-therapy” for employees as they tried to deal with the company's impending collapse. I also argue, however, that e-mail served an important role in the *distribution* of discourse pushed by Enron management, and in other cases helped them reject those same discourses in favor of alternative ones. The alternative discourses, in turn, could potentially point to a different way of organizing in future discourse.

The project ends with a discussion of the Enron case as a representative anecdote (Burke, 1945) for corporate greed and corruption. Representative anecdotes are “named stories, and the attitudes they represent” (Mahan-Hayes & Aden, 2003, p. 36). As a representative anecdote, then, the Enron story is truly to be considered a warning for how certain discourses can lead to corporate corruption rather than simply as an isolated case. The “Enron story” continues to repeat itself, and so this story is representative of present and

future problems. Discourses of laissez-faire, free market capitalism have obviously led to more than just the Enron case, as several recent examples demonstrate. This project illustrates how certain discourses at Enron are more common than previously thought, and how alternative discourses may help circumvent dominant discourses that have continued to create financial problems in the U.S. and beyond.

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Identification and Disidentification in Organizational Discourse:
A Metaphor Analysis of E-mail Communication at Enron

by
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DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad

BIOGRAPHY

Anna Turnage is a rhetorical scholar with interests in critical interpretive organizational communication, computer-mediated communication and the philosophy and theory of communication technology. She received her BA in Journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1989, after which she worked eight years as a newspaper reporter and editor at *The News & Observer* in Raleigh, N.C.; *The Greenville News* in Greenville, S.C.; and *The Gaston Gazette* in Gastonia, N.C. In 1996, Anna left the newspaper business and entered the world of public relations. She moved to Raleigh to work for Electricities of N.C. as its strategic communications director. From there, she moved on to a PR and marketing company, Cramblitt & Company, representing clients in computer graphics and modeling and engineering software. The last position she held before entering graduate school was as the director of communication at North Carolina State University's College of Education. While working for the college, she decided to take some courses, and eventually earned her M.S. in Organizational Communication from NCSU, continuing on to get her PhD in the Communication, Rhetoric and Digital Media program. During that time, she published articles in *The Southern Journal of Communication*, *The Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* and *The Communication Review*, in addition to presenting at numerous conferences including several annual meetings of The National Communication Association, The Southern States Communication Association and the Rhetoric Society of America.

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When I embarked on this incredible journey six years ago, I remember something one of my professors said to me as I began the masters program at NCSU. She said, in an offhand way, “Graduate school is a lonely experience.” In many ways she was right. There were times when I was holed up in my house for days at a time, furiously reading, researching and writing, feeling isolated and lonely. Those times, however, were short-lived. For I would always think of all of the wonderful people in my life who have supported me, energized me, and encouraged me along the way to get to this point, and I realized I was far from alone. In many ways, I did this for those people as much as I did it for myself.

I leave here as someone who studies the power of language – someone who understands that words can start a war, or heal a nation. Yet, as I sit here trying to find the right words to express my gratitude to all of my family, friends, colleagues, professors and mentors who have supported me through the years, I find it a daunting task. As someone who appreciates the power of language, however, it is necessary to try it anyway. In particular, I want to thank Dr. Victoria J. Gallagher, my advisor and mentor throughout graduate school. In many ways, Dr. Gallagher is the reason I am here today. She was my first communication professor, and she immediately inspired me to want to do more with my life. It was Dr. Gallagher I went to see when I decided I wanted to pursue my doctorate. And it has been Dr. Gallagher since that day who has constantly encouraged me, challenged me, and nurtured me

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The year 1979 marked the beginning of a significant turn in the study of organizational communication, when Pondy and Mitroff argued that organizational theory should move “beyond open system models of organization” to a “cultural model, the key elements of which include an emphasis on the use of language and the creation of shared meanings” (p. 4). They further argued that “integrating the concept of language into formal organization theory can begin to give us a deeper understanding of perception, meaning, creation, communication and social influence” (1979, p. 27). More importantly, their model called for scholars to move more towards thinking of organization not as an objective reality, but one that is socially constructed and maintained through *language*. Not only would this model involve a new set of questions concerning organizations and the process of organizing, it would also involve a different way to research organizations apart from empirical, quantitative design.

Two years later, organizational communication scholars held what has been referred to as a watershed event (Corman, 2006) in organizational communication studies, when a group gathered in Alta, Utah, to discuss the state of the field. The impetus for this conference was twofold – to distance organizational communication research from managerially biased traditions of research, and to come up with new ways to study organizational communication apart from the empirical, positivist tradition that had until that time dominated the field

(Taylor, Flanagin, Cheney & Seibold, 2001). The result of that 1981 conference was Putnam and Pacanowsky's 1983 edited collection, *Communication and Organization: An Interpretive Approach*. This edited volume introduced a new paradigm to organizational communication research – the interpretive tradition.

The interpretive approach is based on the recognition that organizations are not simply rational, fixed entities that operate *apart* from communication, but rather, they are *created and maintained* through communication. The focus of interpretive studies has been on the use of language practices that shape rationality, construct power relationships, and enact member identities (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). Mumby and Clair (1997) made this point much more succinctly when they argued that, “Organizations exist only insofar as their members create them through discourse” (p. 181). The importance of organizational discourse is now obvious as a result of this more recent tradition of studying organizations in terms of how people communicate, what they say, who they say it to, and how they say it, among other things. Grant, Hardy, Oswick and Putnam (2004) note that studies focusing on how organizational discourse shapes reality have made an important contribution to our understanding of the process of organizing, since they show us how our constructed realities shape our attitudes, behaviors and actions. Moreover, language use and the resulting discourses, according to Alvesson (2004), “can be seen as clues or indications of an underlying cultural meaning system” (p. 329), and are, therefore directly tied to the creation and maintenance of an organization's culture. He defines culture as “broadly shared meanings and symbolism, often partly or fully take-for-granted” (p. 331). Discourse and

culture, he says, share what could be referred to as a dialectical relationship, informing each other in the shaping of our attitudes and behaviors:

Culture is put into action, carried and changed partly or perhaps mainly through discourses. Cultural meanings frame, restrict, and give meta-meaning to discourses.

The same discourse (language use) in different cultures (meaning contexts) may lead to different receptions and thus meanings. (Alvesson, 2004, p. 331, parentheses in original)

Studying culture, however, and studying discourse are two different propositions, Alvesson (2004) argued. Studying culture involves focusing on more broadly shared meanings that involve more than just verbal exchanges. Studying discourse, on the other hand, involves looking specifically at the use of language and the meaning systems instantiated within it. Studying discourse, then, can inform how organizational cultures are formed, maintained and changed through *language*. So while this project is not a study of organizational culture, it is important to point out the relationship between discourse and culture in order to better explicate the power of discourse and how it shapes certain cultural realities specific to a given organization. Discourses, Alvesson (2004) argues, “also represent a (perhaps even the most important) medium in which cultures are constructed, reproduced, contested and changed” (p. 331, parenthesis in original).

This project is situated within the interpretive tradition of organizational communication research, focusing on organizational discourse. It goes further by bringing the discussion into the 21st century by examining how communication technology –

specifically e-mail – plays a role in the linguistic practices that help create, maintain and change organizational discourse. Specifically, this project examines metaphors in e-mail messages at the now-defunct Enron Corporation, and how those metaphors supported certain systems of discourse that helped create and maintain the company’s now infamous culture, but also how the use of different metaphors supported alternative discourses which could have possibly led to a different kind of organization. The overarching theme driving my research borrows from Conrad’s (1985) notion of coordination and control, and the dialectical tensions related to this concept. The purpose of this project is three-fold: to explore how metaphor helps create, maintain and change organizational discourse; how it helps maintain and/or transform dialectical tensions; and to examine the role communication technology, specifically e-mail, plays in this same process. In this first chapter I further establish the rationale for the project, and also provide an overview of the theoretical framework, and the resulting methodological approach, including the guiding questions driving the research. I then provide a preliminary analysis of the artifacts being examined to help explicate my approach and to delineate the scope of the project. The overview will end with a summary of the following chapters.

Theories of coordination and control

Conrad claimed, “...it is through communication that individual employees gain the information on which they base choices and exercise the influence that translates their choices into action” (1985, p. 3). These choices are based, in turn, on what Conrad referred to as a kind of dialectical tension between coordination and control. That is, in order to

organize, we must coordinate our actions through language. Those acts of coordination, however, also create structural systems of power by which we are controlled. Conrad, however, never specifically discusses coordination and control *as* a dialectical tension, what that means to employee experiences in organizations, or how coordination could also relate to resistance rather than, or in addition to, control. Other scholars at the time (the late 1970s and early 1980s), however, did directly discuss the dialectical tensions related to coordination and control, although they did not use the same terminology as Conrad. Giddens (1979, 1984), for example, introduced through his structuration theory the concepts of duality of structure and the dialectic of control to help better guide our understanding of how social relations are formed, maintained and changed. Giddens' explication of the duality of structure provides insight into how enacting social structures also reifies them. In *coordinating* social structures, then, we are in turn constrained or *controlled* by them. Furthermore, Giddens' notion of the dialectic of control helps to explicate how coordinating also allows for employees to engage with power structures and change them, thereby exerting their own control over certain situations.

In a somewhat complementary move, George Cheney (1983a, 1983b) introduced Kenneth Burke's notion of identification as a way to understand coordination and control in organizations. Employees must identify with the organization and with other members in order to coordinate their actions. This identification, however, can lead to a certain level of control over the employee, who is then likely to make decisions based on the organization's needs above his/her own needs. Burke (1950) refers to the process of identification in terms

of congregation and segregation. In identifying (congregation) with one group, organization or person, the employee is in turn *disidentifying* (segregation) from others. One may purposefully *disidentify* from one group in order to identify with another and vice versa. It is this *disidentification* that opens up possibilities for discursive coordination in a way that seeks to alter or may result in altering an existing power structure. Finally, one could argue that more recent studies related to power and resistance in the process of organizing are also directly related to this notion of coordination and control. Mumby (2005), for instance, specifically discusses power and resistance as an overarching and ever-present dialectical tension in organizational life. Power and resistance, he argues, are “mutually constitutive,” and are “a routine social production of daily organizational life” (p. 38). Power, then, involves both coordination and control, as does resistance.

The upshot of a dialectical approach to organizational communication based on issues of coordination and control is that transcending any kind of dichotomy between the two allows a more thorough exploration into the workings of organizational discourse. Mumby (2005) argues that dialectical tensions are not to be solved, *per se*, but to be explored for their ability “to create possibilities for organizational change and transformation” (p. 38). Or, as Holmer-Nadesan (1996) explained it:

Within a post-structuralist framework, resistance is often explained in terms of individuals’ capacities to draw upon alternative discourses that subvert the privileged position of the dominant system of social identities and values. Subversion occurs

because these alternative discourses constitute a ‘surplus of meaning’ that destabilizes the dominant system’s autonomy and self-containment. (p. 57)

Indeed, the dialectic, according to Burke (1945), is “the employment of the possibilities of linguistic transformation” (p. 402) through the use of alternative discourses. And, as Benson (1977) argued: “It offers an explanation of the processes involved in the production, the reproduction, and the destruction of organizational forms” (p. 2).

One goal of this project is to explore organizational communication in terms of issues related to coordination and control, specifically how the dialectical tensions of identification/disidentification and power/resistance help us understand not only how organizational discourses are created and maintained, but also transformed and possibly changed. Specifically, I explore how the use of metaphor opens up possibilities for “linguistic transformation” as Burke (1945) suggested. That is, I examine the role metaphor plays in directing attention to certain discourses that help shape and maintain certain power structures, but also in challenging those power structures. Addressing these issues meets the first two goals of this project: to explore how metaphor helps create, maintain and change organizational discourse; and, in turn, how it helps maintain and/or transform dialectical tensions. I specifically address the role of metaphor through a rhetorical analysis of e-mail messages from Enron Corporation. Exploring e-mail communication, in turn, helps to achieve the third and final goal of this project – to examine the role communication technology, specifically e-mail, plays in the distribution of language in creating and maintaining organizational discourse, but also in bridging dialectical tensions.

Enron's "cultish" culture

Enron is an exemplary case through which to explore how discourse shapes reality, since it is apparent in the numerous reports available in both the mainstream media and scholarly work that employees had a strong sense of identification with the company, so much so that many of them were still buying stock when it was obvious the company would fail (Cruver, 2002). As Tourish and Vatcha (2005) argued in their analysis of Enron as a cult, "Language was crucial to the process" (p. 473) in the indoctrination of employees to the company's values and in the control Enron managers exerted over their employees.

The company's collapse in late 2001 is one of the most notorious, and well documented corporate bankruptcy and fraud cases in American history. Hundreds of articles have appeared in the popular press and scholarly journals pointing to the questionable accounting practices, haughty corporate bravado, aggressive business tactics, and highly autocratic internal culture as contributors to the company's downfall. And while scholars in the field of business management and others have picked apart the leadership and ethical shortcomings related to the case, very few communication scholars have addressed the communication issues that contributed to the company's demise. Specifically, we have overlooked the opportunity to analyze the Enron case in terms of how *language use* in the company led to the company's "cult-like" (Tourish & Vatcha, 2005) internal culture. It is clear from at least one scholarly article that metaphor did play a role in the creation and maintenance of discourses that led to identification. An article from accounting scholars Craig and Amernic (2004) explores the hyperbole that was a normal part of Enron's

discourse. They analyzed a letter to shareholders from Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling in 2000 and highlighted several examples of metaphors of war, sport and extremism. Phrases like “performance beyond measure,” “outdistance the competition,” “Enron is laser-focused on earnings per share,” and “logistical expertise to produce high value,” exemplifies the metaphorical themes Craig and Amernic (2004) identified. If these two scholars were able to draw out clues to the organization’s discursive structure and belief system from one letter, the Enron e-mail corpus provides the perfect opportunity to analyze the day-to-day language in the organization among rank and file employees as well as upper management. And so this database of e-mails presents a unique opportunity for communication scholars to get a rare glimpse of the language that created and maintained Enron’s now infamous organizational culture. As Diesner, Frantz and Carley (2006) pointed out:

For researchers focusing on social networks, organizational theory, and organizational behavior, the Enron corpus is alluring and of particular interest with much academic value because it enables the examination of social and organizational processes in a real-world organization over a long period of time. It provides researchers a rare, authentic glimpse into the social network of an actual business organization. The Enron corpus also contains a large amount of raw data on communication, knowledge, relationships, perceptions, resources, and events in a company in a crisis. (p. 202)

By analyzing the language used in the e-mails in this database, this project will help fill the gap in communication research both about how discourse at Enron generated realities

which contributed to the company's ultimate demise, but also about how e-mail as text can be analyzed to reveal the rhetorical aspects of language use in organizations. In this project, I look at Enron's discourse not just in regard to the users' roles, but also in regard to the role of e-mail as a communication technology in the communication process – in particular as it related to issues of coordination and control.

Organizational communication and digital media

In their historical look at organizational communication studies, Taylor, Flanagin, Cheney and Seibold (2001) explicitly call for more research on the various impacts of new technologies, adding that, “because it is interwoven so thoroughly into organizational practice, it cannot be meaningfully separated from the organizational contexts in which it is used” (p. 121).

It is particularly important to consider e-mail communication as a worthy source of study, since e-mail has become a dominant form of communication, surpassing even face-to-face interaction, in many organizations (Dawley & Anthony, 2003). Rhetorically analyzing e-mail texts longitudinally enables us to examine organizational discourse *in situ*, or as it occurred. In having access to this kind of text, researchers gain access to organizations that they may not otherwise have, or may have difficulty obtaining. As Graham (1986) argued: “Researchers interested in studying the ‘dark’ side of organizational life, such as political behavior in the workplace, are not generally welcomed by organizational gatekeepers” (p. 68). Texts like the e-mails in the Enron database, which was released by the Federal Energy

Regulatory Commission in 2002, however, allow a rare look at the inner workings of the organization (albeit posthumously in this case) without the battle of gaining entry.

In addition, this project provides a unique look at how language may be different in e-mail communication than in face to face and other contexts. For instance, Baron (1998) noted that research on e-mail communication consistently found that e-mail encourages more personal discourse, and that communication via e-mail can become overly emotional as opposed to other communicative contexts. People are also less inhibited when using e-mail, often becoming bolder in their approach. “Even when one’s identity is revealed, the level of ‘comfort’ in initiating communication, suggesting new ideas, and even critiquing proposals made by those perceived as higher on the status chain is not necessarily reduced” (Baron, 1998, p. 147).

In looking at the use of metaphors in the Enron database, the qualities of e-mail mentioned above become apparent, and could provide information as to how the technology can affect discourse in the organization itself. This project explores those aspects of e-mail communication, and, in doing so, provides a means for examining how e-mail functions rhetorically in organizations as employees navigate discursive aspects unique to the individual organization.

Methodological approach

From the discussions above concerning the dialectical nature of organizational discourse and the potential impact of communication technologies in the workplace, this project presents a rhetorical analysis of e-mail messages in the Enron e-mail corpus. Cheney

and Lair (2005) argued that studying organizational rhetoric is a field open to new methods of study, adding that a rhetorical approach gives researchers “the opportunity to consider new concepts, methods, objects of study, even as scholars try to augment rhetorical analysis of organizations with theories and strategies from other areas and approaches” (p. 77). This project considers new objects and strategies of study by looking at e-mail text in terms of organizational rhetoric.

Rhetorical criticism allows scholars to interpret, analyze and critique organizational discourse and the persuasive strategies therein. As Hart and Daughton (2005) say, the job of the critic is “building an argument about social conditions by observing what people say” (p. 23). And, as Foss (2009) argued, in understanding the discursive options available to rhetors in the construction of discursive messages, we gain an understanding of how they function in the creation, maintenance and change in social life. In so doing, she said, “we are able to question the choices others make in the construction of acts and artifacts” (Foss, 2009, p. 8), and the effects of those choices.

Cheney and Lair (2005) argued that there are two crucial questions in studying organizational communication from a rhetorical perspective: (1) To what degree are organizations constituted by rhetoric? (2) How does a rhetorical approach differ from, or offer theoretical value to, our understanding of the process of organizing? One answer, they say, is that studying organizations in terms of rhetorical theories is “valuable above all for their recognition of how *discourse links individual persuasive choices with organizational resources*” (Cheney & Lair, 2005, p. 68, emphasis in original). In the case presented in this

project, persuasive choices were made using e-mail as a resource. Specifically mentioning the Enron scandal in their article, Cheney and Lair (2005) argued that the Enron case has too often been reduced to the unethical practices of “a few bad CEOs.” They further argue that taking the analysis to the structural, organizational level allows for a shift from rhetorical criticism aimed only at specific artifacts to looking at broader organizational discourses from the standpoint of *collective* agency – that is, moving from a micro-level view of discursive practices to the macro-level. The critic is then able to better understand the organization-wide discursive structures that create collective agencies, and, I argue, collective identification.

As such, this project provides a micro-level rhetorical analysis of the use of metaphor in the Enron e-mails, which then demonstrates how those metaphors reflected the organization’s macro-level discourses, which led to identification and disidentification with discourses specific to the company and overarching discourses of capitalism. Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) discuss the importance of the interrelation between micro and macro-level discourses. They argue that there traditionally have been two ways of studying organizational discourse: There is the study of *d*iscourse (with a small “d”) at a close range, micro level, which emphasizes the local, situational context in which meaning is formed; and the study of long-range, macro-level *D*iscourses (with a capital “D”), which emphasize the determining nature of discourse as it structures meaning in a number of given contexts. Alvesson (2004) explains that *Discourse* is “a rather universal, if historically situated, language constituting a particular phenomenon” (p. 325). *Discourse* is deterministic, and shapes meaning systems, or as Cooren et al. (2007) explain it, “[*D*]iscourse is positioned as exerting a kind of power over

the way people communicate with each other” (p. 154). Alvesson (2004) used the example of “The New Economy” as an example of *Discourse*. In this project, in fact, I approach the study of discourse from the long-range, *Discourse* point of view, demonstrating how *Discourses* of “The New Economy” drove Enron’s overarching culture of profit and greed, but I also demonstrate through the metaphor analysis how micro-level *d*iscourses helped reify those *Discourses* in some cases, but also presented opportunities to disrupt them in others. In other words, this project takes a hybrid point of view on discourse as Cooren et. al (2007) did in their study on how Doctors’ Without Borders mission statement is maintained across space and time. That is, it is assumed in this project that “a given *Discourse* must, by definition, be embodied, materialized or even incarnated in *d*iscourses” (Cooren et al., 2007, p. 155).

In looking at discourse in this way, the assumption is that micro-level and macro-level discourses are therefore dialectical in and of themselves in a structural way. Macro-level discourses harden into reality through micro-level discourses, and these micro-level discourses continue to reify the macro-level discursive structure. There are cases, however, where micro-level discourses run counter to macro-level discourses, in which case they may disrupt dominant power structures. In the case of Enron, the macro-level discursive structure is what Craig and Amernic referred to as “the rhetoric of resilient capitalism,” or, as it is referred to in this project – the rhetoric of “The New Economy.” This project will demonstrate how that rhetoric was the main motivator for Enron leaders and that early on in the company’s life, employee discourse supported that rhetoric. Once employees realized the

company was about to fail, however, employees began to use discourses that challenged the “rhetoric of resilient capitalism” and the profit-driven motives behind it.

Examining the Enron case on both the micro and macro discursive levels enables the critic to engage in an analysis based on scope and reduction (Burke, 1945), or in terms of “both/and” rather than “either/or.” By moving in and out of scope and reduction, and viewing a situation dialectically rather than singularly, the critic is able to analyze the discourse on a much broader level. In analyzing the discourses of an organization such as Enron, for instance, the notion of scope and reduction gives critics numerous ways to look at it. We may look at it more on the macro-level (scope), in which overarching discourses of capitalism are present in the metaphors being used, or the micro-level (reduction), in which the metaphors used are specific to discourses of the organization or employee. Scope and reduction also allows us to see that the micro-level metaphors are in many cases driven by the macro-level discourses and vice versa, in a dialectical way.

Boje and Rosile (2003) took this kind of scope and reduction approach (although they didn’t call it that) to the Enron case by looking at it through tragic and epic frames. The authors juxtapose tragic and epic depictions of the Enron “meltdown” and conclude that an epic view is expansive beyond the tragic view, allowing a more thorough picture of the meltdown and its causes. An epic view, for example, brings in historical and external participants that played a role in the meltdown – like capitalism, the government, and other Wall Street institutions. The tragic view, in contrast, presents a more micro-level, organization-specific, or leader-specific, perspective on the social systems which contributed

to Enron's collapse. The micro-level view, however, tends to provide a limited view of the social drama and passes off the company's collapse as if it were an isolated case at the hands of a few rogue executives. The epic, or macro-level view, extends the story beyond the tragic to show larger, more overarching systematic issues that contributed to the company's collapse. More importantly, this view helps us understand that this can, in fact, happen again given the role those macro-level discourses played in the Enron case.

This project examines the Enron case in a similar way, except it focuses on the specific role of *discourse* on a micro/macro level. Discovering the macro- and micro-level discursive structures present in the metaphors used at Enron, and how those may have changed over time, helps to demonstrate how dialectical tensions can be transcended.

The dialectical nature of metaphor

Metaphor, after all, is dialectical in and of itself. It also has a macro/micro dimension to it, in that macro-level metaphorical conceptual systems are instantiated through micro-level expressions (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The metaphorical concept "Time is Money," for example, is instantiated in expressions such as "I've *invested* a lot of time in this project." In addition, metaphor operates in a "both/and" fashion, enabling and constraining certain ways of viewing the world, while at the same time opening up possibilities for seeing the world differently by changing metaphorical structure (Burke, 1945). As such, metaphor is crucial to the process of identification, according to Brock (1985):

Not only are paradox and metaphor central to identification, but, their marriage can best be seen in the simultaneous unity and division of Burke's concept of

identification. Paradox highlights opposites, the divisions that are capable of being united through transcendence in metaphor. (p. 96)

Metaphor is a means for establishing identification in the face of division. This particular insight can be useful in determining how identification occurs on a number of different levels. If organizational members are identifying through the use of metaphor, then their social reality, and identity, is being shaped through the specific metaphors being used in the process of organizing. However, metaphors can also play a role in *dis*identification. In this way, Burke (1937) argues, it is through metaphor that we may find change with what he calls “perspective by incongruity” in which “a word belongs by custom to a certain category – and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category” (p. 308). Changing metaphors, then, can disrupt patterns of discourse and help us see things in a different way, and therefore disidentify from people or ideas with which we may previously have identified. Therefore, new metaphorical structures open up the possibility of transcendence, as Burke argues. This project examines changes in metaphor over time at Enron Corporation to illuminate instances where employees either disrupted or preserved dominant organizational discourses through identification and/or disidentification.

Overarching questions

Working from the aforementioned theoretical and methodological approaches, this project is guided by the following overarching questions. The order of the questions begins with a micro-level look at individual use of metaphor in the organization. The questions then move to the macro-level by examining how those metaphors contributed to collective,

organization-wide identification with new economy ideologies pushed by Enron management, and how e-mail as a communication medium was used to distribute the micro-level *discourses* which reified, and then rejected, those dominant *Discourses*. The questions are:

- *How did metaphor help create, maintain, and provide opportunities for potential change in dominant discourses at Enron?”*
- *How did metaphor help employees at Enron bridge dialectical tensions related to coordination and control?*
- *To what extent, and how did e-mail function to help enable Enron employees to bridge dialectical tensions?*

The first question is addressed through the rhetorical analysis of the metaphors used by employees in Enron e-mails. This analysis demonstrates how metaphor directed attention to certain ideologies and values and deflected attention away from others during two different time periods in the company’s life – during its heyday as a Fortune 500 company, and as the company began to collapse. The results of the rhetorical analysis are then used to address the second question through a theoretical analysis of how the use of metaphor between the two time periods illustrates employees’ attempts to identify or *disidentify* from the organization. That is, the analysis illustrates how the use of metaphor helped employees to bridge the dialectical tensions of coordination and control by directing attention away from dominant discourses, making room for different perspectives.

To address the last question, I conduct a theoretical analysis of Enron e-mail use through theories of extended agency, which fall under the “organizations as grounded in action” approach to organizational discourse. These theories recognize the role of objects in the process of organizing, many of them going as far as to claim that objects can be considered agents in the creation, maintenance and change in social structures and the discourses related to them. The analysis demonstrates how e-mail, at the very least, served as a form of “techno-therapy” for employees as they tried to deal with the company’s impending collapse. I also argue, however, that e-mail served an important role in the *distribution of discourses*, which in some cases helped reinforce *Discourses* pushed by Enron management, and in other cases helped them reject those same *Discourses* in favor of alternative *discourses*.

The project ends with a discussion of the Enron case as a representative anecdote (Burke, 1945) for corporate greed and corruption. As a representative anecdote, the Enron story is truly to be considered a warning for how certain discourses can lead to corporate corruption rather than simply as an isolated case. It is clear from other cases of corporate fraud and corruption during the time Enron went bankrupt, and also more recent cases in the financial sector, that Enron is not an isolated case. As representative anecdote, the Enron case demonstrates how the micro and macro-level discourses of *laissez-faire*, free market capitalism often lead to corruption and economic chaos.

Preliminary metaphor analysis

The impetus for this project as a whole came from an earlier project (Keyton & Turnage, 2009) analyzing upward communication patterns in the messages in the Enron database. While reading the e-mails from the sample in that particular project, I noticed what appeared to be a dramatic change in metaphor use between the two time periods. To get a better idea of what might be going on with the metaphor use, I conducted a preliminary analysis of the e-mails from the sample used for that previous project, and discovered that there were interesting patterns in the use of metaphor in the e-mails and what appeared to be a bridging of dialectical tensions of identification/disidentification and power/resistance in the metaphors used between the two time periods. From this preliminary analysis, I generated my guiding questions for the project presented here. The first set of messages below, for example, demonstrates how employees used metaphors to *identify* with the organization in the earlier years before the company's collapse:

- “I always *dreamed of* working for a company that truly cared. My prayers were answered. We are *building a great company* together.”
- “I am proud to be *a part of this team* and *look forward* to many years of prosperity and success.”
- “Thank you again for allowing me to be *a part of such a GREAT team*.”
- “The E means something to me. I'm so proud to be *apart [sic] of this great company that you and Enron employees built*.”

In these e-mails, references to “team” suggest a feeling of playing offense rather than defense – a group working together to achieve goals and win the game among competitors. Since Enron was on top at the time, there was little need for defense. Offensively, though, there was the need to push harder to make even more money so the organization could further surpass any competition in its path. There is also a metaphorical sense of future and moving forward in these messages. As Craig and Amernic (2004) demonstrated in their analysis of Enron leaders’ letter to shareholders, the “offense” mentality could also be seen as a sports metaphor. The goal, then, would be to continue to “outdistance the competition.” Craig and Amernic’s analysis of the letter also found metaphors focused on a vision toward the future – one full of dreams, gains, and the building of prosperity, as evidenced in Lay and Skilling’s assertion that “we expect to continue strong earnings performance,” and “an increasing number of global customers” (2004, p. 822). In addition, all of the e-mails from employees shown above are related to monetary value. In terms of identification with the organization, these e-mails show a strong identification in the assumed or transcendent “we” (dissimilar interests joined under the transcendent “we”), in that there is a sense among these employees that they are all in it together. None of these employees are in the same position as Ken Lay, but they consider themselves to be building the company and its future along with him as evidenced in the statements: “We are building a great company together,” and “I’m so proud to be apart [sic] of this great company that you and Enron employees built.”

By contrast, the preliminary analysis also revealed a stark difference in e-mails later on, as the company was about to collapse. These e-mails demonstrate Enron employees' attempts to *disidentify* from the company:

- “You demonstrated that that *trust was misplaced and worth nothing.*”
- “After 21 years *I was standing at the end of the rainbow just to watch my pot of gold snatched away from me* by the very people I trusted the most.”
- “You asked one thing of the people that work for you. To make Enron the worlds [sic] leading energy company. We gave that to you and *what did we get in return?*”
- “You *load of bastards* - you *screwed us all* and got *fat on the profits of our sweat.*”

While there may have been an attempt to distance themselves in these e-mails, the overarching metaphors of monetary value are still prevalent, but are now coupled with a shift towards values in terms of ethics. The references to “what did we get in return,” “my pot of gold snatched away from me,” and “fat off of the profits of our sweat,” reveal an ongoing concern with monetary value. References to “trust was misplaced and worth nothing,” shift over to ethical values. Also, in these e-mails, we are starting to see more of a sense of the past than the future, for example, in the statements, “trust *was* misplaced,” “I *was* standing at the end of the rainbow” and “*I have stopped* trying to defend you.” This also indicates a potential sense of *disidentification*, in that these employees obviously no longer believe in a future for the company. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that metaphors can indicate experiential and emotional states. In this sense, the experience and emotion have turned

negative, and it is evident in the employees' use of metaphor. Some further examples of this negative turn can be found in these e-mails to Lay:

- “I have a suggestion. I feel strongly that you should promptly have the ‘values’ banners removed from the Enron building lobby. It is *a slap in the face* of every employee.”

Another e-mail, sent by “Just another fucked over employee” said:

- “I particularly like your adherence [sic] to the core values - you ‘respected’ us, you ‘communicated’ brilliantly with us, your fucking us over was ‘excellent’, your ‘integrity’ was without question.”

These e-mails indicate a change in relational patterns between employees and management, and a different view of power structures.

Aside from the vitriolic messages to Lay, the preliminary analysis also revealed e-mails that displayed other forms of strong emotion:

- “Our hearts bleed ENRON blood and they were wounded deeply last Friday night when we saw you on TV announcing the sale of ENRON to Dynegy.”
- “My heart was breaking, seeing the hurt in Ken Lay's eyes and to see our company tumbling down as if it was the New York Trade Center this was my first thought and question how could a few cruel and selfish individuals bring something so wonderful down after so many years of hard work?”

Overall, the few messages presented here show how shared metaphors at one point in time created a collective agency among employees, or a strong level of identification with Lay and the company. Later on, however, the metaphors begin to change indicating efforts to disidentify from the company, or resist Lay and the company's previous ideological values. This rest of this project presents a much more extensive examination of the metaphors in the Enron e-mails and a fuller theoretical explanation of what those metaphors mean in terms of organizational discourse and the dialectical tensions therein.

Summary and project outline

To summarize, the combination of theories of coordination and control in concert with a rhetorical analysis of how metaphor is tied to, and leads to potential change, in the dialectical tensions discussed here, enables a broader look at how organizational discourse is shaped, maintained and changed. By examining this process as it occurs through e-communication, I am focusing the discussion on the 21st century organization, where electronic communication largely dominates. What can we learn from looking at the e-mail messages at Enron about how language can be used to shift course and perhaps change a cultural vision to a more positive, productive one? The more complete analysis by the end of this project addresses that question.

In analyzing the use of metaphor in Enron e-mails, this project makes several contributions to organizational communication research. First, in specifically addressing how metaphor maintains dialectical tensions, perhaps we can discover ways that these tensions may be transformed, or at least managed in the workplace, for employees to take more

control over the process of organizing. Second, this project introduces e-mail text as a viable way to study organizational discourse. That is, databases such as the Enron corpus give researchers a unique opportunity to examine actual day-to-day discourse that in many cases is hidden from public view. It also enables a longitudinal look at how the discourse changed over time as the company began to fall apart. Third, this project will help further research on the role communication technologies play in creating, maintaining and changing organizational discourse (specifically in relation to dialectical tensions) by using theories of extended agency such as ANT. A final contribution is that it illustrates how people communicate differently using these technologies as opposed to more traditional forms of communication.

This study is organized as follows: Chapter 2 provides a more complete description of Enron's corporate culture from existing literature and how it ties in with issues of coordination and control. This chapter will also include a brief history of Enron's rise and fall as a major corporation in the U.S., from both a micro and macro perspective. Chapter 3 details the methodological approach to the project and the results of the rhetorical analysis of the metaphors used in the Enron e-mail messages. It demonstrates how some metaphors reflected discourses at Enron that maintained its "cult-like" culture, while other metaphors disrupted the dominant discourses, introducing new perspectives. This chapter addresses the first question: *How did metaphor help create, maintain, and provide opportunities for potential change in the organizational discourse at Enron?* Chapter 4 addresses the second question: *How did metaphor help employees at Enron bridge dialectical tensions related to*

coordination and control?, by providing a macro-level structural analysis of what the metaphors from the rhetorical analysis mean in terms of the dialectical of identification/disidentification and power/resistance. Chapter 5 addresses the last question: *To what extent, and how, did e-mail function to enable Enron employees to bridge dialectical tensions?*” To address the last question, I conduct a theoretical analysis of Enron e-mail use through theories of extended agency. The analysis demonstrates how e-mail served as a form of “techno-therapy” for employees as they tried to deal with the company’s impending collapse. It also demonstrates that e-mail served an important role in the *distribution* of discourses, which in some cases helped reinforce Discourses pushed by Enron management, and in other cases helped them reject those same Discourses in favor of alternative ones. Chapter 6 ends the project with a discussion of Enron as a representative anecdote (Burke, 1945) for corporate greed and corruption. Conclusions and implications, and limitations and future directions are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2

ENRON CORPORATION: CULTISM AS AN EXERCISE

IN ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

“This is a story of people, a story of human error, and it’s a story any of us could have found ourselves characters in” (McLean, 2008).

The story of Enron is also a story about language – about how the use of language helped create a culture in which everyone involved contributed (many unwittingly) to the company’s demise (Trinkaus & Giacalone, 2005). Or, it is a story of how language, when it *uses us* (Burke, 1966), can lead to a level of human error that can result in catastrophic consequences. Yet, apart from Craig and Amernic’s (2004) account of certain metaphors used by management, there is very little information about how language was actually used in day-to-day discourse at Enron. This account from Swartz and Watkins (2003), however, does give us some clue of how important it was to choose the right words (and highly metaphorical phrases), or else be branded an outsider:

No one at Enron would ever ‘build consensus,’ they would ‘come to shore,’ as in ‘We have come to shore on this,’ or ‘Are you ready to come to shore on this?’ One week somebody used the word ‘metrics’ to mean the numbers in a deal, as in ‘We’ve got to massage the metrics!’ Pretty soon, everyone was using the term ‘metrics’ and anyone who used the term ‘numbers or calculations’ was a ‘loser,’ the most popular Enron label of all. (p. 473)

As this account demonstrates, the ability to shape the way language is used is one way power is exerted, as Lyon (2008) pointed out in his article about Enron leaders in terms of Bordieu's notion of social capital. According to this theory, language use, among other things, becomes a sign of social wealth – a way to build social capital in a group. The power of language can become so strong, however, that it blinds those using it to outside interpretations. As Deetz (1986) argued, language systems are central to the production of social reality in organizations. Studying them provides insight into broader organizational processes:

“Language can so dominate sensual involvement in the world that members are directed to a peculiar set of things and totally overlook other important events taking place” (p. 172).

Perhaps Fox (2003) put it best when he called the Enron story a “fable of what happens when a company starts to believe the spin and hyperbole about its success...” (p. 307). Detailed accounts of the company's culture show that the hyperbole Enron advanced internally to its employees, and the employees' response to it, helped maintain what Tourish and Vatcha (2005) called a “totalizing vision” that motivated employees to display extraordinary levels of commitment to the organization and its values, and, presumably, to take high risks too. In their analysis of Enron as a “cult,” they said:

Overall, it appears that Enron inculcated a powerful set of cultural norms in its employees. These specified acceptable business dress, how people talked to each other, and what values they were supposed to subscribe to. The culture attempted to regulate people's identities – an increasingly common process, and one which has the

effect of reinforcing organizational control, through producing individuals deemed appropriate by the ruling group. (p. 474)

Key to that statement is that it is an “increasingly common process” among organizations. So while Enron may have taken certain practices to the extreme, some scholars warn that this type of strong corporate culture is not at all unusual. Spector and Lane (2007), in fact, warn that there is a “surprisingly fine line” between what they call a “high performance” organizational culture and a cultish one. They point to several other large organizations, such as Nordstrom, General Electric, and Southwest Airlines, which have high performance cultures, with “common and shared values that help shape employee behavior” (p. 18) very similar to cults. Spector and Lane also draw a close comparison to the way Jeff Skilling ran Enron and the way Jack Welch ran General Electric when he was CEO (Welch, by the way, was Skilling’s role model). However, they point to subtle but important differences in the approaches of the two men that can explain why GE still exists and Enron doesn’t. Their overall point is that a strong, conforming culture is highly desirable, but can easily get out of hand, and this fine line can be the difference between success and failure. So, in some ways Enron may be unique, but it certainly does *not* represent an extreme exception in terms of corporate cultures in the 20th and 21st centuries. In this regard, McLean’s (2008) point is well taken. The Enron story is one in which we could *all* find ourselves participating.

Nevertheless, in an effort to explain such a rapid, history-making corporate failure, there are a wealth of articles and personal accounts that blame what has been called an

excessive, and often bizarre, culture at Enron. And, even though the culture there may not have been unique as these accounts claim, it still provides crucial information about language use in organizations and why and how a company of that size could rise and fall so quickly. This chapter will provide the backdrop to help make sense of the way discourse and organizational culture at Enron were so intimately intertwined. Recall that Alvesson (2004) argued that language use and the resulting discourses are clues to underlying cultural meaning systems. In what follows, I discuss how power was exerted over employees and how Enron leaders fostered identification among the rank and file to maintain coordination and control. Specifically, this chapter (1) provides a brief history of Enron Corporation and what led to its demise; (2) provides an overview of what the existing literature tells us about Enron's culture; and (3) indicates how certain discourses indicative of that culture set up an atmosphere meant to foster identification among employees, while also discouraging any form of *disidentification* or resistance.

Enron's demise: macro and micro-level perspectives

In a panel discussion held at the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics at Santa Clara University in March, 2002, several business ethics scholars pointed to a variety of factors leading to the company's failure. One scholar, Manuel Vasquez, listed three factors: personal, organizational, and systemic ("What really went wrong with Enron?" 2002, ¶1). Personal factors, of course, point to the character and actions of specific individuals. This perspective boils the company's failure down to the actions of a few unethical managers. Organizational factors look for causes based on group influences, that is, the discourses and

practices which lead to identification with the organization and its leaders. And finally, systemic explanations point to outside forces, such as the legal, environmental, economic and overarching ideological systems that influence the business world in general. These are the factors that Boje and Rosile (2003) identified when looking at the company's failure through an epic frame. Vasquez (2002) suggests that it was a combination of all of these factors, and, in so doing, encourages us to look at the company's collapse in terms of Burke's scope and reduction.

In this chapter, I argue that macro-level discourses of capitalism (scope) contributed to the company's failure. But so did micro-level discourses coming from leaders, and later adopted by employees (reduction). Specifically, macro-level discourses of capitalism and the "New Economy" during the 1990s in many ways contributed to the creation of micro-level discourses of greed and profit at Enron.

The "new economy" discourse of the 1990s

In discussing the overarching economic ideological forces behind Enron's failure, one could argue that the company's behavior was in many ways a result of neo-liberal, free market discourses which have dominated the Western world since the late 1970s or early 1980s¹. Referring to this ideology as "Capitalism run amok," Giroux (2005) described it as "[w]edded to the belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions" (p. 2). In specific, Vasquez (2002) argued that one of the systemic causes of Enron's failure was the economy of "the booming 90's." As Temple (2002) describes it, the economy in the U.S. in the 1990s experienced remarkable growth,

coupled with a booming stock market. Price-earnings ratios for the entire U.S. market were at their highest ever in the 20th century. “Paper fortunes,” in fact, were a hallmark of what became known as the “New Economy.” Thrift (2001) describes this entire concept as a “rhetorical fabrication” created by what he calls “the cultural circuit of capital,” made up of business schools, management consultants and management gurus, all pushing the idea that in a new, technology driven, globalized world, the old ways of doing business – “of heavy industry, bureaucratic ways, a deficit of entrepreneurial spirit and general lack of economic negative” (Thrift, 2001, p. 428) – must be replaced by a new world order in business activity. This discourse of the “New Economy” slowly seeped into the press, and eventually, the political arena and mainstream culture, until it became a material reality, Thrift (2001) argued.

But what did this “New Economy” discourse entail? According to Vasquez (2002), a sky rocketing stock market, high levels of venture capital and consumer spending, large levels of growth for start-up companies, and finance capital. As Thrift (2001) pointed out: “The new economy was framed by finance – in terms of venture capital, the prevalence of shareholders, and the distribution of wealth” (p. 414). These factors led to the overly inflated stock prices that created what is now known as the “dot-com bubble,” which eventually burst at the beginning of the 21st century. As Conrad (2003) argued, stock prices at the time were not only viewed as “an accurate measure of the future value of a company, they [were considered] the best available predictor” (p. 8), despite mixed empirical evidence that it was in fact the case. As a result, executive compensation often came in the form of stock options,

as well as a large increase in employee stock options, which helped boost a company's stock price (Thrift, 2001). Vasquez (2002) said:

I would suggest that during periods like these, our morals tend to get corrupted. The ease with which we see money being made leads us to cut corners, to take shortcuts, to become focused on getting our own share of the pie no matter what because everybody else is getting theirs. (¶ 9)

Conrad (2004) pointed to several other discursive factors during this time that characterized the new economy, one of which entailed “discourses of deregulation,” which presented the government as an entity interfering with growth and competition in an increasingly fast-paced, global marketplace. This discourse accelerated in the 1990s, beginning with deregulation of the natural gas market, followed by partial deregulation in electricity markets. Conrad (2004) also pointed to discourses that situated CEOs as “secular saviors” or as the heroes who would always save the day both for their company and for the American economy. As Boje and Rosile (2003) recalled, President Bill Clinton described Enron CEO Ken Lay “as having the strength and diversity necessary to keep the New Economy on track in the 21st century” (p. 98). Business schools perpetuated this notion of CEOs as larger-than-life heroes. People like former Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca were held up as great Americans with the potential to lead the country to greatness. Iacocca, in fact, was discussed at one point as a potential presidential candidate. Conrad (2004) argued that, “Academic notions of the CEO-hero entered the popular imagination via the exploits of individual corporate saviors despite any flaws or limitations of managerial decision-making”

(p. 5). Under this backdrop, CEOs and managers not only had to exude a certain level of passion for new economy pursuits, Thrift (2001) argued, “But that required being able to engage the emotions, not just the cognitive skills, in order to design the movement so that it would engage others” (p. 418). This meant that managers “had to engage the soul” of their employees and other stakeholders to get them to buy into the same visions and goals driven by the new economy, he argued.

The discourses in the particular areas discussed here, created and perpetuated by financial consultants, academia, the media, the government, and eventually popular culture, created what Conrad (2003) called, “...a complex combination of ideologies, practices, and public policies that encourage ethically questionable behavior” (p. 6). More importantly for this project, though, it provides the overarching context, or backdrop, if you will, that helps explain Enron’s rise and fall. The next sections will provide a brief history of Enron’s existence as a “New Economy” company, followed by a discussion of how those external discourses seeped into the company’s internal discourse, creating the culture that is still talked about today in business and academic circles as a major contributor to the rise and fall of Enron.

Enron: A brief history²

Before filing for bankruptcy in December 2001, Enron employed nearly 22,000 people worldwide, and was considered one of the world’s leading energy companies. *Fortune Magazine* – the same publication that would eventually begin to question the company’s accounting practices – named Enron “America’s Most Innovative Company” six years in a

row. The company was the darling of Wall Street, the envy of other large companies, with a business model that others wanted to emulate. “Blue-chip consultants from firms like McKinsey were running around the world preaching to executives how they could make their companies more like Enron. Enron was a super-star company. ...People were scared of this company” (McLean, 2008, pp. 15-18).

The company was born of a merger between two natural gas companies in 1985 of which Ken Lay was named CEO. Almost immediately, Lay began lobbying for deregulation of energy markets. The natural gas market was fully deregulated by 1989, followed by partial deregulation of the electricity market in several states in 1994³. While these markets were being deregulated, the company pushed for increased regulation in areas where it was at a disadvantage (Conrad, 2003). This aggressive push to manipulate regulation marked a turning point for the company, which moved from a humble natural gas distributor to the energy trading juggernaut it became in the 1990s. Another big reason for that turning point was Jeff Skilling, who was hired away from management consulting firm McKinsey & Company (a member of the “cultural cult of capital” Thrift discussed) to join Enron in 1989. From the start, Skilling was the man with all the ideas, known as “incandescently brilliant” to those in the organization (McLean & Elkind, 2003, p. 28). Skilling, along with Lay and other executives in the company, began to reposition Enron in light of a deregulated market and the “New Economy” that began to take shape in the early 1990s. Skilling wanted to reposition Enron as company “that valued different competencies such as ‘smartness,’ aggressive communication practices and new-economy discourse” (Swartz & Watkins, 2003, p. 377).

There are numerous examples, in fact, of this discourse at play in existing company documents and videos. For example, in a letter to shareholders from Lay and Skilling in Enron's 1999 Annual Report, there is an entire section on "The New Economy." The letter states: "We are participating in a new economy, and the rules have changed dramatically" (1999 Annual Report, p. 2). It then proceeds to list four traits of the new economy and how Enron exemplifies each. In the company's 2000 Annual Report, while it did not mention "The New Economy" specifically, the letter to shareholders did make statements like, "In current market environments, these abilities make Enron the right company at the right time" (2000 Annual Report, p. 2), further pushing the idea that Enron is leading the way in a changing world of business. To use another example, in a video for new employees on Enron's Vision and Values, Skilling says:

In the old days, I think a lot of companies were designed as mechanisms – this cog here, and turn that wheel there, and everybody knew exactly what their job was. It's increasingly hard to run a company that way, when you see the kind of change we see in our markets. (Enron Corporation, 1998)

Boje and Rosile (2005) argue that by constantly making statements like those listed, and presenting the company as a shining star in a new world order, Enron executives became the heroes who would invent new, innovative ways to do business and "who tossed out the old business model and reinvented entire industries in the new reinvent-or-die New Economy employment" (p. 99). Skilling, however, pushed these competencies to excess. His use of "all the right buzzwords" in new-economy language was "almost messianic" (Lyon, 2008, p.

381). Because of this, decisions were made at a furious pace, and the company seemed to constantly be repositioning itself, said former vice president Sherron Watkins⁴ (2009) in an interview for this project:

Quite often, our water cooler talk was that Enron was going to die young. We just said ‘you can’t keep up at this pace,’ it was always just go, go, go, go. You felt like you were burning it fast and loose and this isn’t the way a company grows old.

This fast pace also created a do or die mentality among employees, Watkins said, as she described this particular metaphorical phrase used within the company: “The saying I heard most often was that we had to kill to eat.” At first, though, this fast-paced corporate business model seemed perfect for the time. Wall Street, in fact, considered Enron to be a “New Economy” stock, which, of course, was one of Skilling’s goals (McLean, 2003). The rapid pace and constant repositioning were considered to be bold and innovative, and Skilling was the leader of this effort. As a result, Skilling developed a “cult-like” following within the company (Swartz & Watkins, 2003), and he quickly moved up, being named president and COO in 1996, and eventually replacing Lay as CEO in 2001. In other words, Skilling, along with Lay, developed the “secular savior” reputation – heroes of the “New Economy” that Conrad (2003) discussed. During this time, Enron was buying and trading both natural gas and electricity on the spot market at higher prices⁵. Early on, energy trading became the linchpin of Enron’s fortune, so much so that the company launched EnronOnline in 1999 to enhance its trading business. Not satisfied with the enormous success of its trading business, however, Enron continued to diversify, and by 2001, the company owned and operated gas

pipelines, pulp and paper plants, broadband assets, electricity plants, and water plants around the world (Healy & Palepu, 2003). Skilling even discussed trading weather at one point (McLean and Elkind, 2003). The company appeared to be hugely successful, and Wall Street responded with great enthusiasm, giving the company a market capitalization that exceeded \$60 billion, 70 times earnings and six times book value (Healy & Palepu, 2003).

It was also during this time that two decisions were made which would help set up the house of cards that later came crashing down in late 2001. First, Skilling asked, and the SEC eventually allowed Enron to implement mark-to-market accounting, an accounting system by which the company could put future profits as far out as 30 years on the books immediately. For the most part, under this accounting system, profits would be whatever Enron said they were, based on future earnings estimates. Skilling reportedly received a \$65 million bonus on one transaction that allowed him to book profits from a 23-year deal in one quarter (Conrad, 2003). So, in a nutshell, Enron's earnings estimates were more than what the company really had on hand. And that kept the company's stock at an artificially high price. Enron, in other words, had a "paper fortune" (Temple, 2002). The other thing Skilling did during this time was to name Andrew Fastow CFO in March 1998. It is now widely known that Fastow developed numerous off-balance sheet deals and partnerships (special purpose entities or SPEs) to conceal Enron's poor cash flow. These SPEs also continued the façade that the company was making more money, which, again, kept its stock price artificially high. And in the "New Economy" under which the company was operating, the stock price was everything. It was the main indicator of the company's success. In reality, though, Enron was

basically robbing Peter to pay Paul, and in effect hid its debt within these SPEs, with the appearance that it was making greater profits. Since this kept the stock price high, no one in charge cared about the unethical nature of these SPEs. In fact, Enron's board of directors voted on two separate occasions to set aside the company's code of ethics to approve Fastow's deals (Swartz & Watkins, 2003).

These and other activities within Enron's management circle are particularly ironic given the value system they pushed to employees and the outside world. In 1996 the company established its "Human Rights Principles" (Seeger & Ulmer, 2003). The principles, which were supposed to be the values by which all Enron employees were to strictly adhere, became known as RICE: respect, integrity, communication, and excellence. A large banner extolling these values adorned the main lobby at the company's Houston headquarters. In a training video for new employees, Ken Lay said: "Enron is a company that deals with everyone with absolute integrity" (Enron Corporation, 1998). In the same video, Skilling says: "You may disagree with someone and that's fine. Let's get the disagreement out on the table and resolve it. But, let's do it with respect." It would later become clear, however, that these values were merely platitudes:

The RICE values were neither modeled by leaders nor integrated into operations.

Enron was obsessed, however, with values relating to business success and profitability. The employee parking garage featured large signs on each level extolling a particular business virtue such as "bold, innovative, smart, ambitious, accomplished, adventurous, and undaunted" (Cruver, 2002, p. 18). The result was a

complex moral context with one set of values, the RICE code, functioning as a public foreground and another set functioning for insiders as background. (Seeger & Ulmer, 2003, p. 69)

Given the outside belief that the company actually adhered to the RICE values, coupled with the earnings reports and innovative nature of Enron's diversified business model, it is not surprising that for years Enron enjoyed glowing reports from the press, until McLean's article in *Fortune*, "Is Enron Overpriced?" was published in March 2001. The article asked a fundamental question: "How does Enron make its money?" It was the first serious questioning of the company's financial position. A month after the article ran, in a conference call with Wall Street analysts, one analyst questioned Skilling about Enron's lack of a balance sheet or cash flow statement, after which Skilling called him an "asshole" (McLean & Elkind, 2003). Soon after, the company was forced to restate earnings, and the stock price began to fall, at which point company executives began selling stock. At the same time, however, they were still encouraging employees to invest heavily in Enron stock. Then, on August 14, 2001, just six months after being named CEO, Skilling suddenly resigned, citing "personal reasons." It became clear at this point to all inside the organization that something was seriously wrong (Keyton & Turnage, 2009). The next day, Watkins sent Lay the now famous anonymous memo about Fastow's SPEs, claiming that if something was not done, the company would "implode in a wave of accounting scandals" (Swartz & Watkins, 2003, p. 362). Lay took no action. Over the next two weeks, however, he sold \$20 million in Enron stock, all the while reassuring employees at an all-employee meeting that "the

company is probably in the strongest and best shape it has ever been in” (Spector, 2003, p. 209). In October 2001, the last shoe would drop, when the *Wall Street Journal* published an article exposing Fastow’s SPEs. He was replaced as CFO, and the Securities and Exchange Commission began an inquiry into Enron’s financial statements. With the stock price now in a free fall, Enron tried to merge with rival energy company Dynegy. The merger, however, failed, and with the stock price at less than 40 cents a share, the company declared bankruptcy on December 1, 2001. The aftermath: thousands of employees were fired and lost almost all, if not all, of their retirement savings – money that was for some almost entirely tied up in Enron stock. In a final show of arrogance, the Enron management team that declared bankruptcy in New York that day “flew up on the crown jewel of the Enron fleet, the \$45 million G-5 corporate jet, and they stayed at the Four Seasons Hotel in Manhattan” (McLean, 2008, p. 19).

Becoming “Enronian”

Overarching value of profits

As Thrift (2001) argued in his analysis of “New Economy” discourse, managers had to “engage the soul” of stakeholder audiences – mainly those of employees. Enron’s new economy internal discourse did engage employees’ souls, as many corporate cultures do. But, Enron crossed the “surprisingly thin line” between high performance cultures and cults (Spector & Lane, 2007). High performance cultures, argue Spector and Lane (2007), display a deeply shared belief system, strong behavioral norms, and a leader with charismatic powers – some of the same characteristics found in cults. And it is only in hindsight that Enron’s

culture is now referred to as a cult, because in the 1990s, “the world saw Enron as a high performance culture” (Spector & Lane, 2007, p. 18). What was the difference? Enron’s culture, they (2007) argued, also exhibited “arrogance, avoiding reality, concealment, and the dismissive behavior of executives who intimidated people, attacked criticism and ‘did not suffer fools’” (p. 22).

Perhaps the best way to begin talking about the culture at Enron is to describe the ultimate vision – to become the world’s leading company (Boje & Rosile, 2003). This was to be achieved by the ultimate goal driving the company’s culture: “Enron’s culture was essentially focused on two things: The first was profits and the second was how to make even greater profits” (Fusaro & Miller, 2002, p. 47). One executive said, “You can cheat, you can lie, but as long as you make money, it’s all right” (Schwartz, 2002). This overarching value was exemplified in the extravagant perks the company offered to those who took on that value and worked hard for it. This started with salaries that for many employees started in the six figure range with regular bonuses to match, access to company jets and expensive cars, \$1.5 million company parties, \$100 bills left on each employee’s desk when the stock price reached \$50, and the promise of more rewards to come (Spector, 2003).

Along with such rewards, management repeatedly worked to convince employees that they deserved these excesses because they were in a class by themselves in the world of corporate power. As former Enron employee Brian Cruver put it: “If you were smart enough and tough enough to work at Enron, you deserved to live like last year’s Oscar winner” (2002, p. 191). Those who worked there were called “Enronians,” and were repeatedly told

they were the best and the brightest. And Enron leaders made sure they hired what they considered *only* the best and brightest employees. What attracted new recruits was Enron's reputation "as a hip, dynamic, new age, blue-chip company that you could join and have a good time of it" (Spector, 2003, pp. 214-215). Enron also targeted specific types of individuals in its hiring process. Skilling specifically targeted recruits from the best business schools in the country and people who shared his love for money, aggression, and competition:

Regardless of their academic background, candidates had to demonstrate a strong sense of urgency in everything they did. Candidates also had to demonstrate that they could maintain high levels of work intensity over an extended period of time. Some have compared the work environment and high employee intensity at Enron to that of a top law firm, which is typically filled with brilliant young associates willing to do whatever it takes to make partner. (Fusaro & Miller, 2002, p. 49)

Many employees felt extreme pride and loyalty to the company and its leaders, especially to Ken Lay (see Trinkaus & Giacalone, 2005). Enron was one of the most powerful companies in the U.S., and to many employees, it seemed invincible. As one employee told the *New York Times*, "You could feel the excitement at 6 a.m. You walked in the door and got energized, all those creative juices flowing. You worked with the best, the most brilliant. It was a great, great company" (Bragg, 2002, ¶ 15-16).

As a result, Enron became what one outside consultant called a "company of believers." The charismatic leadership of Lay and Skilling had many employees star struck

and in awe (Tourish & Vatcha, 2005, p. 475). McLean (2008) quoted one employee who summed up Jeff Skilling's charismatic allure this way: "I blame Jeff for everything that went wrong at Enron, but if he walked into this bar right now with a new business idea I would follow him straight out the door" (p. 24). These leaders drove the best cars, took the best vacations, lived in the best neighborhoods in Houston – and employees were well aware that if they followed these leaders and the company line, they too could have this kind of success and wealth. Thus, for some, employee loyalty may have been enhanced by their new wealth. For others, being a part of a powerful corporation led them to identify as Enronians—they were "sought out; people who perceived their job not as a chore, but an opportunity to be part of a mighty mission" (Trinkaus & Giacalone, 2005, p. 239). The company, after all, had gone from being the premier natural-gas pipeline in North America, to what leaders then called "the world's leading energy company," with the ultimate goal being "the *world's leading* company." The result, as Tourish and Vatcha (2005) argued, was a company of employees who bought heart and soul into the company's leaders and their vision, as this description of cultish behavior describes:

Having invested many of their hopes for a better life in the leader, followers are intrinsically motivated to look positively on the leader's words and actions. The resulting high commitment of members is usually expressed in Stakhonivite work norms which mean that the group environment virtually monopolizes their time. Members also replace their pre-existing beliefs and values with those of the group, lose confidence in their own perceptions in favour of those of the group's leaders, and

experience social punishments such as shunning by other members if they deviate from carefully prescribed norms. Conformity is critical. (p. 457)

Creating a culture of 'undiscussables'

The quote above conveys the flip side of a culture characterized by single-minded compliance to the company's values and norms – the need to suppress dissent. In fact, open dissent of any sort was not tolerated at Enron. Executives created an environment where most employees were afraid to express their opinions or question any behavior they might consider unethical or questionable (Fusaro & Miller, 2002). Employees did dissent privately in the hallways, or on a Yahoo message board, said Watkins (2009), but they did so at their own peril. There were rumors that management worked hard to find out who the employees on the message board were, and that some were fired for it. An e-mail address known as "officeofthechairman@enron.com" was meant as a way for employees to express concerns, but people were too afraid to use it for fear they could be identified, Watkins said. E-mail was also not the main communication tool at the time. As a relatively new technology, many employees did not trust it – particularly given the fact that once they logged in, a message popped up warning them that management reserved the right to read their messages. So, as Watkins recalls, it would not normally have been a tool for dissent.

It is clear, then, that Enron's RICE values were in direct conflict with the company's actual communication culture. Werther (2003) called the conflicting messages about values at Enron the "undiscussable. But the prevailing culture rendered 'the undiscussability of the undiscussable also undiscussable'" (p. 569). This "undiscussability" is what Deetz (1992)

refers to as a form of discursive closure, which exists whenever potential conflict is suppressed. Cruver (2003) recalled that at Enron “there was an unwritten rule ... a rule of no bad news. If I came to them with bad news, it would only hurt my career” (p. 471). This rule is exemplified in the fact that executives attempted to fire Watkins after she wrote the letter to Lay and later spoke face-to-face with him about the company’s accounting problems (Fox, 2003; Morse & Bower, 2003).

This unwritten rule of no dissent was enforceable in large part because of a regular employee review process Skilling implemented called The Performance Review Committee (PRC), otherwise known as “rank and yank,” and “bag ‘em and tag ‘em” (Bryce, 2002, p. 127). In the PRC, associates were responsible for grading their peers, which caused a great amount of distrust and paranoia among employees. Those that made it to the top 5 percent were dubbed “water walkers.” The bottom 15 to 20 percent were let go. The rest were sent to the “redeployment” office or “office of shame” where they looked for work in other Enron divisions (Swartz & Watkins, 2003). Thus, despite the enormous time and energy Enron put into hiring just the right people, at any given point in time, nearly 50 percent of the workforce stood to lose their jobs (Trinkaus & Giacalone, 2005). According to Sims and Brinkmann (2003), Enron’s reward system established a “win-at-all-costs” focus in which aggressiveness and greed were core values. The company’s leadership promoted and retained only those employees that produced consistently, with little regard for ethics (Bryce, 2002). Fox (2003) recounts how one employee described the atmosphere this process created: “The people you were competing against for a bonus were sitting next to you. It could get hairy,

especially as year-end bonuses were on everyone's minds. ... Sometimes workers even sabotaged one another" (p. 84). Beyond that, this process was extremely effective in stifling dissent, by instilling fear in employees who might otherwise question management's practices or be willing to express dissent.

The PRC process was coupled with an atmosphere of extreme masculinity and aggression. A Lucite cube on Fastow's desk, for example, read: "When Enron says it will rip your face off, it will rip your face off" (Norris, 2003). Fastow also regularly yelled at, and threatened employees, to get things done his way (Lyon, 2008). Jeff Skilling was known internally as Darth Vader, "a master of the energy universe who had the ability to control people's minds. He was at the peak of his strength and he intimidated everyone" (Cruver, 2003, p. 10). Skilling took this moniker so far that he called his traders "Storm Troopers," dressed up as Darth Vader at company parties, and even decorated his house in black and white to mimic the Star Wars theme (Boje et al., 2004). McLean (2008) referred to Skilling's style as "intellectual intimidation. Jeff's highest form of praise was to say of someone, 'They got it,' and his highest form of criticism was to say a person 'Just doesn't get it'" (p. 38). Skilling was also known as 'The Prince,' after Machiavelli. In fact, new employees were required to read *The Prince* "cover to cover, or be eaten alive" (Boje et al., 2004, p. 760). As Cruver (2002) recalled, Skilling was known as "ultra competitive," often taking other members of the management team on dangerous, extreme-sports trips around the world. Other executives also had tough, intimidating nicknames. Rebecca Mark, CEO of Azurix, a water services division of Enron, was known as "Mark the Shark," for her competitive,

predatory spirit (Frey, 2002, p. 462). By contrast, Ken Lay played the role of “gentle sage to Skilling’s samurai” (Swartz & Watkins, 2003, p. 11). But this put Lay in a position of being the “father figure” to many employees (Spector & Lane, 2007) – the patriarch who made this extraordinary wealth and happiness possible for all those employed at Enron. In contrast, Skilling was the enforcer, creating an aggressive atmosphere that signaled to employees that “being arrogant, tough, and intimidating were pluses...” (Trinkauss & Giacalone, 2005, p. 239). And it was not a company anyone in their right mind would want to leave once there:

Leaving Enron would be like a star reporter leaving *The New York Times* or an honor student walking away from Harvard, or a bound-for-glory baseball player abandoning the Yankees – anything else was going to feel like a step down. Did you want to work with average people who make average incomes and had average ideas? Leaving Enron meant admitting that you, too, were average – instead of being the smartest, the fastest, and the best in the business. (Swartz & Watkins, 2003, p. 134)

Enronians and organizational identification

In short, all of the characteristics described above led Tourish and Vatcha (2005) to label Enron a “corporate cult” as the company exemplified all of the characteristics they described as indicative of a cult, in contrast to what Spector and Lane (2007) refer to as a “high performance culture.” It is not at all a stretch to argue that being a member of a “cult” such as this requires a high degree of identification with the organization. More specifically in this case, though, as Burke argued (1950), identification occurs as a result of “one particular integrated structure of motives” (p. 27). Based on the discussion above about

Enron's values and culture, in this case money and profit was the structure of motives that helped management foster identification among employees. Indeed, Burke (1945) argued that monetary motives in our capitalist society have slowly moved from being an *agency* of economic action into a function as *ground or purpose* of economic action (p. 92). It is obvious from the accounts above that at Enron this transference from agency to purpose was complete. Burke also discusses the process of identification in terms of "identifications whereby a specialized activity makes one a participant in some social or economic class. 'Belonging' in this sense is rhetorical" (p. 28). It should be clear from the description of the culture here that belonging was a huge part of how and why Enron employees were taken in by the hyperbole Fox (2003) described.

In terms of Cheney's (1983b) analyses of how corporations foster identification among their employees, at the very least, Enron fostered identification through the common ground technique ("I am like you") and the assumed or transcendent "we" (dissimilar interests joined under the transcendent "we"). As Cheney (1983b) demonstrated, some of the main ways organizations foster identification is "through oral messages from management; with bulletins, handbooks and house organs, in labor negotiations; by offering an array of benefits and services; and through personnel selection, socialization, training and promotion" (p. 144). The mere fact that employees referred to themselves as "Enronians," and felt that they were better and brighter than anyone else, was indicative of these forms of identification. Banners in the lobby and parking deck, verbal messages from management at

all-employee meetings, employee handbooks, lavish rewards and the like pushed the hyperbole that helped create identification.

The obviously strong level of identification among Enronians set up the kind of coordination and control discussed thus far in this project. The employees identified so much so that they coordinated their activities according to management's wishes, and were therefore controlled by this totalizing vision. In this way, they reified the culture, as Giddens' duality of structure states. In turn, the totalizing culture *discouraged* disidentification with the organization, by squashing dissent, but also by providing rewards that made it easy for employees to look the other way. "Why do anything that might hamper or shoot down such an operation – it would be like criticizing Santa Claus, or looking a gift horse in the mouth" (Trinkauss & Giacalone, 2005, p. 240). Or, as Cruver (2002) put it: "Why rock the boat lest you capsize it?"

The overarching question for this project, however, is how this totalizing vision of Enron was created and perpetuated through language. What can Enron tell us about the use of language in organizations as a whole? As Craig and Amernic (2003) observed: "Analysis of words is especially important in understanding the public discourse of corporate leaders (and their accounting-related discourse), since their written and verbal text contributes to the 'battery of belief-forming institutions' in society" (pp. 814). In terms of Enron, "new economy" discourse, coupled with what Tourish and Vatcha (2005) referred to as "love bombing" in the way employees were constantly talked about as the best, the brightest and most powerful, worked to create the culture at Enron that ultimately led to its demise. The

results of the analysis of the e-mails revealed in the next chapter demonstrates how language – particularly the use of metaphor – exemplified this culture and the values inherent in the culture, but also how some employees eventually used metaphor to *disidentify* from the company, demonstrating how the dialectic of control works through metaphoric constructions, and is achievable even in the least accommodating, heavily controlled language systems.

¹ Many point to Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of Economics for the 20th century rise in free-market, laissez-faire economics. Others trace it back to the Reagan-Thatcher era.

² Timeline of Enron meltdown (adapted from McLean & Elkind, 2003 and PBS special on Enron - <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/enron/timeline80s.html>).

- July 1985 -- Houston Natural Gas merges with InterNorth, a natural gas company based in Omaha, Nebraska, to form the modern-day Enron. Ken Lay is named CEO.
- 1989 -- Enron begins trading natural gas commodities. The company will become the largest natural gas merchant in North America and the United Kingdom.
- June 1990 -- Jeff Skilling, who has been a consultant for McKinsey & Co., joins Enron.
- Dec. 10, 1996 -- Enron announces that Jeff Skilling is taking over as COO.
- June 28, 1999 -- Enron's Board of Directors exempts CFO Andy Fastow from the company's code of ethics so that he can operate LJM1 – one of the SPEs that hid Enron debt and made it appear that the company was performing better than it was.

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- Oct. 12, 1999 -- Enron board exempts Fastow from Enron's code of ethics so that he can raise money for LJM2 – another SPE.
 - August 23, 2000 -- Stock hits all-time high of \$90.56.
 - Dec. 13, 2000 -- Enron announces that Skilling will take over as CEO in February. Ken Lay will remain as chairman.
 - Feb., 2001 -- Lay retires as CEO and is replaced by Skilling.
 - Feb. 19, 2001 -- *Fortune* article, by Bethany McLean: “Is Enron Overpriced?”
 - Feb. 21, 2001 – At an all-employee meeting, in reference to McLean’s article, Skilling says: “Yes, it is a black box. But it is a black box that’s growing the wholesale business by about 50 percent in volume and profitability. That's a good black box.” Skilling then announces Enron's goal, to become “The World's Leading Company.”
 - April 17, 2001 -- Quarterly Conference Call with analysts, when one asks Skilling why the company cannot produce a balance sheet. Skilling calls him an “asshole.”
 - July 12, 2001 -- Quarterly Conference Call. Skilling still claims the company is in good shape and growing.
 - August 3, 2001 -- Skilling makes a bullish speech about Enron Energy Services. That afternoon, he lays off 300 employees.
 - August 14, 2001 – Skilling’s resignation announced. That evening, he tells analysts and investors that “The company is in great shape.” Lay says: “The Company is in the strongest shape that it's ever been in.” Lay is named CEO.
 - August 15, 2001 -- Sherron Watkins writes to Lay expressing concerns about Enron's accounting practices.

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- August 22, 2001 -- Watkins meets with Lay and gives him a letter in which she says that if the financial issues aren't addressed, the company will "implode in a wave of accounting scandals."
 - September 2001 -- Skilling sells \$15.5 million of stock, bringing stock sales since May 2000 to over \$70 million.
 - Sept. 26, 2001 -- At an all-employee meeting, Lay tells employees that Enron stock is an "incredible bargain," and that "The third quarter is looking great."
 - Oct. 16, 2001 -- Enron reports a \$618 million third-quarter loss and declares a \$1.01 billion non-recurring charge against its balance sheet, partly related to "structured finance" operations run by Fastow. In the analyst conference call that day, Lay also announces a \$1.2 billion cut in shareholder equity.
 - Oct. 17, 2001 -- *Wall Street Journal* articles about Fastow's SPEs appears. The SEC begins an informal investigation.
 - Oct. 23, 2001 -- Arthur Andersen destroys one ton of Enron documents.
 - Oct. 24, 2001 -- Enron ousts Fastow.
 - Nov. 8, 2001 -- Enron files documents with SEC revising its financial statements for past five years to account for \$586 million in losses. The company starts negotiations to sell itself to Dynegy. Dynegy agrees to buy Enron for about \$9 billion in stock and cash.
 - Nov. 28, 2001 -- Enron shares plunge below \$1.
 - Nov. 29, 2001 -- Dynegy withdraws from the merger.
 - Dec. 2, 2001 -- Enron files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, at the time the largest bankruptcy in U.S. history.

³ Some states tested deregulated electricity markets. California passed a law that partially deregulated its market, establishing the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) to operate the transmission facilities of California investor-owned utilities (IOUs), requiring them to buy wholesale power in a newly created ‘spot’ market run. Retail rates, by contrast, remained regulated. Enron was involved in buying and selling electricity on the market (FERC, www.ferc.gov/industries/electric/indus-act/wec/chron/chronology.pdf).

⁴ I conducted about an hour-long interview with Watkins for this project for information about the company’s culture and the use of e-mail in the company.

⁵ As a result of deregulation of the wholesale market, Enron and several other energy companies were accused of driving up the cost of wholesale power and manipulating the market. This became known as the “California Energy Crisis,” as the state was forced to impose rolling black-outs during some of the hottest days of the summer of 2000. Information came out in the Congressional hearings after Enron’s bankruptcy detailing how Enron traders manipulated the market, and subsequently made millions. For a full account, see <http://www.ferc.gov/industries/electric/indus-act/wec/chron/chronology.pdf>.

CHAPTER 3
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF METAPHOR USE
AT ENRON CORPORATION

“Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 3).

As the quotation above indicates, metaphors structure our everyday realities. Indeed, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors not only govern our thought process, but “our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane detail” (p. 3). They structure what we perceive, how we behave and how we experience the world around us. Metaphors, then, “are not neutral representations of reality; they are manifestations of particular ideologies and world-views, and have implications for what counts as information, and what is thinkable” (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 369). Metaphor, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Burke (1945) define it, is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another. For this project, when metaphor is discussed, it is discussed in terms of examining a particular concept as it is discussed in terms of something else.

When one thing is talked about in terms of something else, it indicates a rhetor’s *perspective* on an issue, person, place, thing, event, etc. (Burke, 1945). “Burke suggests that in order to identify human motives one should search for the guiding metaphor underlying the perspective. This focus leads the critic to treat every document ‘as a *strategy* for encompassing a situation’” (Peterson, 1988, p. 123, emphasis in original). By analyzing a rhetor’s use of metaphor, a critic can then gain an understanding of that person’s perspective,

including the ideological values that motivate him/her. The critic can gain clues to the overarching metaphorical structure by paying close attention to the specific language being used on the micro-level. Recall from Chapter 1 that Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphor gains systematicity on a macro-level, which is then instantiated and reified at the micro-level. For example, the conceptual, macro-level metaphoric system, “argument is war,” is instantiated in a dialectical fashion through metaphoric micro-level expressions, such as “He *shot down* my argument,” or “Your claims are *indefensible*.” Metaphoric expressions, then, can be used to study the nature of the entire conceptual system and the entailments therein. The relationship between the linguistic expression and the metaphorical conceptual system highlights certain realities while hiding others. “In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept (e.g., battling aspects of arguing), a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor” (p. 10). For example, the metaphor “argument is war” indicates that the rhetor’s *perspective* on an argument is a win-lose proposition. One who constantly considers argument as war metaphorically would be motivated, then, to win the argument at all costs. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out, however, one could easily take the perspective that argument is a dance, rather than a war, where “no one wins or loses, where there is no sense of attacking or defending, gaining or losing ground...the participants are seen as performers, and the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way” (pp. 4-5). A person taking this perspective on argument would be motivated more towards cooperation and compromise than winning at all costs. The different perspectives can depend in large part, according to

Lakoff and Johnson (1980), on cultural ideological discourses which structure our experiences. The metaphor “argument is war,” for example, is a perspective on argument specific to Western cultures. Different organizations, then, as cultures, will employ different metaphorical structures depending on the belief systems inherent in the process of organizing, in addition to larger, meta-level belief systems such as democracy or capitalism. Given the discussion in Chapter 2 regarding Enron’s culture, this chapter will examine the metaphors used by employees in the Enron e-mail database to explore how the use of metaphor helped dictate what was thinkable in that organization.

Methodologically, the process of analyzing metaphors of organizational communication, according to Deetz (1986), requires the identification of metaphorical clusters common to a specific organization: “So what is attempted is the building of a cluster that helps in the understanding of each instance of it... the process is referred to as a hermeneutic, or interpretive, circle, where the part aids in the understanding of the whole and the whole aids in understanding of the part” (pp. 177-178). The part aiding in the understanding of the whole involves looking at the micro-level linguistic expressions to understand how they support (or reject) the macro-level metaphorical concepts. In this way, one can identify the systematic properties of a metaphorical structure and its ideological underpinnings. In a structural sense, using a metaphor both instantiates its perspective and projects it forward, and both draws on it as a resource and reaffirms it for the future. Here again, this is a way of looking at the use of metaphor in terms of Burke’s scope and

reduction, in that the overarching, macro-level ideologies impact micro-level language and practice.

Some of the more common metaphor clusters, for example, that Deetz (1986) identified are the team metaphor (often clustered with terms such as competition, drive, and game) and the organism metaphor (often clustered with terms such as survival and growth). What Deetz suggests is not much different from Burke's (1967) cluster-agon method, in which the critic looks at bodies of text for "what goes with what" and what is in opposition to what. By identifying terms that cluster with and/or are agonistic to particular terms or metaphors, the critic is then able to identify particular motives. Burke (1967) calls this method a "statistical" means of examining rhetoric, in the sense that it provides "a descriptive analysis of a rhetorical performance that allows for the application of subsequent critical and evaluative tools" (Lynch, 2006, NP). Or, as Ivie (2001) explained it: The critic "charts the rhetor's symbolic equations or 'associational clusters' to determine what goes with what, what versus what, and what becomes what through which symbols of transformation" (NP). Like Smith and Eisenberg's root metaphor analysis, a cluster-agon analysis involves identifying key terms, such as "family" or "show business," that is accompanied by other terms. As Berthold (1976) explained: "No apparent limitation exists on the number of ways in which terms may be combined. The critic, in general, must examine each context for ways in which the key term is supported or accompanied by another term" (p. 303). More importantly, as Cheney (1991) argued: "[Burke] is saying that *associations between terms reveal much about associations between people*" (p. 16,

emphasis in original), tying it directly with the process of identification. Hence, this method enables scholars to identify communication as a potentially *strategic* activity, as Conrad (1985) discussed.

Methodological approach¹

Some scholars have argued that *all* language is metaphor, and, at the very least, *most* of the language we use is metaphoric (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This presents a problem, though, in that there must be a way to sort through the very large set of metaphorical systems inherent in specific discourses. Cluster-agon analysis, as a system to identify key terms (in this case metaphors), enables the critic to sort through the vast sea of metaphors to determine which ones are dominant, and drive a particular ideological structure in a particular culture. The goal, then, with this method is not to point out *every single* metaphor present in a text, but to identify which metaphors are used frequently, and also which are the most intense, which helps the critic determine a rhetor's motive and perspective. Foss (2009) explains the process of selecting key terms this way:

A term that is used over and over again by a rhetor is likely to be a key term in that person's thought and rhetoric, so if one term frequently appears in the artifact, the term probably should be selected as one of the rhetor's key terms. A second criterion to use in selecting the rhetor's key terms is intensity. A term may not appear very often in a rhetor's work, but it may be critical because it is central to the arguments being made, represents an ultimate commitment, or conveys great depth of feeling. (p. 66)

Cluster-agon analysis involves four steps: (1) Identifying the important or key terms (in this case metaphors) and ranking them according to frequency of appearance and the intensity or power of the term through a close reading of the text (Berthold, 1976; Burke, 1941; Rueckert, 1963). (2) Identifying terms that appear in the same context as the key term(s). (3) Identifying clusters, or, “the verbal combinations and equations in which the speaker tends to associate a key term with other terms” (Berthold, 1976). And finally: (4) Identifying agons, or terms in opposition to the key term that provide symbolic conflict. The agon analysis, Foss (2009) explains, involves looking for terms that oppose or contradict other terms in the discourse. “Such a pattern may suggest a conflict or tension in the rhetor’s worldview or may make explicit the allies and enemies or god and devil terms in the rhetor’s world” (p. 68). The agon analysis would suggest areas where transformation may take place as a result of conflict or confusion, as terms begin to oppose one another. In other words, the agon analysis would present opportunities for perspective by incongruity, where “a word belongs by custom to a certain category – and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category” (Burke, 1937, p. 308). Opposing metaphors, then, can disrupt patterns of discourse and help us see things in a different way.

An example of this cluster analysis process is an article by Elliott (2009) on Enron’s 60-page *Code of Ethics*. Although she did not conduct an agon analysis, she did identify clusters of association, and determined that ethics in the minds of Enron leaders equated to legal rather than moral issues. The terms that clustered around the key term *ethics* were legal terms such as *regulations*, *policies*, *standards*, *violations*, and *obligations* among others. In

addition, she found that Enron framed employees as potential liabilities, as the key term *employee* was clustered with terms related to criminal conduct such as *violate*, *illegal behavior*, *not authorized*, *infringe*, and *failure to comply*. Employees, then, were also placed in the legal realm along with ethics. In short, the cluster analysis of Enron's *Code of Ethics* revealed a *perspective* on ethics by company leaders that the only ethical obligations necessary involved not breaking the law. Other moral and/or ethical values did not come into play. For employees, strict adherence to rules and regulations as outlined in the ethical codes were their only obligation. The analysis also "offers some insight into how one organization used *new meanings* to persuade its members to accept a prescribed definition of *ethics* over their own preexisting definitions" (Elliott, 2009, p. 91, emphasis in original).

In this chapter I apply cluster-agon analysis to identify the dominant metaphor structures used in e-mails in the Enron database. Identifying the metaphors will help determine what motivated employees at Enron by looking at the ideological meanings behind the metaphors used. I then use the metaphors identified in the cluster-agon analysis and examined them in terms of Burke's pentad (1945), which further enables an analysis of motives, but also enables the critic to examine any changes in motives over time as metaphors change. The Pentad involves the use of five terms—act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose—which help the critic make sense of how a rhetor views the world. In this sense, humans are interpreting the world as a social drama in which these five terms are ever-present:

In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the

act (names what took place, in thought or deed), and another that names the *scene* (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (*agent*) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (*agency*), and the *purpose*. (Burke, p. xvii, emphasis in original)

Burke further explained that one or two terms may supersede the others to become dominant in the argument (Burke, pp. xxi–xxiv). These terms will indicate the rhetor’s *perspective* on an issue, event, person, or organization, just as metaphor does. Arguments dominated by *scene*, for example, reflect a materialist perspective that reduces action to motion (Burke, p. 131). People are constrained or dominated by the scene and lack free will. Scene, according to Burke, can be used as a “blanket term for the concept of background or setting *in general*, a name for any situation in which acts or agents are placed” (p. xviii, emphasis in original). As several scholars have illustrated, a scenic orientation is often used as a way to absolve certain actors of their actions (Ling, 1970; Birdsell, 1987; Boor Tonn, Endress, and Diamond, 1993). In contrast, arguments featuring “agent” as the dominant term reflect an idealist perspective in which the actor or actors have free will and reality is constructed by humankind (Burke, 1945, p. 171). An “agent,” Burke says, “embraces not only all words general or specific for person, individual, hero, villain, but also words for the motivational properties of agents such as ‘drives,’ ‘instincts,’ or ‘states of mind’” (Burke, 1945, p. 20). An argument featuring agent places responsibility for the act squarely on the actor. The analysis of the metaphors used at Enron will illuminate what kind of perspective the employees there took, and the ramifications of those perspectives.

The Enron e-mail corpus²

The Enron database, which the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission released in May 2002 as part of the federal court proceedings against the company, at one point contained 517,431 e-mails sent and received by 151 employees from 1997 to 2004. The e-mails originate from over 4,700 e-mail folders maintained by employees throughout Enron (Diesner, Frantz & Carley, 2006). Some messages were deleted in response to requests from affected employees. Researchers from the University of Massachusetts subsequently enhanced the dataset by applying an algorithm to sort through the database. This team discovered that the corpus actually contains 250,484 unique e-mails from 149 individuals. Researchers at the University of California – Berkeley then developed a GUI and software for the database that enables powerful search capabilities to retrieve data.

To date, only a few communication scholars have engaged in studying e-mails in the database. Lyon (2008), for example, examined company documents and e-mails from the database through the lens of Bordieu's notion of cultural and social capital. He concluded that "the perceived value of executives' practices was the result of Enron's context and executives' communicative efforts to position their own contributions as the most important" (p. 371). Executives, in other words, communicated a perceived social value in their "new economy" discourse that was perceived as legitimate, when the opposite was true. Keyton and Turnage (2009) conducted a thematic analysis of the e-mails to examine how upward communication from employees to Enron executives helped perpetuate and sustain the company's unethical culture. The study concluded that: "As day-to-day communication

artifacts in this company, the e-mails examined illustrate how an organizational culture can perpetuate and sustain unethical and even illegal practices” (p. 18). And Garner, Leahy, Rubenstein and Templeton (2009) used e-mails in the database to analyze levels of dissent among employees via that particular medium. The study found that over time networks began to form in which employees expressed dissent toward management and company policies. However, the findings also indicated that employees did not express dissent to many people, which suggests that employees were well aware of the company’s unwritten rule regarding dissent, and therefore did not feel that there were many options for expressing dissent.

Scholars in the fields of computation and mathematics have also published research using the database that provides some insight into the use of language in the e-mails. Keila and Skillicorn (2005) were able to identify a number of specific words they dubbed “*Enron speak*,” or “the normal patterns of utterance within the organization” (p. 187). And Diesner, Frantz, and Carley’s (2005) research on the corpus demonstrates that e-mail exchanges peaked during the August 2001 (the same month Jeff Skilling resigned) period of the company’s crisis, and that the number of people involved in these exchanges also increased. They concluded that the patterns suggested that subcultures had formed and that “previously disconnected people began to engage in mutual communication, thus strengthening the cohesion of the system” (p. 214). Keila and Skillicorn, and Diesner, Frantz and Carley were not, however, interested in the actual words used as much as they were in discovering how computer programming can be used to sort through the monstrous database.

In fact, they did not reveal any of the words or patterns in their article – just the methods used to find the patterns.

Overall, it is clear from the studies mentioned above that communication was crucial in perpetuating the cult-like culture at Enron, and that e-mail helped distribute specific language structures to that end. It is also clear that language use at Enron was organization specific and that toward the end of the company's life, communication activity began to change. A goal of this project is to help illuminate the specific language use and the changes in language to demonstrate the potential transformative nature of certain discourses in that culture, but also to examine the impact the specific technology of e-mail had on the process. With the following analysis, we can begin to address the first overarching question: *“How did metaphor help create, maintain, and provide opportunities for potential change in dominant discourses at Enron?”*

Cluster analysis of Enron e-mail messages

As the first step in the cluster-agon analysis, I determined the texts to be examined by pulling all messages from employees to Ken Lay over two time periods. Time period 1 included e-mails sent to Lay before and during Jeff Skilling's reign (from Jan. 1, 1997 to August 14, 2001). Time period 2 included e-mails to Lay after Skilling's departure (from August 15, 2001 to Dec. 31, 2004). Written reports about the company consistently state that there was a marked change in the company's culture during Skilling's reign as COO and CEO, and that after Skilling's departure, employees began to realize something was wrong (Keyton & Turnage, 2009). The search criteria for pulling the e-mails for analysis is as

follows: I pulled e-mails to Ken Lay from Enron employees only. E-mails from outside the company were sorted out of the sample. Also sorted out were any e-mails that did not contain text in the body of the e-mail and e-mails that contained only news articles or daily numerical reports. That left 587 total e-mails for time period 1 and 601 e-mails for time period 2. From these roughly 1,200 e-mails³, a random sampling (the database will randomly sample the requested number of e-mails) yielded 456 total e-mails which served as the texts for analysis – 228 e-mails for each time period. The texts were then transferred to the Atlas.ti qualitative analysis program for coding.

The rationale for looking at the language use in e-mails from employees specifically to Ken Lay is that they will provide a sense of how employees identified with the company, or disidentified from it. Identification with the leader is indicative of identification with the organization as a whole (Tourish & Vatcha, 2005). And, as Collinson (2005) pointed out, the same holds true for disidentification:

...many studies suggest that follower dissent does frequently focus directly on the leaders of organizations and particularly on the change programmes they seek to instigate. This is especially the case when followers perceive leaders to be 'out of touch' with organizational realities and when they detect discrepancies between leaders' policies, discourses or practices. (p. 1430)

At Enron, Collinson's observation rang true as employees became more and more disgruntled when they began to realize that management was not following the highly touted RICE values as representative of how they were to behave in the organization (Keyton &

Turnage, 2009). In terms of how this occurs through language, Collinson (2005) discussed several “subtle, routine subversions” that can occur in organizations such as the use of irony and satire in organizational discourse, and, of course, metaphor.

Using the cluster-agon method described above, I coded the e-mails for key metaphors based on frequency of appearance and the intensity or power of the metaphors between the two time periods. Overall, the metaphors that clustered within the time periods were considered, as well as any agonistic metaphors between time periods.

Results of the analysis: From machines to humans

The biggest difference between the two time periods is a dramatic shift from the frequent use of mechanistic or business process metaphors depicting an objectified organization concerned solely with profits in time period 1, to one that in time period 2 became more concerned with ethical values and the emotional, bodily experiences of human beings. In other words, the overarching metaphorical structures between the two periods moved from one full of unemotional, dehumanizing discourses to discourses of humanity in a highly emotional sense. In addition, there were more personal⁴ e-mails to Ken Lay in time period 2 than in time period 1, and the metaphors in time period 2 were much more intense in terms of emotional displays. Specifically, dominant metaphors found in time period 1 were mechanistic metaphors related to business process, metaphors of monetary value, and metaphors of sports/team from an offensive point of view. By contrast, dominant metaphors from time period 2 were metaphors of monetary value, metaphors of the human body, religious metaphors, metaphors of team/sports and of war from a *defensive* point of view.

The chart below shows the dominant metaphor structures that were identified for both time periods by frequency of occurrence.

Table 3.1. Dominant metaphors by frequency

Metaphor structure	Time period 1	Time period 2
Monetary value	83	87
Mechanistic/business process	70	28
Team/sports	33	28
War/military	9	27
Ethical values	7	18
Human Body	9	50
Religion	3	26

Dominant metaphors in time period 1

Metaphors of business process/mechanistic metaphors

The most revealing of these metaphorical structures for time period 1 is the highly mechanistic language dealing almost exclusively with business process issues. According to Lindsay, Downs, and Lunn (2003) metaphors related to business process usually focus more on mechanistic operations while ignoring the involvement of humans. Business process language is mainly concerned with “techniques of costs, profitability and competitive advantage, failing to address the complexity and non-linear nature of much of the work carried out in organizations” (Lindsay, Downs, & Lunn, 2003, p. 1017). The e-mail messages

in this time period were almost entirely business related, with very few personal or direct e-mails to Ken Lay. The mechanistic language in these messages is clustered mainly with terms of functionality and productivity. I refer to the overarching root metaphor for these as “Enron is a well-oiled machine.” Some examples of these messages from time period 1 are:

- “Most *cross-calibration* will be at the *business unit level*, since this is where the best interaction and *information gathering* occurs. Steps to ensure consistency across the *business units* are outlined in the memo.”
- “Over the last two years, UTC attempted various *energy procurement strategies*, *failing to execute any.*”
- “To the extent there are unique aspects of these policies as they apply to your *business unit*, please follow up with a further communication to your employees. We will send you a list of frequently asked questions that deal *with systems issues.*”
- “I need *your input* ASAP to compile the lists.”
- “As we discussed at the policy committee offsite, *I am assembling* the goals and objectives for the Board.”
- “I’ll look forward to *your input.*”
- “The schedule reflects *a more procedural answer.*”

As these examples illustrate, everyday work at Enron is talked about metaphorically *in terms of* mechanistic business processes, or in terms of “Enron is a well-oiled machine.”

Departments are referred to as “units,” people need “input” rather than answers or advice,

goals and objectives are “assembled” as if they were products, and operations between departments are “cross-calibrated” rather than coordinated. All of these terms are associated with machines. And so Enron, as an organization, is being discussed *in terms of* a machine. The metaphors suggest rationality and productivity as being the most important motivators for employees. Getting down to business and staying on course are the order of the day during this time period. In other messages using these metaphors, employees are repeatedly referred to as “performers” who rate at the top or bottom of a scale rather than as people. Leadership, as well, in one example below, must be defined in terms of “business objectives,” as if it were an object that could be manipulated. The root metaphors here are “employee as object” and leadership as object”:

- “On May 10, 2001, a memo was sent out regarding “*Peer Group Mapping.*” This *mapping* is intended to *illustrate from a functional view point* where each activity was placed at Year End 2000 VP PRC.”
- “Enron was very prepared on the commercial and the legal front and our team, as expected, *carried the load* for this case even though we were not the primary defendants.”
- “We’ve now completed the operating unit Mid-Year PRC meetings, and each group did an excellent job hitting or coming very close to the *preferred distributions*. As you know, we have planned the final meeting for next Wednesday July 18, to *review the operating unit distributions*, and to *discuss the top (1) and bottom (5) category performers.*”

- “Those interns who have had a good experience and accept our offer will be *the lowest risk hires* we make - from any source. We will have effectively interviewed and watched them work for 2-3 months. They also have the potential *to be the most effective* advocates and talent scouts we have, when they return to campus.”
- “The HR organization has been working to *develop meaningful reporting of trends in our employee population*. A few highlights from this report: *The employee base continues to grow* (though on a significantly slower pace than 2000). *Terminations* (voluntary and involuntary) are up dramatically this year. Our ‘*contribution loss*’ (a statistic which uses terminations weighted by the performance ratings of those leaving) has gone up, indicating that we are losing more high performers than in previous periods.
- “As part of the Culture Committee discussions, ‘*Leadership*’ has been identified as an area of concern at Enron. There are of course many definitions of leadership and, as such, *we would like to define leadership as it applies to Enron's culture and business objectives*. As a result, we think it is important to meet with each of you to discuss your views of how ‘leadership at Enron’ should be defined.”

These messages discuss employees and leadership in terms of objects. Leadership, in the last message, is discussed as if it were an object that can be readily “defined” and “identified” in terms of Enron’s “business objectives.” Employees are “performers” who either add value or do not in terms of ratings, as indicated in “the lowest risk hires,” “We are losing more high performers,” and “to discuss the top (1) and bottom (5) category performers.” If they do not

perform up to standards, they are “terminated” as one might toss out an old computer that no longer performs up to par. The terminations are, in turn, referred to as “contribution loss” rather than firings. In another e-mail, Enron employees “carried the load” in a court proceeding as perhaps a truck might. The “peer group mapping” and “mapping” references are referring to the rating of employees in the performance review process. Companies often “map” operations to determine how to allocate resources in production. In this case, employees are being referred to as parts in the operation that are allocated according to their performance, as a machine might also be allocated. Instead of referring to this process as employees rating each other, it is called “peer group mapping” and whether an employee is doing a good job or not is talked about in terms of “a functional viewpoint” as a machine might function. These metaphors, then, are another example of the root metaphor “employees as objects.”

Metaphors of monetary value

As Lindsay, Downs, and Lunn (2003) pointed out in reference to business process metaphors, not only are they associated with mechanistic metaphors, but also are often associated with costs and profits. This leads to another frequent set of metaphors in this time period – those of monetary value, which is not surprising given the company’s obsession with profits. These metaphors are clustered with terms of progress, personal wealth, personal sacrifice and hard work. The language in these e-mails is also oriented toward the future. These messages fall under the “Hard work is money” root metaphor structure. Some examples are:

- “Ken: It is my desire to retire from Enron at the end of March, 2001. Thanks to you my *financial position far exceeds* what I had ever thought would be the case.”
- “Without your guidance and direction and the many employee based programs you have initiated, *I would not be where I am financially today. I am looking forward to retirement* without concern for me or *my family’s future.*”
- “Here in my group, and all over Enron, I see people *working hard while some even go above and beyond.* I am in my mid-thirties and will speak for so many in saying *THANK YOU for your hard work, great planning and sacrifice made in the early years* long before we came here *to enjoy all the extra benefits provided.* My family and I, along with so many others, *appreciate the rewards you provide for hard work.*”
- “Hello, Mr. Lay, I thoroughly enjoyed the awards luncheon today, and I understand this was *your treat to us for having done such a good job.*”

These e-mails are unique in their personal nature compared with the other messages in this time period, but they provide an important insight into employee motivation – work hard and reap the rewards as indicated in phrases such as “great planning and sacrifice in the early years...enjoy all the extra benefits provided,” “appreciate the rewards you provide for hard work,” “I would not be where I am financially today,” “I am looking forward to retirement without concern for my family’s future,” and “your treat to us for having done such a good job.” These phrases are indicative of the “Hard work is money” root metaphor since they all

discuss work *in terms of* rewards and monetary gain. In the case of the first two, they are referring more to Ken Lay's hard work, whereas the last two refer to the hard work of employees. The rest of the metaphors in this category are much less personal, but nevertheless refer to different things in terms of monetary value. In the messages shown below, for example, things like input, opportunity, and speeches are talked about in terms of monetary value, as indicated in "valuable input," "making every opportunity count," and "direct implications on our profit centers" in the messages below:

- "I've received *valuable input* from numerous members of Enron's management team and this is the result."
- "I need as many sponsors as possible to fund scholarships and as this is our primary fund-raiser, I need to *make every opportunity count*."
- "Acquiring this asset gives us the opportunity to build copper and copper concentrate positions and more *effectively managing our positions in the market place*. We would finance this off balance sheet."
- "Our Europe government affairs group felt that it would be best if you spoke on energy liberalization and globalization with gas and electricity rather than one of the other topics since it has *more direct implications for our profit centers*."

The last set of messages illustrating metaphors of monetary value specifically discuss *time* in terms of monetary value, that is, the "time is money" root metaphor. Examples of those messages are below:

- “I thank you very much *for taking time out of your busy schedule* to review this. I look forward to hearing from you.”
- “I can tell you without hesitation, that since you took over our company in the late 80’s, it has been *the most challenging and exciting time that I have spent in my work life.*”
- “We would like to *progress these discussions in a timely manner.*”
- “Given the *short timeframe* under which we are working, I wanted to get it on your calendar *sooner rather than later.*”
- “Come to my retirement party on June 4, at 2:00 p.m. in the Cottonwood Room at the Hyatt Regency *if your calendar allows.*”

These messages talk about time in terms of its value, as in “the most challenging time that I have *spent* in my work life” as if time can be spent like money. Other messages are focused directly on the value of Ken Lay’s time, as in “if your calendar allows,” and “thank you very much for taking the time out of your busy schedule.” The rest indicate a sense of urgency in that time is valuable in terms of getting business done, as illustrated in “short timeframe,” “progress these discussions in a timely manner,” and “sooner rather than later.” In general, the messages depict employees motivated by profit but also motivated by fast paced business, a symbol of “The New Economy” discussed in Chapter 2.

Metaphors of sports/team

The fast-paced nature of Enron's culture is also exemplified in the last set of frequently used metaphors in time period 1 – those of sports/team. The company in these messages is referred to as a team with the employees as members of that team. These metaphors are clustered with terms of competition and offense, rather than defense. The metaphors depict Enron and its employees as fast (in terms of the sport of racing), and driven to success and progress – again demonstrating the fast-paced environment within the company. The root metaphor here is “Employees as members of a sports team.” Examples of those e-mails are below:

- “I am still in great health, have *plenty of competitive drive and have no desire to reduce my natural speed.*”
- “I am proud to be *a part of this team and look forward to many years of prosperity and success.*”
- “Thank you again for allowing me to *be a part of such a GREAT team.*”
- Based on your recommendation, we will make offers at the end of the summer to those interns *who perform, and who you endorse as a potential future member of your team.*

These first few examples refer to sports/team specifically in terms of employee membership of a team and/or participation in the sport as in “I am proud to be a part of this team,” and “Thank you for allowing me to be a part of such a GREAT team.” In the last message,

employees who “perform” (like good athletes) have the opportunity to be a “future member” of a team. In the first message, the employee refers to himself as an object of sports – such as a race horse or car that has speed and agility, when he says he has “plenty of competitive drive” and “no desire to reduce my natural speed.” The messages are clustered with terms of competition and prosperity and are oriented towards the future. The remaining messages in this category refer more to the company as a whole, or specific divisions in the company, as a team, rather than individual employees. The root metaphor here is “Enron is a sports team” and “Company division as a team.”

- “We’d like to sincerely thank you for heading our way and *helping us kick off* the official opening of Enron's businesses in Japan.”
- “Enron presented the major rebuttal to the CPIL assertions because the others were not prepared and then *later “coached”* the others to help them prepare appropriately.”
- “Attached is a note that has been sent to our managers regarding off-site and *team-building* meetings.”
- “TVA seems *excited about the prospect of teaming* with Enron to demonstrate this new NOx reduction technology.”
- “I would like to *put together a team to drive MEC’s strategy*, including a consolidation in Houston. We would trade this commitment for warrants in the company and a right to participate in future fundings. Effectively, *our team could*

help drive the strategy for the company and due diligence a possible investment at the same time.”

- “Our *legal team’s opinion is very optimistic based on the way the proceeding progressed* and also on the actions of the chief judge during the concluding arguments of the case today in India.”

These last messages are also clustered with terms related to strategy, competition, progression, and are oriented towards the future, as demonstrated in “our team could help drive the strategy,” “legal team’s opinion is very optimistic,” and “balancing competing interests.” In the other messages, it is necessary to “put together” a team to drive strategy or “to coach” another company’s employees in a legal proceeding. Enron in all of these messages is again depicted as a fast-paced company that is on top of its game in terms of offense, not having to worry about defensive measures.

In many ways, the dominant metaphors discussed here for time period 1 are demonstrative of the dominant culture outlined in Chapter 2, particularly the monetary metaphors of personal wealth and progress and the sports/team metaphors depicting a winning operation that only needs to worry about its offensive game plan. However, the unemotional “it’s all business” mechanistic metaphors are somewhat ironic given that these metaphors are largely identified with bureaucratic, non-innovative, tightly coupled organizations – exactly what Enron leaders were trying to get away from as a “new economy” company. But highly mechanistic organizations are also characterized by management’s tight control over employees (Morgan, 1997), as was the case at Enron.

Perhaps the language used in the e-mails in time period 1 was more indicative of this tight level of control. It also makes sense given the fact that, as Sherron Watkins stated in my interview with her, e-mail was used almost exclusively for business related matters, partly because employees knew management could monitor their e-mail messages. The company's employee handbook contained a statement notifying employees of this possibility, but a statement also popped up whenever employees logged in to a computer, she said. It would therefore have been highly unusual for people to express much outward emotion via that medium. In addition, many employees typically would not have e-mailed Lay at all, Watkins said, because his e-mails were more than likely filtered by secretaries. "I just wouldn't send something to Ken Lay partly because I would think, 'he's not going to see it,' and if you aren't one of his direct reports, you just didn't e-mail him," she said.

Dominant metaphors from time period 2

Metaphors of monetary value

The fact that people mainly used e-mail for the expression of business-related, "unemotional" matters, and that they would not usually e-mail Lay, makes the messages in time period 2 all that much more remarkable. There are a lot more personal e-mails to Lay in these messages that also display a great deal of emotion compared to those in time period 1. So, while there were a number of messages in this time period in which the "Enron is a well-oiled machine" metaphor was prevalent, there were more messages containing metaphors that were agonistic with the machine/business process metaphors. In my interview with her, Watkins said she was "floored" by some of the highly emotional, non-business related

messages in this time period. Metaphors from this time period were much more personal and intense in terms of the display of emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, love, hate, etc. And although in time period 2 metaphors of monetary value were frequently used as they were in time period 1, in this period they were clustered with terms of loss, destruction, personal pain, and with orientational metaphors of “down” and “below.” These messages are also more oriented towards the past than the future. There is still an obsession with money, in other words, but more from the standpoint of the loss of money. The root metaphor, then, in these messages is “Money as a source of loss and pain,” as indicated in these excerpts:

- “Please don’t be *heartbroken about the value of anyone’s portfolio* or stand in line to *beat yourself up about it* (again).”
- “*So we’re down a few \$ billion* - this is so piddling! God has “umpty-zillion” in money + much more important stuff to *make up this perceived loss.*”
- “*In all my wildest dreams* (or nightmares), I would have never envisioned the stock *getting low enough to threaten* a grant price of \$21.563, but here we are.”
- “Ken, Enron Corp was a great empire *that found itself vulnerable -- the same as the World Trade Center* -- the same as our country’s security. *The cost of exposure* has been high but *a cheap price to pay* in the long run for our future generations.”
- “As a dedicated and confident employee, *I hung in there early in the year* and listened to all indications around me that the stock would go to 100. Later in the year, *as the stock moved downward*, I heard indications that we were going to bounce back

strong. I was on board. I was excited. I trusted that this was the case. In fact, *I look back on this past year* and, based on what I knew at the time, I would probably do the same thing over again.”

The messages here are agonistic with the messages of monetary value in time period 1, because they discuss the monetary value of the company as a whole in terms of destruction, pain and loss, down and below, as indicated in the phrases, “beat yourself up about it,” “get low enough to threaten,” “make up for this perceived loss,” and “as the stock moved downward.” The employees in these e-mails are no longer looking forward to a bright financial future as they did in time period 1. They are instead lamenting about the past and the stock’s downward spiral, as indicated in “I look back on this past year,” and “I hung in there early in the year and listened to all indications around me that the stock would go to 100.” One of the messages discusses the situation in terms of dreams and nightmares, as if it is difficult to accept the situation as actual reality. The reference to the World Trade Center, “cost of exposure” and “a cheap price to pay,” even goes so far as to compare the company’s impending destruction to that of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. This is interesting in that the attack on 9/11 was a direct attack on capitalism and America’s obsession with money. Enron was a bastion of capitalist ideology, and the employee here seems to be equating attacks on the company with attacks on capitalism.

The other messages falling under the “money as a source of loss and pain,” root metaphor in this time period are also discussed in terms of loss, but they point directly to employees’ personal loss, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

- “On a personal level, *I have invested many years in this company.*”
- “You asked one thing of the people that work for you. To make Enron the worlds leading energy company. *We gave that to you and what did we get in return?*”
- “One other feeling you will never realize is After 21 years *I was standing at the end of the rainbow just to watch my pot of gold snatched away from me* by the very people I trusted the most.”
- “You demonstrated that *trust was misplaced and worth nothing.*”

The ongoing obsession with money is evident in these e-mails, except now employees are more concerned with loss of both time and money as demonstrated in the phrases, “my pot of gold snatched away from me,” and “we gave that to you and what did we get in return?” The phrase, “I have invested many years in this company,” also falls under the “time is money” root metaphor in that the employee laments at how much time he/she has *invested*, as if it were money. Also, as indicated in the last message above about “trust was misplaced and worth nothing,” we begin to see the metaphors turn from monetary value to ethical values. In this sense, trust is discussed in terms of worth or value.

Metaphors of ethical value

Metaphors of ethical value, in fact, were also frequently used during this time period. It is clear in these e-mails that employees were beginning to question *what* is more valuable – money or the ethical treatment of people. These messages are agonistic with the mechanistic/business process metaphors from time period 1 because they discuss employees

more in terms of *human* value, rather than as parts in a machine working for monetary value. These messages are also fraught with emotion and oriented more towards the past. Some of these messages continue the “Money as a source of loss and pain” root metaphor structure, but others also include the root metaphor “Ethics is a possession” in which ethics are discussed in terms of what someone possesses, does not possess, or needs to go out and get.

Below are examples:

- “The ‘portfolio problem’ *is not loss of value*, rather *lack of values*--people need to get *some personal values that are worth a damn!*”
- “I noticed how little confidence the top executives at Enron had in this company when they sold off hundreds of millions of dollars in stock between November and February. Many of us see that as the beginning of *the moral bankruptcy* at the top of Enron.”
- However, I believe ultimately justice will come to fruition. *Reputations have been destroyed which in my opinion is more important to any amount of money or financial gain. Without integrity a person has nothing!*”
- “I was disappointed to get a copy of a PR piece in my home mail yesterday with interviews and profiles of “Three Men.” Reading their values and accomplishments *led me to believe these guys are motivated not by family and ethics but rather by material possession*. This is the intellect of failure. If your driven simply to own a boat and your measure of success was recognized when you bought a big house, there

is a very high probability that you will *breech the line of ethical (and perhaps legal) financial actions in order to have more.*”

- “For the first time in 22 years of service for Enron I'm ashamed to admit that I work for Enron! I have lost all respect for Enron Senior Management and agree with the Financial Analyst when they say that Enron Senior Management cannot be trusted. *Ethics and Morals are either something everyone else needs to have except Senior Management or somewhere along the way Senior Management started believing the end justifies the means.*”

The root metaphor of “Money is a source of loss and pain” is indicated in the phrases “breech the line of ethical (and perhaps legal) financial actions in order to have more,” and “motivated not by family and ethics but by material possession.” These phrases indicate that money is the source of a loss of family and ethical values. Employees here are more concerned with Enron’s ethical reputation and that of its leaders than its reputation as a Wall Street powerhouse. The “Ethics as a possession” root metaphor is evident in the phrases “people *need to get some values* that are *worth a damn!*,” “Reputations have been destroyed,” “without integrity a person has nothing,” “morals are either something everyone else needs *to have* except senior management.” The phrases “moral bankruptcy,” and also “values that are *worth a damn,*” are ironic given that they fall under an “Ethics as money” root metaphor, since both refer to morals and values in terms of money. The implication here is that while employees now appear to be directly concerned with ethics, they are discussing morals and ethical values *in terms* of monetary value. The company will literally go bankrupt financially,

but this employee is comparing ethical values with bankruptcy. Two other messages worth mentioning in this category indirectly refer to ethical behavior, but more in terms of the value of humans. These also ironically split between ethical values and monetary value, for a root metaphor of “Humans as valuable assets:”

- “As I said the other day, there may be a relatively small number of individuals who are commercially successful, well paid, regularly promoted who have *little or no respect for their coworkers or other human beings in general. When others see them rewarded, it matters not at all what we say about our values.*”
- “Indeed I have reminded myself daily over the last few weeks that Enrons success was built more *on its intangible assets rather than its tangible assets.* Enron’s greatness *was built by its people* because we all have dreams and ambitions to be a part of something great.”

In referring to human beings *as* human beings with discussions of financial rewards and ethical values, and then referring to employees as “intangible assets” and the company’s greatness as “built by its people,” these messages again mix metaphors of monetary values in with those of ethical and human values. These messages indicate an agonistic turn in the metaphors, and exemplify a struggle for the employees over what is and is not important in the company. It is clear, though, that there is an effort here to re-align “value” from monetary to human/ethical.

Metaphors of the human body

The above metaphors of ethical value, coupled with a sense of human loss and pain as a result of an obsession with money, are even more evident in the very large number of e-mails from this time period that contained metaphors related to the human body – particularly the heart. These metaphors are clustered with terms of anger, pain, destruction, disease, death and love. Employees here are also referred to more as people, rather than objects or assets. Again, these messages are more oriented towards the past. The root metaphor for these messages is “Enron’s failure is a physical assault on employees.” Excerpts are below:

- “*It has been painful for me, as I know it has been for you and all others with a stake in this company. I want to get us back to our heyday and am willing to commit to that end.*”
- “*Why have you allowed this to happen....we have lost everything despite working our butts off. You have had the most talented people in the business as you keep reminding us, so why?*”
- “*I have a suggestion. I feel strongly that you should promptly have the “values” banners removed from the Enron building lobby... It is a slap in the face of every employee, laid off or still here, who walks into that lobby and sees them hanging there.*”
- “*Mr. Lay, Have you ever been sucker punched? In case you haven’t let me describe it to you. First you are stunned and shocked because you didn't see it coming. Then you*

realize that you can't breath because the wind has been knocked out of you. Then you get mad when it sinks in that something like this could have happened to you. Well Ken! The employee's of Enron know what it is like because it just happened to us.”

- “When you make statements like you did in yesterday's Investor conference call it erodes EGA’s ability to sell those assets (who wants to buy a very bad investment?) *and chokes the spirit of the employees* who have remained loyal to Enron and continue to support the needs of EGA.”
- “I know this doesn’t seem like a big change but *I can tell you my numb arms and wrists* have changed *hundreds of people* today.”

The first several messages discussed the company’s financial woes in terms of personal violence and pain. “It has been painful for me,” “It is a slap in the face of every employee,” “chokes the spirit of the employees,” “numb arms and wrists have changed hundreds of people,” “have you ever been sucker punched?” and “we lost everything despite working our butts off” illustrate how employees are talking about the company’s situation in terms of physical pain. These messages further exemplify the move from an objectified organization with inhuman goals and values in time period 1 to an organization full of humans who have been negatively affected on the most emotional and physical levels.

Perhaps the most dramatic or intense of these messages depicting employees’ personal emotional and physical pain were those that directly discussed emotion and pain in terms of the human heart. The first root metaphor in these messages is “Enron members’ actions and efforts as heart.” In addition, instead of the root metaphor “Enron’s failure as

physical assault on employees,” we now see a more specific root metaphor in “Enron’s failure as an assault on the heart.” These are demonstrated in the excerpts below:

- “I’ve seen a lot of change over the past 9 years. Some great, some good and some not so good. But all in all, *I would do it all over again in a heartbeat*, because I still trust in the core of this company and decisions our management have made.”
- “I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for everything you’re trying to do for us during this horrible situation. It would have been easy to stay at home (many people would have) and watch events unfold *but you had the guts and the heart* to come back and take this thing head on. Being a 21+ year Enron/NNG employee, this *situation has been heartbreaking... I know you’re there too. Many employees are sitting around in a daze over everything we’ve lost; I’ve lost everything too...*”
- “I hope it’s clear to you that *I love this place. I have poured my heart and soul* into it. It is the finest organization I *have ever been* part of. Like everyone, *I have had some time to reflect lately*. I have recommitted myself to this place and to your leadership. Part of that recommitment will be my concerted effort to make things even better.”
- “The events of the last few months and weeks *must be weighing heavily on your heart. Greed whispers to all of us*, and I am thankful for being able to see and experience its *devastating effects on individuals, families and organizations*.”

- “*My heart goes out to you* as I can’t begin to imagine the *sense of loss* you must be feeling. I am however, aware of *our (your employees) loss*, as I’m sure we will never again experience someone of your character and magnitude.”

By referring to a vital organ that sustains life – the human heart – employees’ sense of loss is even more dramatic than the previous messages talking about loss in terms of physical injury or pain. Damage to the heart can cause death rather than simply injury. Some of these messages, in fact, make it sound as if someone has died, or an immense tragedy such as a flood or natural disaster has occurred leaving death in its wake, as exemplified in: “My heart goes out to you as I can’t begin to imagine the sense of loss you have been feeling,” and “the situation has been heartbreaking,” and “Many employees are sitting around in a daze over everything we've lost; I've lost everything too...” The other messages talk about the heart more in terms of hard work and sacrifice as indicated in the “Enron members’ actions and efforts as heart,” as indicated in the phrases: “I love this place. I have poured my heart and soul into it,” “you had the guts and the heart to come back and take this thing head on” and “I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.” One other interesting root metaphor in the above messages referring to the human heart is the “Greed as human” root metaphor, which is seen in the phrase, “greed whispers to all of us.” Overall, the human body metaphors related to the heart indicate an intense emotional feeling among employees of sadness and an overwhelming sense of loss over the company’s demise.

Other messages using metaphors of the human body, though, exhibit a different kind of strong emotion – anger, specifically towards Ken Lay, as indicated in these two messages, in which the root metaphors are “Ken Lay as excrement” and “Ken Lay as a male body part”:

- “Thanks Ken You *Piece of Shit*”
- “Thanks for everything *knob head*.”

The rest of the messages discuss physical violence, anger and personal pain towards Ken Lay and management. Examples are:

- “*The tears rolled down my face* the night Channel 11 broke through with the announcement that Enron was going to merge with Dynegy. *My heart was breaking, seeing the hurt in Ken Lay’s eyes and to see our company tumbling down as if it was the New York Trade Center* this was my first thought and question how could a few cruel and selfish individuals *bring something so wonderful down after so many years of hard work?*”
- “*You load of bastards - you screwed us all and got fat on the profits of our sweat.*”

The first two messages, referring to Lay in terms of bodily waste (“piece of shit”) and his head in terms of a male body part (“knob head”), exemplify the intense anger employees began to direct towards Lay as the company’s leader. The last message referring to management in terms of physical sexual acts (“you screwed us all”) and body weight (“fat on the profits of our sweat”), also exemplifies this intense anger at the situation. The other messages express more sympathy or sadness for Lay, such as “The tears rolled down my face

the night Channel 11 broke through with the announcement that Enron was going to merge with Dynegy” and “My heart was breaking, seeing the hurt in Ken Lay’s eyes and to see our company tumbling down as if it was the New York Trade Center...” In short, these messages using metaphors of the human body continue to exemplify the strong emotions and pain employees felt – so much so that they connected it with figurative physical pain, loss and death. And they are again clustered with terms of destruction and “down” and “below.”

The final set of messages using metaphors of the human body do not discuss it in terms of individual pain and loss, but rather in terms of the organization as a whole as human, with a root metaphor of “Enron as human being,” as illustrated in these excerpts:

- “As an organization, and as part of our culture, *we lead with our chin* - always have and probably always will. *We are going to take our share of bumps and bruises.*”
- “*Most of our wounds are self - inflicted.* We can and should do a better job.”
- “This division *could be cancerous* to our new company as we attempt to rebuild Enron.”
- “We sure don’t want Enron, as a whole, *to be growing so fat* and so fast that it *will hurt our bottom line*. I’m sorry if I’m out of line, but I really do care about Enron and am very proud to be its employee.”

It is interesting in these messages that actual human beings are removed from the equation. The company itself (and in one instance a division within the company) is discussed as a human being with actual body parts (“We lead with our chin”), which can experience

physical pain (“Most of our wounds are self-inflicted,” and “we are going to take our share of bumps and bruises”), can get seriously ill (“This division could be cancerous”), and can gain weight (“to be growing so fat that it will hurt our bottom line”). This indicates that the employees viewed the organization as something that can live and die, get sick and then get well, and potentially hurt itself as humans do – a far cry from the organization depicted in time period 1 – which was thought of as a powerful, inhuman machine for business process and profit. In other words, the company’s impending collapse has functioned to “de-reify” Enron for employees and provide them with insight into the fact that the company is not a machine, but made up of real people.

Metaphors of military/war

Along with the metaphors of the body clustered with pain and loss were military/war metaphors, in which many employees discussed the company’s situation in terms of fighting and potentially losing battles. These metaphors are couched in defensive terms with many employees expressing a willingness to take physical pain in order to help save the company. These metaphors were most often clustered with terms of defense, battles and perseverance. Employees discuss themselves as soldiers, with Ken Lay as the leader of their military unit. The root metaphors here are “Employees as soldiers,” and “Ken Lay as general.” Some examples are below:

- “In the all-employee meeting, *you told the troops* that it was going to take the continued dedication and hard work from all of us to get things going in the right direction in order for us to dig out from this mess.”

- [salutation at the end of an e-mail] *Ever Loyal and willing to serve.*”
- “Dear Mr. Lay - *those of us in the trenches* really appreciate the updates and what you and others are trying to do. Thank you so much.”
- “Ken, I am a loyal Enron Employee for over 17 years and my opinion (however insignificant) *is that we stand and fight* and not take any buy out offer from anyone.”
- “I believe Enron will eventually rebound and I still believe in your vision but I also believe it will be a while before we *can recapture the confidence of the markets.*”
- “Note that both our counterparties and creditors place great weight on our consistent rating profile. Due to this, the agencies should be confident that *we will aggressively defend the ratings.*”
- “It's awful that we're getting calls *from the enemy* telling us to “Get out of their new building”. You help build this company, you have idea's don't just throw it away on one month of bad press. If you give up, they will say it's always better the old way.
WE ARE ENRON, WE HAVE CLASS, AND *WE DONT LAY DOWN AND DIE.*
WE HAVE A SOLUTION!!!!”

Phrases such as “you told the troops,” and “those of us in the trenches” exemplify the employee-as-soldier root metaphor. The signature “ever loyal and willing to serve” further exemplifies this as this employee is talking as if he is ready to serve his country and fight a war. The feeling among these employees that they were at war is illustrated in “we don’t lay down and die,” “calls from the enemy to get out of their building,” “stand by this decision to

stand and fight,” and “we will aggressively defend the ratings.” The message with the phrase “recapture the confidence of the markets” depicts the market as a territory that must be fought over and captured before it can be owned. These metaphors, which depict the company as an army ready for war to defend itself, are agonistic with the sports/team metaphors in time period 1, which depict the company as a winner concerned only with offense. There was no need to fight during that time period as the company was on top.

Metaphors of sports/team

Although metaphors of sports/team were slightly less frequent in time period 2, they are worth noting in particular because, like the war metaphors, they are also agonistic with the sports/team metaphors in time period 1. The majority of these e-mails contained the “Enron division as team” root metaphor since employees in these messages referred to their respective divisions as teams. Other messages, however, like the war metaphors, are clustered with terms of defense, rather than offense. Instead of “Enron is a winning team,” the root metaphor is “Enron is a losing team,” as indicated in these excerpts:

- “*Looking at this in football terms... this is a rebuilding year and we've got a bright future with a young team and a deep bench.*”
- “I have been completely distraught at the speed with which my coworkers *have thrown in the towel* and have essentially given up.”
- “I know that I speak for the *rest of my team when I say lets stand and fight.*”

- “*The ball is in our court.* We have to lead and be perceived as credible leaders. *We’ve got to dig deep and get down the road - together.*”

Enron as a losing team is evident in the phrase “rebuilding year,” as that is how people often characterize a losing season for a sports team. And the phrase “throw in the towel” is a boxing term for when a fighter has given up. The phrase “let’s stand and fight,” depicts Enron as a team on the defensive, while “the ball is in our court,” and “we’ve got to dig deep and get down the road,” also indicate a need for defensive measures. There was one message in this time period, however, that still uses the “Enron is a winning team” root metaphor, as indicated the phrase, “the ball is moving in the right direction” in “this quarter,” in the excerpt below:

- “*The ball is now moving in the right direction* and we are doing all we can to close some meaningful business with them *this quarter.*”

Metaphors of religion

For other employees, though, standing and fighting in war or team/sports terms did not satisfy their concerns. These employees were more willing to put their faith in a higher power and use metaphors of religion to discuss the company’s demise. These metaphors were most likely clustered with terms of redemption, sacrifice, loss, hope, and God-like praise for the leader, Ken Lay. The root metaphors here are “Ken Lay as messiah,” and “God and religion as saviors of the company.” Below are excerpts of these messages:

- “I know our current scenario wasn’t a part of your vision for Enron, but stockholder anxiety just shows that *most people are spiritual morons.* *God promises* to take care

of each and every one of us under absolutely every circumstance. People choose to ignore this; in doing so, *they reject His blessings in favor of their own worries*. So be it.”

- “Ken, *I believe in you and wish you success and redemption* through this difficult time. I wish that I could have done more.”
- “Mr. Lay, Just wanted to let you know *that we're keeping the faith*, and wish you all the best in your endeavor to pull Enron out of this current predicament.”
- “The foundation of the EBN *is on blessed ground*, the earth is old church property. I don't know if you ever considered that but I am relatively sure that it is fact. Any business within the walls on this ground is in a better position to prosper. I am not sure if the new building is on the blessed grounds. *It could be beneficial to have the new building blessed*. An old tradition for future success. For me it is the basic premise for success as we move forward.”
- “*We have so much faith in you* and we know you will pull Enron through this tumultuous time. This is meant to be a note of encouragement for a man *we all admire very much*. You've done it before. You can do it again.”
- “I know that you are working very hard on a myriad of projects right now. I can only imagine the stress and strain that you are under, but I also wanted to warn you that I think the upper management is *losing the faith* of the employees.”

- “Thank you *for restoring my faith* in Enron. I truly *appreciate the sacrifice* you are making and thank you for thinking about the employees.”
- “We could do without the Christmas party, do without our bonuses and next year at this time, when we are back on top, *it would be a sweeter glory* knowing that the employees helped turn everything around.”

In these messages, employees talk about Lay as if he is a God who can bring salvation to the faltering company, in phrases like, “we have so much faith in you,” “Thank you for restoring my faith,” “I believe in you and wish you success and redemption,” and “appreciate the sacrifice you are making.” As Gemmill and Oakley (1992) argued, “As social despair and helplessness deepen, the search for a Messiah (leader) or magical rescue (leadership) also begin to accelerate.” (p. 153). Lay in these messages, then, embodies the “CEO as secular savior” moniker that was indicative of “the new economy.” There is one message with the opposite effect, “upper management is losing the faith of employees,” which uses the religion metaphor to signal Lay’s and management’s fall from God-like status. Also indicating a rejection of Lay and management as saviors of the company, the other messages shown here discuss the company’s situation in terms of some kind of cosmic or mystical salvation, as if the company needs to be delivered from evil, illustrated by “It would be a sweeter glory,” “It would be beneficial to have the new building blessed” as if having the building blessed would save Enron. The employee in the very first message talks as if spirituality and belief in God in general will save the company, as exemplified in “stockholder anxiety just shows that most people are spiritual morons. God promises to take care of each and every one of us

under absolutely every circumstance. People choose to ignore this; in doing so, they reject His blessings in favor of their own worries.” Rejecting “His blessings,” then, means they will not attain salvation from the pain of Enron’s failure.

From god-term to devil-term: Changing scenic perspectives

In general, the metaphors from time period 2 are agonistic with the metaphors from time period 1, particularly from the standpoint of monetary value and emotional intensity. In these messages, we see a steady move towards a rejection of monetary value in terms of profits to the embrace of value in terms of ethics and human beings. The latter metaphors are much more intense and emotional than the mechanistic messages from time period 1. The differences here indicate, as Burke (1945) might argue, a change in *perspective* among the employees not only towards the company, but also towards the overarching goal of profits at all costs. We might argue that money between these two time periods moves from a god term to a devil term for employees. For Burke, a god-term is “the word to which all other positive words are subservient,” and a devil-term “sums up all that a speaker regards as bad” (Griffin, 1994, p. 311). Money as god term is evident, for example, in e-mails from time period 1 with statements such as: “my *financial position far exceeds* what I had ever thought would be the case” and “*I would not be where I am financially today. I am looking forward to retirement without concern for me or my family’s future.*” And as a devil term in these examples from time period 2: “Reputations have been destroyed which in my opinion *is more important to any amount of money or financial gain.* Without integrity a person has nothing!” and “*If your driven simply to own a boat and your measure of success was recognized when you bought a*

big house, there is a very high probability that you will breach the line of ethical (and perhaps legal) financial actions in order to have more.” In addition, as mentioned above, employees began mixing the monetary metaphors with those of ethical value as indicated in “moral bankruptcy” and in referring to people as “intangible assets.” These mixed metaphors indicate a sense of confusion over the previous emphasis on monetary value in terms of profits, to the point where many employees outright rejected that metaphor in favor of metaphors of human and ethical values. As Foss (2009) argued, “Such a pattern may suggest a conflict or tension in the rhetor’s worldview,” which makes those terms significant in this kind of analysis. The mixed metaphors in this case demonstrate employees’ grappling with the tension between monetary value and ethical value.

The move in time period 2 is particularly interesting given that money is in general typically considered a god term in western capitalist societies, as Burke argues here:

Money would be, in the technical sense, his “God term.” For a God term designates the ultimate motivation, or substance, of a Constitutional frame. And as we have previously noted how the ambiguities of substance cause extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to merge, we note that when men respond to the laws of the market and its price system as second nature, the qualities of the *scene* are thereby *internal* to the *agent*. (1945, p. 355, emphasis in original)

In this case, I would argue, the *scenic* properties of “The New Economy,” particularly the obsession with stock values and growth, led employees at Enron to internalize these discourses to the point where they perhaps lacked the capacity to think outside of them. The

scene-purpose ratio in time period 1 presents little opportunity for change since the highly mechanistic/business process metaphors clustered with metaphors of monetary value and sports/team demonstrate employees' strong identification with the company's profit-driven goals. As Burke (1945) argued, with a scenic perspective, action is reduced to motion. The mechanistic metaphors depicting the company as a machine and humans as parts in that machine indicates an identification so strong that employees acted almost as robots trained specifically to engage in business activities for the *purpose* of making more money. Burke (1945) equates purpose, in fact, with Aristotle's concept of "eudaimonia," or happiness. A purpose-centered ratio would then indicate that the rhetor is primarily motivated to pursue what makes him/her happy. In this sense, coupled with the scenic perspective of the new economy, we have the single-minded pursuit of profit. The scenario is much like what Burke (1954) referred to as "trained incapacity" or the "occupational psychosis," in which he points directly to capitalism and monetary emphasis as incapacitating our ability to think outside of those ideologies. There is also a point, Burke argues, in which the materialist perspective associated with *scene*, and the mystical perspective associated with *purpose*, become indistinguishable:

Both involve a narrowing of motivational circumference. Materialism accomplishes this by a deliberate elimination of purpose as a term...Mysticism arrives at somewhat the same result unintentionally, in making purpose absolute, and thereby in effect transforming it into a fatality. (1945, p. 291)

The indistinguishable nature of scene and purpose described in that quote becomes a perspective which leads to the trained incapacity to seek monetary rewards above all else. Hence, the messages convey an identification with an unemotional drive to succeed based on the ideological underpinnings associated with capitalism and the company's culture of greed.

The scene-purpose perspective may, in fact, help explain the highly mechanistic nature of the messages in time period 1. The scenic properties of the new economy and the desire to move at lightning speed to make more and more money became the motivating factor beyond human and ethical value. Early on, then, the dominant pentadic ratio was scene-purpose, as the "New Economy" (scene) drove the acts of those inside towards the single pursuit of profit (purpose). The discourses set up profit and capitalist ideals as good and anything apart from it as evil. This is similar to what Kendall (1993) found in her analysis of corporate discourses which situate a "dramatic setting, with the company as hero, the government as villain and public interest groups as minor players. The overriding corporate drama can be traced to the archetypal drama of pure competition" (p. 571). The "New Economy" discourse of the 1990s was very similar, as detailed in Chapter 2. The monetary metaphors and team/sports metaphors support the mechanistic metaphors in terms of the single-minded competitive drive for increasing profits. There is no room for emotion or concern for ethics or human beings as people. The scene-purpose ratio in time period 1, situated the pursuit of profit as "gospel" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2000).

Time period 2, by contrast, becomes a much different type of drama. The concern in these messages is still very much focused on the scene. The concern is still with money in

some respects, but the scene has now gone from one of prosperity and success to one of destruction and loss. Employees talk as if they had no control (or lacked the free will) to steer the company in a different direction. In so doing, they absolved themselves of any responsibility for how the company ended up in that position in the first place. Yet, as demonstrated in the numerous articles about the company, and the messages from time period 1, employees wholly bought into the unethical and greedy culture that brought the company down.

The move, however, from mechanistic discourses to more emotional discourses, coupled with the move towards ethical and human values suggests a move from a scene-purpose ratio to scene-*agent*, since the focus is no longer so much on the single-minded pursuit of profit, but now more about the affects of the scene on the agents, as the metaphors of the human body demonstrate. In addition, an argument featuring agent places responsibility for the act squarely on an actor or actors. In this case, Lay and management are being held responsible for the company's predicament. Most of the messages in time period 2 are centered on Lay and his actions and feelings, or upon the feelings and predicaments of other employees *as a result of* management's actions. In the messages containing religious metaphors, the agent is God who will save the company, or, Ken Lay himself is upheld as a messianic agent who will save the company from doom. And finally, the military/war metaphors situate the employees as agents who are willing to fight to the end with their general – Lay – to bring the company back to its previous position (or scene). The employees

in these messages are taking personal responsibility to save the company rather than giving in to the scene.

The differences in the metaphorical structures between the two time periods, as mentioned above, suggests conflict or tension in the employees' worldview. The stark difference between the metaphors suggests areas where transformation could have taken place as a result of this conflict or tension. The opposing metaphors are in some ways disrupting the previously powerful patterns of discourse that motivated the employees earlier in the company's life. As Deetz and Mumby (1985) argue, it is the alternative structuring of metaphors that open up possibilities for new realities and ideologies to emerge:

The ability of a group of metaphors to present a particular ideological structuring of organizational reality is, therefore, most seriously threatened when an alternative and noncoherent metaphoric structuring emerges, threatening to displace the dominant metaphors. It is only through the emergence of such alternatives, however, that other organizational realities can evolve. (p. 382)

The change in metaphors exhibited in the Enron e-mails, then, provided opportunity for new realities, but the alternatives arrived too late. Had the employees made use of these alternative metaphors earlier, could change have occurred that may have altered the company's destructive course? Deetz and Mumby (1985) say that the alternative metaphors must "overcome the deeply rooted patterns of thinking that the prevailing metaphors create and overcome the material arrangements in the organization such as reward systems and technology which support them" (p. 383). At Enron, the reward structures and the ideological

systems behind them were so strong that employees there most likely would not have been motivated to break through them as long as times were good. It wasn't until those rewards disappeared that the employees began to shift from metaphors of money to ethics. The question, then, becomes: Must an organization reach a debilitating crisis level before employees try to change language systems that created the crisis in the first place? Or, in terms of Burke's pentad, must the scene change so drastically before employees begin to seriously question what they uphold as their god-term and the ideological implications of that term? It appears that at Enron, the answer to these questions is yes. As long as times were good at the company, and the "gospel" of capitalism was bringing employees wealth and security, they seemed more than willing to toe the company line without questioning what they may have known to be unethical practices in management. Or, as Sherron Watkins argued: "That the single-minded pursuit of money might be self-limiting in other psychic ways was not really considered" (Swartz & Watkins, 2003, p. 464).

What does that tell us, then, about organizational identification/disidentification and the bridging of dialectical tensions discussed earlier in this project? In other words, what needs to occur in an organization before power structures are challenged through disidentification? The analysis here provided a look at language use at Enron from a micro, reductionist level. The next chapter will examine the metaphors in terms of scope and consider how the metaphors, as shared understandings of the organization and its culture, created identification strong enough to prevent employees from seeing the problems related to it, and then later *disidentified* as they begin to recognize problems. The chapter will

address the next overarching question: “*How and to what extent did metaphor help employees at Enron bridge dialectical tensions related to coordination and control?*”

¹ This project received approval from the Institutional Review Board at NC State University.

² The database that was used for this project is no longer available. The data can now be accessed at <http://www.isi.edu/~adibi/Enron/Enron.htm>.

³ The total number of e-mails in the database to Ken Lay over the two time periods was 1,600. Once the outside messages and messages containing news articles and numerical reports were removed, the number totaled 1,200 to be randomly sampled.

⁴ The e-mails were initially coded in the Atlas.ti qualitative analysis program for (1) the year they were sent; (2) whether it occurred in time period 1 or 2; (3) whether it was sent directly to Ken Lay or Lay was copied in addition to several other people; and (4) whether the e-mail was personal in nature or non-personal. The criteria for personal e-mails as follows:

- Includes any e-mails to Ken Lay with the words “I” and “me” prevalent in the text, particularly if it relates to a personal complaint or request.
- Any e-mail that expresses reflective opinions about the state of the company: i.e., “Even though Enron's stock price has come off a little I still think this is a great company and that the overall fundamentals are very sound. I hope all is going well!”

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- The e-mail expresses emotions such as pride, sadness, anger, fear, concern, gratitude, appreciation, disappointment, encouragement, admiration, etc.
 - The e-mail expresses concern for the personal well-being of oneself or the well being of others (including Lay).

Criteria for non-personal e-mails are as follows:

- The e-mail is reporting information, updating information, related to daily business matters only
- The e-mail is non-affective in content (there is little or no emotion involved)

CHAPTER 4

A WAY OF SEEING: OVERIDENTIFICATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COLLAPSE

“Many an organization has been ‘shipwrecked’ because of an unshakable commitment to an otherwise unwise course. Overidentification with a course prevents the navigator from seeing other courses, other options” (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987, p. 11).

When applied to Enron Corporation, the above quote is entirely prophetic. It could be argued that an overidentification among employees with the organization and its course is, in part, what led to the “shipwrecking” of one of the world’s largest companies. This identification came about as a result of certain discourses in the organization which prevented both leaders and employees of the company from seeing other courses or options. Cheney (1983a) defines organizational identification this way:

A person identifies with a unit when, in making a decision, the person in one or more of his/her organizational roles perceives that unit’s values or interests as relevant in evaluating the alternatives of choice. ...If a decision maker decides with the welfare of an entire organization as the primary concern, he/she likely identifies with the organization. (p. 346)

Or, as Cheney and Lair (2005) argued, “We find organizational values superseding individual ones,” which can lead to what they call “uncoerced obedience” to, in some cases, an unwise course. Cheney (1983a) points out that identification is not a fixed product or state of

organizational discourse, it is a *process* that involves “a continuing development involving many changes” (p. 343).

The e-mails in the Enron database provide a unique opportunity to see the identification process at work *in situ*, or as it occurred, while at the same time providing a look at how newer communication technologies are contributing to the process. It also allows a look at how identification may change over time as the employees at Enron began to use different metaphors once they realized the company and its values were not only unethical, but were contributing to the company’s demise. This chapter will demonstrate how some of the metaphors analyzed in Chapter 3 led to the kind of overidentification and “uncoerced obedience” referred to above, but also how other metaphors demonstrate employees’ attempts to *disidentify* (Scott, Corman, & Cheney, 1998) with the values and goals of the company and its leaders. I will also examine in this chapter how these metaphors enabled employees to bridge the dialectical tensions of identification/disidentification, and power/resistance, inviting the possible “social change and transformation” to which Mumby (2005) refers. To that end, this chapter addresses the second overarching question: *How did metaphor help employees at Enron bridge dialectical tensions related to coordination and control?*

In what follows, I will review the literature on organizational identification; how that ties in with power/resistance; and how metaphors work to create and sustain identification with the organization. This is followed by an analysis of how the metaphors from time period

1 reflect identification with the organization and, in turn, how the alternative metaphors in time period 2 reflect attempts at *disidentification*, which helped bridge dialectical tensions.

Organizational identification

Since the early 1980s, numerous organizational communication scholars have studied identification (DiSanza & Bullis, 1999; Gossett, 2006; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002; Larson & Pepper, 2003; Morgan et al., 2004; Russo, 1998; Scott, 1997; Scott, 2001; Scott et al., 1999; Scott, 2007 and Scott & Stephens, 2009)¹. The interest began, however, with Cheney's (1983b) introduction of Burke's notion of identification, in which he conducted a rhetorical analysis of corporate house organs to demonstrate organizational identification strategies. This project will mimic Cheney's approach, extending it to how metaphors foster identification.

In defining identification, Burke (1950) says: "A is not identical with his colleague B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or, he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so" (p. 20). The key phrase there is "persuaded to believe so." Much of organizational communication, according to Cheney (1983b), seeks to show organizational members that their interests are joined, or that they are united in substance (e.g. "consubstantial"), with the interests of the organization and its leadership. People are consubstantial with each other when they share attitudes, beliefs, values, ideas, location, activities, and so on.

As individuals “work out” their corporate identities, they are inclined to communicate and cooperate with persons and groups who share the same interests...

Consubstantiality represents an area of “overlap” – either real or perceived – between two individuals or between an individual and a group; it is a basis for common motives and for “acting together.” (Cheney, 1983b, p. 146)

The need for consubstantiality, or unity, according to Burke, is because we are ultimately divided from one another. “If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity” (Burke, 1950, p. 22). In identifying with one group, idea, value system, person, organization, and the like, we are also *disidentifying* with others. According to Cheney (1983b), “Organizations are in the business of congregation ... fostering identification is the ‘intent’ of many corporate policies, and with it comes greater assurance that employees will decide with organizational interests uppermost in mind” (p. 158). Barker (1998) argued that an organization “*needs* its members to identify with its goals, values, and objectives” (p. 258, emphasis in original) so that they will readily do work that helps the organization to achieve those goals, values and objectives. Some of the main ways organizations foster identification are “through oral messages from management; with bulletins, handbooks and house organs; in labor negotiations; by offering an array of benefits and services; and through personnel selection, socialization, training and promotion” (Cheney, 1983b, p. 144). His argument here has stood the test of time, as it is clear from the description of Enron’s culture in Chapter 2 that all of these tactics were used to foster identification among the employees there as well. To give a few examples: the banners were

hung in the lobby and in the parking deck touting the corporation's values; hiring involved careful handpicking of specific types of employees who were already identifying in many ways with the organization's values of monetary gain; employees received lavish perks, high pay and extravagant bonuses; videos disseminated company-wide featured Ken Lay proclaiming that the company's objective was to ensure all employees realized their potential; all-employee meetings were held in which Ken Lay would rally employees to work even harder to make the company "the world's leading company," and, finally, certain slogans were repeated across all company communication with employees, such as, "Everything we do is about change. Change is a goal. Change is a habit. Change a mind" (Tourish and Vatcha, 2005, p. 472).

In addition, the fact that employees there were called "Enronians" also fostered strong identification. As Cheney (1983b) pointed out, "In this way, names, labels, and titles become the foci for larger corporate identities; they carry with them other 'baggage' in the form of values, interests and the like" (p. 146). Enronians were constantly told that they were the best and the brightest, which also fosters strong identification. In this way, Burke (1937) argued, identification leads to "braggadocio":

By it, the modest man can indulge in the most outrageous 'corporate boasting.' He identifies himself with some corporate unit (church, guild, company, lodge, party, team, college, city, nation, etc.) – and by profuse praise of his unit he praises himself. For he 'owns shares' in the corporate unit – and by 'rigging the market' for the value of the stock as a whole he runs up the value of his personal holdings. (p. 267)

This is an ironic metaphor comparing stock to an employees' identification with a company, particularly given Enron's obsession with the value of its stock shares. At any rate, through these particular means, the organization "initiates" the identification process by communicating its values and goals in a number of different ways. The employee completes the process by accepting the "outer-voice" of the organization and internalizing it, such that "the member will 'see' his or her 'reflection' in the social mirror of the collective" (Cheney, 1983b, p. 147). In so doing, the employees make decisions that are in the best interest of the organization often to the detriment of their own values and goals.

Metaphor, organizational identification and the dialectic of control

One of the more subtle ways organizations foster identification through language is the use of metaphor. Cheney's (1983b) analysis of house organs explores the role metaphors play in organizational identification, but also demonstrates how discourse operates in the distribution of metaphor and the ideologies found within them. Cheney specifically looks at Burke's three forms of identification: the common ground technique ('I am like you'), identification through antithesis ('we have a common enemy') and the assumed or transcendent "we" (dissimilar interests joined under the transcendent "we") and explains how each is carried out in specific organizational texts. Although Cheney does not explicitly discuss metaphor in this article, the language used in the different examples of house organs he analyzes does make obvious use of metaphor. For example, R.R. Donnelly & Sons Co. used the phrase, "Our people are the key to what makes this company tick." Cheney uses this as an example of the common ground technique through the expression of concern for the

individual. However, the clock metaphor used in the phrase is also an example of a structural metaphor, which, according to Deetz and Mumby (1985), functions to project the characteristic of one experience onto another. “In Western culture, for example, ‘time is money’ is a dominant metaphor in which one structured experience – monetary transactions – is projected onto the concept of *time*” (Deetz & Mumby, 1985, p. 378). Here the clock metaphor may create a sense of identification to the Western ideology of “time equals money,” or to the idea of the organization as a machine, with clock-like parts (with the employees being the individual parts) that creates the need for those employees to keep the organization ticking. And with the time and money order, keeping the organization ticking is the same as making a profit.

To use another example from Cheney’s analysis, BankAmerica’s newsletter article featuring employees who are “On the Way Up,” also demonstrates the common ground technique, according to Cheney, through recognition of individual contributions to the organization. This particular metaphor is orientational in its use of “Up.” As Deetz and Mumby (1985) point out, “In Western culture generally, ‘up’ is positive while ‘down’ is negative.” Again, this is a metaphorical gesturing toward Western ideologies. In an example of identification by antithesis in Cheney’s article, the war metaphor appears. Cheney asserts that: “Identification is evident in house organs when employees are urged to ‘unite’ against a common ‘enemy,’ usually some threat from the environment” (p. 153). The war metaphor is also a cultural ideological metaphor (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, argument is war). And finally, in some examples Cheney provides for the assumed and transcendent “we”

identification strategy, the metaphors relate to “family” or “team” thereby stressing the ideas of “unity, togetherness and sharing.”

In all of Cheney’s examples of organizational language used to foster identification, the assumption is that this language captures or calls forth shared experiences among employees in the organization. But, as Deetz (1986) argued: “Through metaphors, people structure difficult, only partially shareable experiences in terms of common, shared experiences” (p. 174). What he seems to suggest here with “partially shareable experiences” is the notion of unity and division in identification. They are only partially shareable because, in Burke’s terms, that’s the human condition, which is why, in turn, identification always entails both unity and division. People may share certain ideals or beliefs, but they still are separated from others in individual ways. This notion is similar to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) argument that we are neither solely in control of our construction of metaphor, nor are we completely controlled by the ideological forces behind our use of these tropes. Metaphors are *partially* sharable experiences because they allow humans to practice some form of agency in their use of metaphor to make sense of the world, yet, we are still driven by cultural ideological structures which often *limit* our choices of metaphors. Therein lies the dialectical nature of metaphors with their enabling and constraining qualities.

The enabling and constraining quality of metaphors suggests a “duality of structure” (Giddens, 1979, 1984) in their use. That is, our use of metaphor both creates and reifies our reality, according to Giddens’ structuration theory. The duality constitutes the *congregation* element of identification through the use of metaphor, in that we collectively share a

particular metaphorical structure to make sense of the world and create social coherence. However, since through metaphors we are also afforded some element of agency, their use additionally opens up the possibility of resistance to certain dominant ideological themes. This element of agency is explained in Giddens' notion of the "dialectic of control," which constitutes the *segregation* in identification and metaphor use, since every identification entails a move toward something and away from something else. In other words, a change in metaphor, or the use of the same metaphor in a different way, could therefore enable or open up space for a possible change in the way we see the world and behave in it, and the potential for us to resist ideological power structures that may constrain us in ways that are ethically or practically suspect. As Giddens (1979) argues, "all social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms which oppress them" (p. 145). But, Giddens also says that social actors must actually make use of that "degree of penetration," or they cease to be agents (Howard & Geist, 1995).

Metaphor and *disidentification*

It is the "degree of penetration," then, that allows for disidentification with power structures which may be constraining people. Cheney (1983a, 1983b) indirectly discusses the notion of disidentification when he points out that there is indeed room for change in identification at different points in time. That is, the employee may identify with the organization as a whole at one point, or more so with a particular unit at another. Or, incidents may have occurred in which the employee no longer identifies with the organization at all and considers it "just a job" (Cheney, 1983b, p. 356). To use another

example, he quotes an employee as saying, “I feel more commitment and identification [toward] the people I work with in my department...I get really concerned when I see people getting wrapped up in an organization and identify with it like it’s part of them” (1983b, p. 158). Taking a structural view of organizational identification, Scott, Corman and Cheney (1998) eventually expanded on this notion and referred to it as *disidentification*, which involves the employee exercising agency and thus demonstrating the dialectical nature of control, that is, power’s imperfect control over individuals.

An example from the existing literature that demonstrates the dialectic of control in the use of metaphor can be found in Smith and Eisenberg’s (1984) root-metaphor analysis of conflict at Disneyland. In this case, the metaphors, while shared by both management and the employees, were not experienced in the same way. That is, the two groups had different ideas of what the dominant metaphors of “drama” and “family” evoked. The differences in worldview between management and employees for the drama metaphor were that management considered the metaphor in terms of “show business” – as in money-making entertainment machine – whereas the employees viewed the metaphor as one of fantasy and creating “the happiest place on earth,” including their own happiness as employees.

The differences in the family metaphor were that employees saw it literally as a family, in which managers and co-workers alike treated each other with respect, and as members of their own family. Management, though, once it had to make tough decisions in the face of economic downturns, focused on the bottom-line and ascribed meaning to the family metaphor in a more patriarchal sense, arguing that “families must make sacrifices if

they are to survive.” Despite this, the two groups both identified with the organization through this metaphor, but in very different ways. The employees identified so much with the family metaphor, as a matter of fact, that they were willing to strike in order to maintain their vision of the metaphor at Disney. This is an example of Scott, Corman, and Cheney’s (1998) conception of *disidentification*, in which identification shifts according to activities and events. Employees in this case *disidentified* with management’s use of the metaphor and vision of Disney while maintaining their identification with the organization as a whole.

An organizational member may in fact draw upon a work-team identity to express a lack of identification with that group (as when he or she is unhappy with how the team is doing). Furthermore, those expressions of *disidentification* may have the unexpected effect of greatly increasing the salience of an organizational identity that is perhaps only loosely coupled with the work-team identity. (p. 307)

By rejecting management’s reworking of the dominant metaphors of drama and family, the Disney employees distanced themselves at least from that part of the organization, or from that particular group. Hence, a change in meaning gave the employees at least some form of control, illustrating the dialectic of control, and opening up the possibility for change in the organization. In other words, because Disney employees used family and show business metaphors differently than management used them, they were afforded some personal power to at least resist management’s meanings of what working at the organization was about.

I intend to demonstrate in the following analysis of the Enron e-mails that a similar process took place in the employees’ use of metaphor. At times metaphor was being used to

identify with the organization, while at other times the same metaphoric structure was being used to disidentify from one aspect of the organization and not others. In yet other moments, completely different metaphors were being used to even further disidentify from the company and its values. In either case, we see the identification/disidentification and power/resistance dialectics being enacted and bridged towards the end of the company's life – indicating possible transformation which could have potentially led to a different outcome.

Identification in Enron e-mail communication

In examining the metaphors identified in the Enron e-mails, I took the same approach as Cheney (1983b) did when he examined house organs – looking at the discourse in terms of the three different forms of identification: the common ground technique ('I am like you'), identification through antithesis ('we have a common enemy') and the assumed or transcendent "we" (dissimilar interests joined under the transcendent "we"). Following the example of pulling out the metaphors in Cheney's examples above, I will examine how metaphors identified in Chapter 3 demonstrate identification and/or disidentification with the organization. I will then examine the metaphors of disidentification and discuss how they enabled a bridging of the dialectical tensions discussed here, as well as the potential they exhibit for transformation and a possible change in the organization's culture.

Identification in messages from time period 1

The most prevalent form of identification in this time period is the common ground technique, which occurs when "the rhetor equates himself or links himself with others in an overt manner" (Cheney, 1983b, p. 148). The messages from this time period praising Ken

Lay, for instance, fall into this category. Messages containing phrases such as: “Thanks to you my financial position far exceeds what I had ever thought would be the case,” “Without your guidance and direction ... I would not be where I am financially today,” and “THANK YOU for your hard work, great planning and sacrifice in the early years.” In this sense, they are identifying with Lay on the level of messianic leader in a manner that Tourish and Vatcha (2005) argue is indicative of cults. In addition, however, the metaphors of monetary value indicate that the employees share common ground with Lay on the goal of money and profit. In this way they are also identifying with the new economy discourse focusing on profit. The metaphors of “time is money,” for example, in time period 1 also indicates a common ground identification with what Deetz and Mumby (2005) referred to as Western ideologies of time being valuable in terms of making money. This is indicative in the messages with the phrases like: “the most challenging time that I have *spent* in my work life” as if time can be spent like money. Other messages are focused directly on the value of Ken Lay’s time, as in “if your calendar allows,” and “thank you very much *for taking the time out* of your busy schedule.” The rest indicate a sense of urgency in that time is valuable in terms of getting business done, as illustrated in “short timeframe,” “progress these discussions in a timely manner,” and “sooner rather than later.” It can also be argued that the highly mechanistic/business process metaphors found in the messages during this time period also exemplify the common ground technique, in that the employees here are obviously identifying strongly with an “It’s all business” Western ideology of rationality over emotion. The fact that there were so few messages containing emotion in that time period suggests that most employees shared that

ideology. In sum, the seemingly robotic actions of employees for the benefit of the company's financial interests presents a common ground mentality towards the company's goal for more profits. This tendency could also indicate identification in the form of the "assumed and transcendent 'we,'" in which "uses of this strategy allow a corporation to present similarity or commonality" with the subtle use of the words "we," "us," "our," etc. (Cheney, 1983b, p. 154).

Also demonstrating the common ground technique and the "assumed and transcendent 'we'" were the messages containing metaphors of sports/team. A team, after all, cannot be effective if its players do not share the same goals (common ground). And the old saying, "There is no 'I' in team" applies here, as there is normally an implied "we" with any team concept. For example, when an employee stated in one e-mail that: "I have plenty of competitive drive and have no desire to reduce my natural speed," he is identifying with Enron's fast-paced culture and drive to succeed. In addition, messages with the phrases, "I am proud to be a part of this team and look forward to many years of prosperity and success," and "Thank you again for allowing me to be part of such a GREAT team," show an individual identification with the company as a member of a winning team. The other messages using this metaphor referring to such things as "the prospect of teaming with Enron," "put together a team to drive MEC's strategy," "*our* team could help drive the strategy," and "*Our* legal team's opinion is very optimistic based on the way the proceeding progressed..." don't depict so much a personal identification with a team, but more of an identification with the overarching team's offensive measures and strategies to meet the

company's goals with a "common ground" perspective. One could also argue that perhaps there is a bit of identification through antithesis here, which involves the act of uniting against a common enemy. Although the messages do not explicitly discuss a common enemy, teams have competitors and unite against those competitors. In addition, since the employees in these messages are obviously buying into the profit-centered, new economy discourse, enemies would typically be outsiders not buying into that discourse. Cheney (1983b) argued, in fact that, "Some corporate documents contain passages that emphasize threats from 'outsiders' such as 'misguided' environmentalists, 'overzealous' government regulators and 'unprogressive' community leaders" (p. 148). At the very least, new economy discourse painted the government as the enemy in its regulations on certain industries – something Enron fought hard to do away with in its efforts to deregulate gas and electricity markets.

It is clear from the strong levels of identification presented in time period 1 that there was little or no effort to disidentify from the company or to resist power structures that dictated the values and goals to which employees inevitably appeared to adhere. In terms of Giddens' (1979, 1984) duality of structure, we see employees' identification helping to both create and reify Enron's culture. In this case, by continually using metaphors that fostered identification with Enron management's goals, employees helped to create and perpetuate the single-minded pursuit of profit. As Kaspersen (1995) explains, this happens largely on an unconscious level and involves deep power structures which are often unrecognizable in the situation/context:

Giddens operates with an unconscious level which involves actions caused by unconscious motives. The unconscious includes knowledge that is suppressed or appears in distorted form. Whereas the boundary between discursive and practical knowledge is permeable, there exists a genuine barrier between these types of consciousness and the unconscious motives which, due to repression, inhibit discursive formulation. (p. 49)

Burke makes a similar argument about unconscious motives that shape our identifications, through the concepts of trained incapacity and occupational psychosis. These concepts are demonstrated in the identification on both a micro (with the organization) and a macro-level (with capitalist ideologies), involving “capitalist, monetary, individualist, *laissez-faire*, free market, private enterprise, and the like...” (Burke, 1937, p. 41, emphasis in original).

Identification in messages from time period 2

A key finding from the analysis in time period 2, in fact, supports this notion of the occupational psychosis, since, remarkably, even when employees realized they were losing their jobs and their life savings, some of them continued to show a strong identification with the company and its leaders. Tourish and Vatcha (2005) equate this “overidentification” with the behavior of members of a cult. “Once people over-align themselves with a company and invest excessive faith in the wisdom of its leaders, they are liable to lose their original sense of identity...” (p. 476). Whether it was a result of an ongoing denial by many employees so wrapped up in the organization’s culture and the new economy discourse as context, or true

belief even in the face of corporate death, the Enron case demonstrates just how strong organizational identification can become. Even as it became clear that the company's leaders had acted unethically, and, in so doing, effectively destroyed the company and lost most of their employees' retirement savings, many employees still showed a very strong identification with Lay and the company. The messages containing metaphors of the body related to the heart and religious metaphors are particularly exemplary of this ongoing identification. Most of these messages fall under the "assumed and transcendent 'we'" and "the common ground" approaches. Both of these forms of identification are evident in the messages containing phrases like: "greed whispers to all of *us*," and "Like *everyone*, I have had some time to reflect lately," "sitting around in a daze over everything *we've* lost," and "I am however, aware of *our (your employees) loss*." The common ground comes in with the suggestion in these messages that everyone there is suffering together.

Other employees are sympathizing with Lay and relating his physical pain to their own, as indicated, for example in "My heart goes out to you as I can't begin to imagine the sense of loss you must be feeling" and "this situation has been heartbreaking... I know you're there too." There is even more evidence of the common ground and "assumed and transcendent 'we'" forms of identification in the last set of messages using metaphors of the human body. These messages illustrate an identification with the company as a human being, suggesting that the employees and the company itself share a common bond, as shown in these phrases: "As an organization, and as part of *our* culture, *we* lead with *our* chin," "Most of *our* wounds are self-inflicted," "this division could be cancerous to *our* new company,"

and “*We* sure don’t want Enron as a whole, to be growing so fat and so fast that it will hurt *our* bottom line.”

In the messages using metaphors of religion, there is again identification in terms of the common ground approach, in the employees’ continued allegiance to Lay, as exemplified in phrases like, “we have so much faith in you,” “Thank you for restoring my faith,” “I believe in you and wish you success and redemption,” and “appreciate the sacrifice you are making.” As Tourish and Vatcha (2005) argued, identification with the leader usually equates to identification with the leader’s vision for the organization as a whole. Swartz and Watkins (2003) compared Enron to “a New Age megachurch,” an interesting analogy given these churches’ reputations as embracing the “gospel” of free market capitalism.

The last set of metaphors exemplifying identification in terms of the “assumed and transcendent ‘we’” and “the common ground” approaches, is the military/war metaphors. But in these messages, we also see the third form of identification – “identification by antithesis,” or the sharing of a common enemy. War, after all, involves an enemy, whether it be literal or figurative. In one message in particular, Dynegy is literally referred to as “the enemy.” The message ends with “WE ARE ENRON, WE HAVE CLASS, AND WE DONT LAY DOWN AND DIE. WE HAVE A SOLUTION!!!!” Employees are also identifying with the company by referring to themselves as “troops,” “those of us in the trenches,” and “ever loyal and willing to serve,” for example. Again, in these messages there is an assumed and transcendent “we” with a common ground to stand up and fight for the company.

Disidentification in messages from time period 2

Although there is a strong level of identification with the company in time period 2, Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) pointed out that events and changes in circumstances can lead to disidentification. As Giddens argues with his concept of the dialectic of control, agents do have the ability to reflect on past behaviors, to give accounts of behavior, and to act creatively in a situation. This reflexivity involves being immersed in the continuous flow of action that enables agents to get along in their environments. Reflexivity also allows active agents to be flexible in the face of unexpected situations and unforeseen circumstances. The reflexivity, in concert with agency, enables the dialectic of control, in which agents can take some power back and transform social structures (Miller, 1994).

The key to that concept, in particular for this case, is the notion that reflexivity allows flexibility in the face of unforeseen circumstances. In time period 2 employees faced a rather dramatic unforeseen circumstance when they realized the company was not the indestructible powerhouse they thought it to be. These unforeseen circumstances created what I referred to in Chapter 3 as a dramatic change in the *scene* in which the agents were operating. It is at this point that we begin to see some employees *disidentifying* with both the company and Lay by using different metaphors, or using the same metaphors in a different way. According to Holmer-Nadesan (1996):

‘Dis-identification’ occurs as individuals eschew managerial definitions of organization, identity and practice in favor of alternative designations. In the case of disidentification, the subject-positions embedded in alternative discourses determine

the individual's (explicit) interpretations of the organization and her/his relation to it. Consequently, disidentification does not involve a conscious rejection so much as it entails the replacement of managerial discourse. (pp. 58-59)

In at least one message using the religious metaphor, there is a sense of disidentification in the phrase "upper management is losing *the faith* of employees." It could also be argued that messages which do not point to Lay or management as the saviors of the company, but rather God himself, or the employees, could indicate a disidentification with Lay and management. This potential disidentification is illustrated in the phrases: "*God promises to take care of each and every one of us under absolutely every circumstance. People choose to ignore this; in doing so, they reject His blessings in favor of their own worries. So be it,*" "*It could be beneficial to have the new building blessed,*" and "*it would be a sweeter glory knowing that the employees helped turn everything around.*" The identification in these messages is directed towards a higher power, or to employees themselves, while indicating a disidentification with Lay and his management team. At this point, perhaps these employees felt that the situation should be taken out of management's hands and put into God's. The "gospel" of laissez-faire capitalism is failing them, and they are now turning to supernatural powers for salvation.

Perhaps the most profound form of disidentification, though, can be found in the messages moving from monetary value to ethical/human value in this time period. While employees are still using metaphors of monetary value in these messages, the movement from god term to devil term indicates a disidentification with the company's main goal for

more profits, as well as a disidentification with the unrestrained free market capitalist ideology regarding money. Messages with phrases like, “my pot of gold snatched away from me,” and “we gave that to you and what did we get in return?,” and “trust was misplaced and worth nothing,” indicate a move toward identification with ethical values over monetary values. This move becomes even stronger in the messages dealing almost solely with metaphors of ethical values, such as “breach the line of ethical (and perhaps legal) financial actions in order to have more,” “motivated not by family and ethics but by material possession,” “people need to get some values that are worth a damn!,” “Reputations have been destroyed,” “without integrity a person has nothing,” “morals are either something everyone else needs to have except senior management” and “moral bankruptcy.” Here we not only see a disidentification with the company’s profit-driven goals, but also with the company’s leadership.

There is even stronger evidence of disidentification with Enron’s leadership in the use of metaphors of the human body displaying anger towards management, as indicated in the messages with phrases like “Thanks Ken You *Piece of Shit*,” “Thanks for everything *knob head*” and “You *load of bastards* - you *screwed us all* and got *fat on the profits of our sweat*.” In these messages, employees are disidentifying so much so that they are placing the blame on Enron leaders for the situation they are in – or in Burke’s terms, the leaders are being scapegoated for the problems inherent in the scene. Scapegoating occurs in an effort to purify oneself of one’s own guilt associated with the social drama (Burke, 1937). The

employees here, in fact, are comparing the leader's actions to physical violence against them while other messages depict employees physically harming management.

Opportunities for transcending dialectical tensions

In both time periods, the metaphors used demonstrate a strong level of identification with Enron and Ken Lay. Even when it became obvious that the company was failing, and that management was largely to blame, many employees still bought into the company's vision and leadership. As a result, the messages depicting strong love and support for Lay and the company likely made matters worse, Watkins (2009) argues. Ken Lay, she said, was a man who did not like bad news, and he constantly gravitated towards good news in a self-deceptive way. Couple that with the fact that his e-mail messages were probably filtered by his secretary, and there is a high probability that the ONLY messages he saw were the ones praising and supporting him. Watkins (2009) said:

They tried to say bad news made it to the top. But no, people protected him from it. How much did all those fluffy e-mails of love and support make him guide towards that and not the hard truth? It's quantity over quality. He's looking at the quantity of support from the peons at the bottom vs. the quality of "we've got rot or we're the Titanic and we're going to sink." The words of support, because there were 1,000 of them, made him feel ok as opposed to the 25 saying, "we've got a hole in the boat."

The messages showing strong identification with Lay and the company probably helped sink the ship rather than keep it afloat, because the positive messages reified certain parts of the culture that put the "hole in the boat" in the first place.

Still, as a whole, the metaphors from time period 2, while they may show strong identification with certain ideologies in the company, all display disidentification with the company's chief ideological value – the blind pursuit of profits. As Burke argues, metaphors operate in this “both/and” fashion, enabling and constraining certain ways of viewing the world, while at the same time opening up possibilities for seeing the world differently by changing metaphorical structure. Burke also argued that change is possible through perspective by incongruity, where alternate metaphors are introduced. In order for that to happen, though, it is necessary for people to recognize the power of the metaphors they are currently using. Smith and Eisenberg (1987) and Mumby (2005) argued that the key is not to resolve dialectical tensions, but to explore how the tensions can lead to change. It is more about balancing the poles and *strategically* working with both to effect change. “Effective managers and employees use metaphors strategically to facilitate a sense of cohesiveness and at the same time allow for a variety of individual interpretations” (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987, p. 369). The use of alternative metaphors, according to Deetz and Mumby (1985) can result in “self-determined change” for employees. If they are able to develop an understanding of the metaphors that are used in their organization and how alternative metaphors reveal other possible power structures and ideologies, perhaps change is more easily attained.

The development of alternative metaphors opens up the possibility for self-determined change, in the sense that the structure of organization is revealed as a human, social construct which is by no means fixed and immutable. Providing members with other ways to make sense of information in an organization allows for

a more critical stance vis-à-vis the nature of power interests in that organization.

(Deetz & Mumby, 1985, p. 383)

In time period 2, even the messages that were positive towards Lay and the company demonized monetary value at the least, and focused instead on ethical values at most. There is, then, some indication of the dialectic of control at work in these messages as compared to time period 1. These messages, coupled with those displaying strong disidentification with the company and Lay, demonstrate how the use of metaphor can help transcend dialectical tensions of identification/disidentification and power/resistance. That is, by using metaphors of ethical value instead of metaphors of monetary value, the employees rejected power structures that dictated monetary value as *the* value. Further, by using metaphors of the human body rather than the mechanistic business process metaphors of unemotional rationalization, employees bridged the tensions by pointing out the human, emotional face of the organization. In rejecting the ideological power associated with the metaphors of monetary value and mechanistic business practices, the employees took on agency as Giddens discusses and exerted their own power by using opposing metaphorical structures in some cases. In addition, some of the metaphors of religion, such as those seeking salvation from a higher power, bridged the tensions by enabling employees to turn to some other entity besides management to restore their faith, indicating a rejection of the power management had previously exerted.

The findings here demonstrate the value of looking at organizational discourse in terms of dialectical tensions, and how power structures may fluctuate based on language structures at any given time. As Benson (1977) argued:

The realities accepted by participants at any particular time may be continually undermined by ongoing acts of social construction. Even powerful actors may be unable to maintain an orderly, rationalized system of social relations in the face of this ongoing process. (p. 4)

At Enron, employees began to construct different realities than what management dictated by bridging the dialectical tensions through metaphor. The changes in metaphor opened up opportunities for transformation from an oppressive, homogenous, profit-driven culture to one that perhaps, given time and effort, could have become more ethical, with values more related to human worth, and a more reasonable, restrained approach to rewards and profit. As mentioned before, though, the problem in this case is that employees did not begin to use alternative metaphors until the company was near collapse. In addition, it can be argued that many of them had no desire to construct different realities as long as the rewards and prestige of working at Enron continued. The overarching capitalist ideological pull for personal wealth was obviously too strong. Perhaps it is simply the nature of identification that this is how humans behave when *purpose*, or happiness, is foremost in their minds. In a capitalist, individualistic society such as ours, that pull leads in many cases to identification at its highest levels. As Watkins (2009) put it:

It's not too dissimilar to stories today about Alex Rodriguez. Two years ago, it's: "Get rid of him, steroid bum!" And now everyone loves him. And then in the *New York Times* they ask, "Has he really changed? Or is it just because the Yankees are winning the World Series?" You know, they don't really care about his ethics if they're winning the World Series. They do when the Yankees aren't doing so well. At Enron, how much of that good will was because the pocketbooks were fat? Human nature is to go where it feels good – the prestige of working at Enron, which in Houston was it.

Tourish and Vatcha (2005) added: "Human beings need to believe in something, are frequently naive in where they choose to invest their belief and are vulnerable to dramaturgical spectacles designed to engage their loyalty" (p. 475). Or, as Cheney and Tompkins (1987) might argue, it was an *overidentification* with an unwise course "that prevented the navigator from seeing other courses, other options" until there *were* no other options.

The construction of differing realities, as demonstrated through the use of metaphors over the different time periods presented over the last two chapters, offers some important insights into the workings of organizational discourse and power in terms of identification. The analysis of the metaphors demonstrates the logic of identification which, when supported by discourses like those of the New Economy, can lead to overidentification to the point of collapse. This analysis shows how discourse, rather than simply, say, corrupt accounting practices, actually played a significant role in the company's ultimate demise. In fact, one

could go as far as to argue that it was the discourse, and its role in fostering an overidentification with monetary value, that ultimately led to the corrupt accounting practices in the first place. But, the analysis also shows *what is possible* when different metaphors are used in place of dominant ones. Although Enron went bankrupt shortly after the messages analyzed were sent, the discourse in these messages demonstrates how employees can take back some control by using different discursive structures from what management imposes. We will never know what effect that might have had on the organization's culture, but it does raise an interesting question as to what difference it would have made, if any at all. Regardless, this analysis is a testament to the power of organizational discourses, and the consequences of ideological power structures found in those discourses.

Not only does this analysis make a statement about the power of organizational discourse, it also makes a powerful statement about the medium by which discourse *travels*. In this case, e-mail seemed to provide employees at Enron a form of communication that allowed them to vent and make their feelings known in an environment which suppressed any form of dissent. This brings up the question of the role computer-mediated communication technologies have in affecting change in organizational discourse. The next chapter will address that issue.

¹ According to a meta-analysis (Riketta, 2005) of organizational identification (OI) research in a variety of fields, about 80 journal articles dealing with the topic had been published by that time – half since 1998. This meta-analysis found that organizational

identification has most commonly been measured in terms of “antecedents or consequences” of organizational identification, including variables such as “organizational tenure, job scope/challenge, organizational prestige, intent to leave, and in-role and extra-role performance” (p. 373). However, this meta-analysis, and the majority of the studies conducted on OI since Cheney first introduced it, have been empirical studies rather than rhetorical studies like Cheney’s.

CHAPTER 5

EXTENDED AGENCY, E-MAIL AS ‘TECHNOTHERAPY,’ AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL DISCOURSE

“Instruments are ‘essentially’ human, since they are the products of human design”

(Burke, 1945, p. 283).

Burke’s assessment above is similar to an argument from a number of organizational communication scholars regarding the role of non-human objects in the process of organizing. Scholars such as Castor and Cooren (2006); Cooren (2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2004); Cooren et al. (2005, 2006); Cooren and Fairhurst (2004); Cooren and Taylor (1997); Orlikowski (2007); Putnam and Cooren (2004); and Taylor and Van Every (2000), in one way or another, argue that objects and texts can take on human qualities, going as far as to argue that objects take on agency in the process of organizing. According to Castor and Cooren (2006):

A growing body of studies has been devoted to an extension of the concept of agency. The reasoning that led to this extension is as follows: Starting from agency is indeed the right way to investigate the organizational world; however, focusing only on human agency is not enough because this tends to leave aside other entities that appear to compose and structure this world – machines, documents, organizations, policies, architectural elements, signs and procedures, to just name a few. (p. 573)

Objects, for Burke, do take on agency in that he defines them as the “means or instruments” human agents use to perform an act in a social drama. For the scholars above, agency is “the

capacity to act, that is, a capacity to make a difference” (Castor & Cooren, 2006), and they argue that non-human objects do make a difference, and therefore serve as agents in the process of organizing. However, while Burke separates agent (human) and agency (object), these scholars argue specifically that objects and their human agents combine to perform a third agent – a “hybrid agent¹.” Either way, the tools we use, whether they are memos or specific communication technologies, play an integral role in the process of organizing and the power structures we form in our day to day acts. Burke (1966), in fact, refers to humans as the “the tool-using animal,” and argues that there is a “close tie-up between tools and language” (p. 13). He uses the example of a factory to make his point: “Imagine trying to run a modern factory...without the vast and often ungainly nomenclatures of the various technological specialties, without instructions, education, specifications, filing systems, accountancy (including mathematics and money or some similar counters)” (p. 13). And so the main argument that Burke and scholars of extended agency are making is that humans and objects are *both* involved in the formation of social structures.

In the case of the Enron e-mails, it is clear that this particular technology played a role in creating, maintaining and changing discourse during the two time periods examined in this project. As demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, discourse in the e-mail messages in the first time period helped support powerful discourses driven by management. In the second time period, discourse in the e-mails dramatically changed, as employees began to use different metaphor structures, changing their perspective towards the company and its leaders. In this way, the use of e-mail became a rhetorical strategy as the employees tried to

deal with the life-altering drama that unfolded. In this case, it was through the tool of e-mail that the language actually traveled to users. There were, for sure, numerous ways that employees engaged in the differing discourses between the two time periods (in private, or on the phone, on the Yahoo message board, for example), Watkins (2009) said in our interview. However, it was through e-mail, rather than other forms of communication that the employees attempted to engage in and deliver this discourse to the company's leader – Ken Lay. As discussed above, more recent theories on organizing seek to recognize the specific role of objects to the point of referring to them as agents. And, it is this “agentic quality” (Castor & Cooren, 2006) that e-mail took on that I argue made a difference – in potentially positive and negative ways. It is this “agentic” quality that helped employees bridge the dialectical tensions of coordination and control by giving them an outlet through which to deliver alternative discourses. As such, the discussion here will address the last overarching question: *“To what extent, and how did e-mail function to help enable Enron employees to bridge dialectical tensions?”*

In what follows, I will discuss the theoretical arguments on the role of objects in the formation of social structures, followed by a discussion of how e-mail made a difference at Enron – perhaps enough of a difference to have potentially altered power structures. Ultimately I will show how, with regard to the e-mail messages to Ken Lay, the medium acted as an agent along with employees, enabling them to use *and deliver* discourses that were counter to the dominant discourses dictated by management. In this way, the employees bridged the dialectical tensions between identification/disidentification and power/resistance.

Materiality, agency and organizing

Over the past 10 years, research on the role of objects in the formation of social structures, and the discourses associated with them, stems mainly from theoretical models in the fields of sociology and science and technology. Orlikowski (2007) points to theories such as actor-network theory (Callon, 1986, Latour 1995, 1999, 2005; Law, 1992); sociotechnical ensemble (Bijker, 1995); mangle of practice (Pickering, 1995); object-centered sociality (Knorr Cetina, 1997); relational materiality (Law, 2004) and material sociology (Beunza et al., 2006) as examples of this stream of research:

The development of these alternative conceptualizations can be broadly conceived as post-humanist, in the sense that they seek to de-center the human subject – and more particularly, reconfigure notions of agency – in studies of everyday life. (Orlikowski, 2007, pp. 1437-1438)

The theoretical model referred to most frequently from these perspectives by organizational communication scholars is actor-network theory (ANT). ANT seeks to create an understanding of how humans and objects combine to create social structures and knowledge. The theory states that people and artifacts alone cannot make things happen. Social relations, according to ANT, are not technologically determined, nor are they socially determined (Tatnall & Lepa, 2003). Rather, technology and humans work in concert in the creation and maintenance of social networks. The objects that we use in everyday life are all a part of what makes certain situations what they are, and they have the power to both stabilize and change networks just as human actors do. Law (1992) uses the example of a

projector in a classroom to explain this notion. He describes how the projector not only participates in shaping the interaction inside the classroom, but also, “It is a part of the social. It operates on [the students] to influence the way in which they act” (p. 382). The projector, as an actor, can refuse to work that day, causing the professor to have to change tactics. The interaction would then be different without the projector. But, Law argues, the students, as actors, can also change the social situation, by taking over the projector, or by simply ignoring the professor.

To use another example: Latour and Woolgar (1979) conducted a study on the creation and maintenance of scientific knowledge. In terms of ANT, scientific knowledge is created not just from scientists and their ideas, but also from microscopes, beakers, laboratory tests, government funding, among other things. And some of these “actants” connect to one another, reference one another, presuppose one another, black box one another. As more actants connect together and obscure (i.e., black box) the means by which their actions are created and/or justified, the situations that they combine to create harden into reality. All of these people and things combine to create the network which makes scientific knowledge possible. That scientific “fact,” then, and the way it is treated through laboratory testing, methodological treatments, in writing and in discussions about it, becomes taken for granted as given.

At times, Latour (1995) argues, we actually give objects the agency a human being would possess. For example, Latour suggests that a mechanical door closer is actually an extension of us, as we have delegated the authority of opening and closing the door to that

technology. In another similar example, he discusses a speed bump as taking the place of a human. It slows the car down, just as a human policeman would. But it is not a living being. It is an object that acts in our stead. In short, we have, in both of those examples, given that artifact the power and authority that a human agent would have. The role of the object becomes black boxed along with the humans behind the design of it, and the rules that govern its use. Or, as Law (2004) argues, the rules and procedures surrounding that fact are never questioned.

It can be argued that this is also how organizations are formed. In fact, Cooren and Taylor (1997) refer to an organization as a “collective actant, because the actions that are accomplished by its multiple actants can be black boxed, leaving only a basic transformation” (p. 254). The basic transformation is the organization itself – what is black boxed is all the people, objects and forces that contributed to how the organization, as an entity, came to be in the first place, and how the social structure that is in place at a given moment is maintained and changed. To understand why something is the way it is, then, would require an examination of all of the things – both objects and people – that contributed to the social structures being examined, and the discourses associated with them.

Extended agency theories and organizational communication

This notion of black boxing is very similar to Giddens’s (1979, 1984) “duality of structure,” in which social actors use rules and resources (which would entail objects) to both create and recreate social structures until they become “black boxed,” and, as such, are enabled and constrained by them. Recall that Giddens argues that reification of social

structures happen largely on an unconscious level and involve deep power structures which are often unrecognizable in the situation/context (Kaspersen, 1995). That is, once structures and discourses are reified and harden into reality, they become taken for granted, and therefore “black boxed,” as theories of extended agency suggest. Fairhurst and Putnam (2004), in fact, draw a close comparison between structuration theory and ANT. Both theories focus on “organizations as grounded action” since both seek to retain a balance between action and structure. The concern for theorists who take the “organizations as grounded in action” perspective is “How is the ‘organization’ anchored in what Giddens (1979, 1984) refers to as the *durée* or the continuous flow of discursive conduct?” (p. 16, emphasis in original). Organization (or structure), then, really only exists as a social practice. But, they argue, what makes both structuration theory and ANT unique is that they take into account the *material* forms that help make up that social practice. The difference between structuration theory and actor-network theory, however, is that whereas Giddens argues that objects act as resources for actors to draw upon in the process of organizing (this is akin to Burke’s separation of agent and agency), ANT theorists argue that objects are themselves transformed by human actors to become hybrid agents. This approach, according to Orlikowski (2007), better accounts for the role of objects in that they always must be considered, rather than only being considered as a special case in particular circumstances. For this reason, organizational communication scholars (Castor & Cooren, 2006; Cooren et al., 2006) using ANT argue that this theory goes beyond structuration theory in recognizing the role of objects in the creation, maintenance and change of social structures.

It involves no agency/structure dualism or duality á la Giddens (1984), since all sources of explanation come from this articulation of agencies. In other words, the world as we know it is structured and organized, but this organization can be accounted for just by identifying different entities (human and non-human) that happen to contribute to this structuring. (Cooren, Thompson, Canestraro, and Bodor, 2006, p. 534)

Nevertheless, structuration theory really started what Biesel (2009) refers to as “the trumpet sound of a revolution of structure-agency thinking” (p. 618), thus beginning an important evolutionary process in scholars’ work with the dialectical nature of action and structure. Structuration theory has been used effectively in the past to demonstrate how technologies make a difference with human actors in the process of organizing. For example, in her look at the structural qualities of technologies in the workplace, Orlikowski (1992) argued that there is a dialectic quality between human action and the technologies that are used to perform actions (a both/and quality). “Technology is created and changed by human action, yet it is also used by humans to accomplish some action” (p. 21). She refers to “this recursive notion of technology” as “the duality of technology.” She illustrated this idea with an institutional analysis of how genres of business communication, such as memos and business letters, are generated through repetitive social practices, and then in turn constitute communicative practices in the workplace. Yates and Orlikowski (1992) demonstrated how new technologies changed “genre rules” that both enabled and constrained agents as they drew on certain resources in the workplace. For example, when the typewriter appeared in

the workplace, it led to new textual features and formal conventions that helped employees distinguish the office memo from the more formal business letter. This eventually led to a split into two different genres of business communication. They also demonstrated how the appearance of e-mail as a new resource further led to changes in the memo genre, arguing that this pattern “suggests that the conditions influencing media use and the consequences of media use are tightly coupled in a process of structuration over time” (p. 312).

In a more recent article, however, Orlikowski (2007) moves away from the notion of “the duality of technology” in favor of what she calls “constitutive entanglement,” in which she employs theories of extended agency such as ANT to demonstrate the role of objects in the process of organizing. Here, material forms are more than simply resources for human agents to use in creating, maintaining and changing social structures – they are rather an integral part of the process, and “the social and the material are considered to be inextricably related – there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social” (p. 1437). To demonstrate her point, she uses an example of the introduction of BlackBerrys into an organization, demonstrating how the employees, in concert with the PDAs, began to change the organization’s culture. The employees used the devices so much that their work lives became 24-7 in some cases. They felt as though they constantly needed to check their BlackBerrys for e-mail messages. This practice disrupted what was considered a culture that valued private family time for its employees away from work. “The resulting blurring of employees’ work and personal lives [began to] undermine the espoused family-friendly values of the firm” (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1444).

In these works, Orlikowski (1992, 2007) and Yates and Orlikowski (1992) demonstrated that technology works with human agents to both reinforce existing power structures, but also opens up room for change. The combination of a human agent plus the use of technology as a resource always leaves room for “choosing to act otherwise” (Putnam & Cooren, 2004). In terms of structuration theory, humans can also draw on certain resources to exert their own power over social structures. Giddens refers to this as the “dialectic of control.” For ANT, Akrich (1992) argued, because technical objects have agency, they therefore have power, or the capacity to operate within the heterogeneous network to change social relations, or to “stabilize, naturalize, depoliticize” a particular social reality. Because of this, Law (1992) argues, “the effects of power are generated in a relational and distributed manner, and nothing is ever sewn up” (p. 386). Power, then, “is a cause, not an effect,” of a particular set of relations in a network (Cooren & Taylor, 1997). Here is where we see the role technologies play in potentially bridging the dialectical tensions of identification/disidentification and power/resistance. As part of the ongoing process of organizing in terms of a “grounded in action” approach, communication technologies play a role in maintaining power structures, but also in disrupting them, as power structures are never really “sewn up” as Law argued.

E-mail, agency and the distribution of discourse

I argue that, at the very least, employees using e-mail at Enron had the potential to disrupt certain power structures because of the technology’s role in the *distribution* of discourse. Some scholars, in fact, have argued that the way discourse travels must be

identified in order to fully understand how certain discourses become dominant, as well as how discourses are maintained and changed. “What seems needed is a study that pays attention to the detail of interaction while accounting for *transportation effects*, that is, the ways by which a given discourse manages to travel from one point to another” (Cooren, Matte, Taylor & Vasquez, 2007, p. 157, emphasis in original). Many organizational communication scholars, in fact, specifically focus on how texts can take on agency in the distribution of discourse. Carl (2005), for example, analyzed a letter to the editor in *Forbes* magazine written by a marketing company refuting the validity of a story. He used Taylor and Van Every’s (2000) notion of texts as “macroactors.” His analysis demonstrated how this text acted rhetorically based on the author and certain absent (or implied) presuppositions from which the audience could make sense of the text. Thus, “...the text is constructed to orient to these presuppositions, to construct rhetorical versions of the world and potentially undermine others, and to accomplish a range of actions” (Carl, 2005, p. 26). The letter, in other words, served as a macroactor, “and can go on acting in the absence of the author(s)” (p. 24), in the transportation of these presuppositions.

To use another example, Castor and Cooren (2006) analyzed oral and textual discourse concerning a dispute at a university over an acting dean’s decision to target certain programs for elimination. They determined that a written code from the faculty, which specifies proper procedure for a dean to follow in making such decisions; letters from the dean to the faculty concerning the program elimination; and a subsequent resolution from the

faculty against the dean, all served as agents in the problem formation/solution to the issue.

They concluded that:

The recognition of the role of nonhuman agents in this process provides a more comprehensive picture of organizational action and how organizational realities are constructed. For example, in the senate's discussion, "written statements" and letters were identified as relevant agents in determining the nature and existence of the problem. (p. 593)

The texts in these case studies not only demonstrate examples of objects taking on agency, but they also demonstrate that the *distribution* of discourse is important in the process of organizing, as Cooren et al. (2007) argued. To help demonstrate their point, Cooren et al. (2007) drew from Alvesson and Kärreman's (2000) two approaches to studying discourse in their longitudinal look at interactions that took place before, during and after a meeting between representatives of Doctors Without Borders and local health centers in the Dominican Republic. While Alvesson and Kärreman's (2000) article discusses studies of long-range *Discourse* (with a big "D"), and close-range *discourse* (with a little "d") as being separate ways of examining discourse in organizational communication studies, Cooren et al. took what they call a hybrid approach to studying discourse. Recall from the discussion in Chapter 1 that studies focusing on macro-level *Discourse* work from the assumption that discourse is determining and "supplies a set of linguistic resources to the social actor because they derive from culturally standardized systems of thought – constellations of talk, ideas, logics, and assumptions that constitute objects and subjects in particular ways" (Barge &

Fairhurst, 2008, p. 228). By contrast, studies focusing on micro-level *discourse* focus on “the meaning that emerges in a specific interactional situation” (Cooren et. al, 2007, p. 153).

Cooren et al. (2007) used both approaches in their study to demonstrate what might be called a dialectical relationship between *Discourse* and *discourse*. They determined that in order for certain *Discourses* to endure, it must be embodied in micro-level *discourses* across space and time. This hybrid approach, as they explain, requires paying attention to “the fine detail of what is said in naturally occurring interaction (the realm of *discourse*, lower case) while simultaneously remaining sensitive to the endurable character of a specific *Discourse*, upper case – a *discourse* that might appear to transcend the *hic and nunc* (here and now) of locally situated interaction” (p. 181, parenthesis added). Their analysis demonstrates how Doctors Without Borders’ mission statement endured over time and space, because the *discourses* surrounding the discussions and texts between the two groups constantly supported the *Discourse* of its mission statement and the values and ideologies embedded within. In this case, the researchers applied Latour’s (1987) notion of “immutable mobiles” to demonstrate how difficult it is for dominant *Discourses* to maintain the shape of certain ideas and values over time. Yet, their analysis also demonstrates how *discourses* do stabilize and become powerful enough to dictate collective activity based on certain ideas and values:

As shown in this article, a given *Discourse* must be embodied, materialized or even incarnated in *discourses*, that is, tokens of text or talk, in order for it to be reproduced, sustained and transported from one point to another, that is to become what Latour (1987) calls an *immutable mobile*. A given *Discourse* can thus maintain its shape

across time and space only if a lot of interactive work is done to assure the stability of its associations in the ordinary day-to-day activity of the people who embody it. (p. 153)

This project approaches the study of *Discourse/discourse* the same way Cooren et al. did by taking a hybrid approach demonstrating how metaphors in the e-mail messages at Enron helped support *Discourses* of “The New Economy,” but also disrupted them towards the end of the company’s life. We can see, for instance, the micro-level root metaphors and the metaphorical expressions identified in Chapter 3 as supporting the macro-level, metaphorical concepts of monetary value, mechanistic/business process metaphors in time period 1, while in time period 2, micro-level root metaphors and the expressions therein began to support different macro-level metaphor structures of ethical and human value. The important point to reiterate here is that these alternative *discourses* traveled through e-mail as a way to both reify *Discourse* through time and space, but also to challenge that *Discourse*.

If we think about this idea in terms of organizational identification, then, the way *discourse* travels will have an impact on how management uses *discourse* to establish identification between employees and the organization. In Cheney’s (1983b) study, for example, it was through oral messages, bulletins, handbooks, house organs, and the like. The *discourse* contained in these texts would need to support the *Discourse* of the organization in order to get the employees to identify. And employees would need constant exposure to the same *discourses* for the *Discourse* to endure.

On the other hand, *discourses* that do not support *Discourses* are what Law and Mol (2003) and Law and Singleton (2005) discuss as “mutable mobiles,” which are *discourses* that change their shape over time. Latour (1987) explains “mutability” and “immutability” in terms of the indelibility of inscriptions, or the articulations formed through discourse. When they are disrupted they lose their immutability. A mutable *discourse*, then, is one that has not hardened into reality by forming connections to other supporting concepts, people, or institutions that support *Discourse*. As such, Guney, Raymond, and Taylor (2006) explain that mutability “leaves room for learning, and adaptation to local circumstances, while at the same time retaining key elements of the network organization” (p. 21). In other words, the mutable mobile is where change can occur, because this is where new discourses are allowed to enter into existing structures, and “a process of gradual adaptation” (Law & Mol, 2003) to the new discourses. The argument here is that discourse which migrates from one location to another “is not, strictly speaking, altogether immutable” (Guney, Raymond, & Taylor, 2006, p. 21). In other words, *discourse* that runs counter to the dominant immutable *Discourse* is considered mutable, and, given time, may indeed lead to mutability in the macro-level *Discourse*.

In terms of identification, then, “mutable mobiles” would be *discourses* that disrupt the *Discourse* meant to foster identification among employees. In the Enron e-mails, one could argue that the dominant metaphors in time period 1 display *immutable* mobiles, whereas some of the metaphors in time period 2 can be considered *mutable* mobiles. In other words, in time period 1, the *discourses* that traveled through e-mail helped to reinforce the

Discourses Enron management constantly pushed to strengthen employee identification in time period 1. Here we see the dialectical relationship between *Discourse* and *discourse* to reify certain social structures. On the other hand, some of the *discourses* that traveled through e-mail in time period 2 had the potential to disrupt those larger *Discourses*, because it was in these *discourses* that employees began to disidentify from the *Discourses* of the new economy pushed by management. To be specific, the metaphors of monetary value and mechanistic/business process metaphors represent the *discourses* in the first time period that helped reinforce the larger *Discourse* of profit above all else. In contrast, the metaphors of ethical and human values in time period 2 introduced new *discourses* with the potential to disrupt those *Discourses*, challenging existing power structures – if at least temporarily.

As Guney, Raymond, and Taylor (2006) argued, mutable mobiles have the tendency to erode hierarchy because the alternative discourses are usually coming from below, where the majority of adjustments and learning occur. Management tends to get caught up in stagnant discourses in which their actual knowledge of the organization becomes “seriously deficient.” They argue that when someone is promoted to management, “The individual’s practical, hands-on knowledge of daily organizational activities tends to be frozen at the moment of promotion” (p. 22), in which the manager is called upon to represent a certain point of view, which represents what is supposed to be the dominant knowledge in the organization. Meanwhile, employees continue to adapt, and change the knowledge structures, such that, “What the *organization* ‘knows,’ as opposed to what its various *components* know, must be worked out in a play of politics. Whoever gets to *author* the organization is, by

definition, the one who has gained *authority*” (p. 22, emphasis in original). At some point, then, would it have been possible for the alternative metaphors presented in time period 2 to “author” the organization in place of the dominant metaphors of time period 1, giving employees the authority? As Law and Mol (2003) argued, gradual adaptation occurs, which suggests that, given enough time, if employees continued using these metaphors via this medium, perhaps existing power structures could have been replaced, and cultural change could have occurred at Enron.

E-mail and the distribution of text

As the examples from Carl (2005), Castor and Cooren (2006), and Guney, Raymond, and Taylor (2006) demonstrate, organizational texts, as media, are one of the crucial ways discourse travels. At Enron, this would include employee manuals, the company’s written ethics statement, the banners in the lobby, the website, and, of course, e-mail messages. Texts, then, take on agency with humans in the production and reproduction of organizational life. As such, McPhee (2004) argued, texts both enable and constrain (in a duality of structure mode) organizational members. At the same time, texts can be used to “make a difference,” or change power structures as Giddens’ dialectic of control indicates. I argue that e-mail messages, as hybrid forms of both speaking and writing (Baron, 1998), also constitute a *text* as they have a durable nature that can be copied, forwarded, filed away, and so forth. Therefore, e-mail serves as an agent, and helps make a difference in organizations in two ways: (1) Through the creation of conversational *discourse* and durable texts that can

support or disrupt *Discourses*; and (2) as a technology that delivers the *discourses* and texts that support or disrupt *Discourse*.

The next sections will further this argument about the distribution of discourse through communication technologies, and how that relates to identification/disidentification within Enron Corporation. These sections will specifically discuss the attributes of e-mail as a communication medium that support identification/disidentification.

E-mail, identification and the distribution of discourse

In modern organizations, a significant amount of discourse is traveling more through the Internet and e-mail than any other form of communication (Baron, 1998). These technologies enable a more ubiquitous distribution of persuasive language and textual materials that work to foster identification. Specifically, corporate websites and intranets allow for one-way, and supposedly, two-way communication between an organization and its stakeholders. As a dominant form of communication within the organization, e-mail messages could help indoctrinate members from both internal and external stakeholder groups. The effect of using Internet technologies such as e-mail, websites, PDAs, and blogs, is that organizations can disseminate their messages to more people more efficiently and more often than ever before. For example, Sivunen (2006) and Scott and Fontenot (1999) demonstrate how Group Decision Support Systems – or online meeting programs – can be used to disseminate organizational messages to employees in remote locations. This virtual contact with employees helps foster identification from afar, they argued. For other stakeholders, it can perhaps mean increased contact from the organization. Sommerfeldt

(2007), for example, examined how e-mail action alerts played a large role in Christian Right groups' efforts to reach their membership, and to build a strong political base. E-mail contact is faster, and cheaper, than regular mail or phone calls and therefore allowed the organizations to get more messages out more frequently to their members.

At Enron, as the analyses in Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated, employee e-mail messages reinforced dominant metaphors of monetary value and rational, business-oriented practices in time period 1. These *discourses* helped reinforce *Discourses* supporting Enron's culture of greed, conformity and competition, and even larger *Discourses* of Western organizational ideologies of rationality over emotion. Emotion in the workplace is inevitable, Ashforth and Humphrey (1995) say. But more often than not rationality is favored over emotionality. As a result, the expression of emotion at work tends to become taboo. Ashford and Humphrey argue that, "American organizations have waged a campaign throughout the 20th century to control workplace emotions, principally anger" (p. 101). And, as Callanan (2003) argued specifically in relation to the Enron case: "Organizations reward individuals who are able to control their emotions and their behaviors in line with a corporate culture that discourages dissent, frowns upon outspokenness, and expects a blind acceptance of senior decisions" (p. 33). The e-mails in time period 1 – containing the overarching metaphors of monetary value, mechanistic/business process metaphors, and team in terms of cohesive vision – support discourses of rationality above emotion, which contributed to the process of identification at Enron. In the case of Enron, this is one of the not so positive ways that e-mail contributed to the distribution of discourse.

E-mail as an agent in disidentification

However, if understood as an agent in the Enron network, e-mail not only played a role in reinforcing the use of the language that reified the cultural norms at Enron, but also provided the means for employees, toward the end of the company's life, to begin to reorient in relation to those norms and to use language in a different way, enabling certain levels of *disidentification*. In many ways, in fact, the potential for disidentification is inherent in this medium. As many CMC scholars argue, communication via this medium creates a feeling of disinhibition that is not found in face-to-face or telephone communication. "As a result, CMC often allows people to feel more comfortable and confident in their discussions" (Kato et al, 2007). Baron (1998) argues that, "interlocutors are more forthcoming with ideas and information when they cannot see or hear one another than when they can" (p. 157). Overall, Garton and Wellman (1995) sum up the social effects of e-mail in organizations broadly:

People are more uninhibited, nonconformist and conflictual when using e-mail; groups are more polarized and take longer to reach consensus. ...E-mail increases access to new people; weakens spatial, temporal and status barriers, and provides access to information that would otherwise be unavailable. When people communicate electronically, work groups become more fluid. People can participate actively in more groups, and those on the periphery get more involved. (p. 1)

There are several ways in which the e-mails in the Enron database support the above statement. The most striking is the "uninhibited, nonconformist and conflictual" language used in the messages from time period 2. The vitriolic messages towards Lay are particularly

illustrative of this. There are also conflictual messages in this time period as employees began to shift back and forth between metaphors of ethical value and monetary value, as demonstrated in Chapter 3. In many of the messages, both metaphors appeared, indicating that employees were beginning to feel conflict between the two value systems. And finally, the messages show work groups becoming more fluid, as Garton and Wellman suggested, as employees at Enron began to more actively participate in message production in time period 2. Garner, Leahy, Rubenstein and Templeton (2009) support this point in their finding that networks which previously did not exist in e-mail messages in the database began to form toward the end of the company's life. In these messages employees expressed dissent toward management and company policies via e-mail. In addition, Diesner, Frantz, and Carley (2005) found that the number of Enron employees involved in e-mail exchanges increased, concluding that "previously disconnected people began to engage in mutual communication, thus strengthening the cohesion of the system" (p. 214). This strengthening of the system, coupled with a larger number of people engaging in messaging, was largely made possible by the existence of e-mail as a communication tool. As previously reported, employees likely did not have access to Lay any other way. In this sense, e-mail, as a communication medium, had "political strength" as Akrich argued, and acted as a "hybrid agent" with its users to make a difference as new networks of people began engaging in discourse and using different metaphor structures.

In these examples, it is clear how e-mail served as a way for *discourse* to travel, helping to strengthen certain value systems in time period 1, while potentially giving

employees a way to express identification with value systems in time period 2. Thus, e-mail played a role in helping employees at Enron to bridge the dialectical tensions of coordination and control discussed in this project. The e-mail messages from time period 1 demonstrate employees' identification with the dominant metaphors of monetary value, team cohesion of values, and unemotional, mechanistic/business process metaphors. In contrast, the e-mails from time period 2 demonstrate employees disidentifying with these metaphors in favor of more emotion-laden messages with metaphors of ethical values, human values, and religion. The employees' use of e-mail helped them to *bridge* that tension between identification and disidentification as they reoriented their value systems away from dominant power structures. As Latour (1993) argued, the person plus the tool being used is more powerful than the person without the tool. Or, as Cooren and Taylor (1997) put it: "David downs Goliath, even though David is 'weaker.' It is not David, however, who defeats Goliath, but a hybrid 'actant' – a 'David-with-slingshot.'" (p. 247). E-mail, then, combined with its users ("employee-with-e-mail") became the 'sling-shot' (almost literally in some cases!) that allowed Enron employees to express themselves to Ken Lay, thereby bridging the dialectical tensions and potentially disrupting power structures. Even if only fleeting, the e-mail messages containing metaphors of ethical value, human value, and religion, demonstrated a different set of discourses, which show the employees identifying not with the company's values as they did in time period 1, but a different set of values based not on money and profit, but ethics and human values. In this way, they demonstrate resistance to the power structures which dictated the use of monetary metaphors and rational business processes.

E-mail as “technotherapy”

In sum, technology in the workplace “rather than being artifacts alone ... constitute and are constituted by networks of interacting human, organizational, and artifactual entities or actors” (Hakken, 1993, p. 110). As such, e-mail as a communication medium and a *distributor* of discourse can help maintain power structures, but it can also help disrupt them. Based upon this articulation of theories of extended agency, then, an argument can be made as follows: by giving the employees an outlet to both identify with and disidentify from the company, e-mail plus its users served as a “hybrid agent” in the social network at Enron. Meyrowitz (1997) asks: how does the choice of one medium over another affect a particular situation or interaction? In the case of Enron, particularly as demonstrated in the e-mails from time period 2, the choice of e-mail over other communication media allowed the employees to express themselves in much different ways than they would have in other communication settings. In this way, the choice of e-mail was inherently *strategic* (Conrad, 1994). And, even though Ken Lay might not have even seen the e-mails, employees were at least able to express themselves, and *disidentify*, from management and the overarching value system of profit above all else, via this medium. This outpouring of emotion from employees, the vitriolic language, and the shifting of metaphors in time period 2 is particularly remarkable given what has been described as the oppressive culture at Enron. As Watkins (2009) contends, it was highly unusual for employees to behave in this manner, particularly over e-mail. Watkins also said she believes e-mail was used to express these

emotions because it could possibly have been the *only* outlet in which lower level employees could reach Lay.

If you were going to communicate with Ken Lay you weren't going to leave him a voice mail because it didn't even go to voice mail, it went to a secretary. And she wasn't going to let just anybody leave him a voice mail. So, more than likely it was their only way to communicate with him. (Watkins, 2009)

At the very least, then, e-mail served as a form of “techno-therapy” for employees to vent, even if Lay didn't receive the messages. There are studies in the field of psychology, in fact, that tout the therapeutic nature of writing out emotional thoughts via e-mail (Murphy & Mitchell, 1998; Sheese, Brown, & Graziano, 2004). “Writing about trauma, particularly about feelings and emotions related to trauma, appears to have a long-term positive impact on a variety of physiological and psychological health outcomes” (Sheese et. al, 2004, p. 458). Whether the employees at Enron considered the company's demise as traumatic or not, they certainly felt the need to express their emotions about it via e-mail. In this sense, e-mail served as an empowering and enabling device in the social network at Enron. Employees eventually found it to be a tool enabling them to challenge certain dominant discourses. The irony in this particular situation is that if the employees had been able to express themselves all along, the company might have had a more ethical, open culture. In other words, had the company not gone bankrupt just a few months after these *discourses* began to travel through e-mail, perhaps *Discourses* could have been altered to the point of generating cultural change in the organization. Perhaps a kinder, gentler, more stable Enron would have emerged.

In the sense of social networking, e-mail serves as an enabling tool for employees not only to express themselves but also to share important ideas and concepts that could improve operations. As Latour (2005) argues, for ANT, the social “is the name of a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes” (p. 65). At least for the moment that the employees wrote and sent those e-mails, the social relationship changed for them. In many ways, though, once they felt they had nothing to lose, perhaps the social relationship for many employees changed permanently as many of them lost respect for their leaders. Law (1992) argues that ANT often uncovers power in all actors, regardless of hierarchy or social order.

Finally, theories of extended agency like ANT do give us a sense of how objects act as agents in a network, and how that can affect the actions of other agents, altering social and power networks. Technologies offer us certain affordances (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988), which allow specific types of behaviors regardless of the designers’ intentions. Cooren, Thompson, Canestraro and Bodor (2006) argue that organizational scholars must take these affordances into account when examining the process of organizing:

When a given (human or nonhuman) actor makes a difference, that is, does something, that action can always be appropriated by or attributed to another actor (whether collective or individual) who can be identified in the chain of action; this identification can be more a matter of a rhetorical strategy in the way humans depict the world. (pp. 539-540)

The Enron Corpus, as a fragmented assortment of e-mails from that particular workplace, gives us a sense of how this technology helped enable the creation of and distribution of these texts to help the employees there deal with the company's downfall. In so doing, the technology plus the employees served as co-agents in altering discourses in the organization. The question remains, however, whether these *discourses* would have endured enough to change the larger, overarching *Discourses* that drove the organization to bankruptcy in the first place.

So far this chapter has demonstrated the power of e-mail in helping reinforce certain dominant discourses that maintain organizational cultures. But it also demonstrates how this technology can become a thing of power in the hands of employees, at least momentarily, as they attempt to disidentify from those dominant discourses. Because discourse can be so widely distributed in both time and space through this medium, it is worth considering further how this technology could be used rhetorically to engage employees in power structures, or, how it helps employees *author* the dominant discourses in the process of organizing. This, of course, could be a positive or a negative thing. But in the case of Enron, if employees were able to distribute the alternative discourses earlier, and to more people over a longer period of time, perhaps it could have meant the difference between success and failure. The next section addresses that issue.

E-mail text as projections to the future

As I argued in Chapter 4, this project also enables us to see *what is possible* through language, and how alternative language use at Enron might have affected future discourse in

the organization had it survived. In this way, I argue that this project demonstrates what Bisel (2009) refers to as “projections” on future-oriented actions and structure. He (2009) argues that current theories contain what he calls a “duality bias” for past and present discourse. In so doing, both approaches are missing a potentially vital third element – “future orientation of past and present action and structure.” From both structuration theory and theories of extended agency, we see how the acts of agents, whether human or objects, can “become the rules, resources, and imbrications that structure our *past*, which results in enabling, constraining, and structuring our *present* agency” (p. 630, emphasis in original). Agency, Bisel argues, could be considered the *present* in that actions from agents at any given time can change the past rules and resources that enable and constrain us. Thus, a *future-oriented* consideration – or projection – of past and present action and structure should also be considered.

Bisel (2009) argues, “much agency in organizations is directly enabled and constrained (i.e. structured) by what is believed to be possible or desirable” (p. 630). Perhaps by using the alternative metaphors of ethical and human value in time period 2, the Enron employees were reflecting what they believed at that time was possible and/or desirable. One could certainly argue that by using alternative metaphors so antithetical to the monetary, business process metaphors from time period 1, employees were at least indicating that values related to ethical and human value *were* desirable. Whether or not they considered it possible is not clear.

Nevertheless, this future-oriented approach makes for an interesting perspective in relation to the Enron e-mails analyzed here. Could those e-mails towards the end of the company's life be a "projection" of what might have been possible in the future had those discourses of ethical and human value continued to endure (or become immutable)? In looking at the alternative discourses in time period 2, since they do represent *what is possible*, perhaps we can at least hypothetically project that discourse at Enron might have been quite different had the company survived the crisis in the waning months of 2001. Employees during that time period, in some cases, took past discourses of monetary value, mixed those in with new discourses of ethical values, and, in some cases, completely replaced one for the other. Those *present* actions could very well have meant *future* discourses very different from what had dominated in the past, particularly since the alternative metaphors were traveling via e-mail, a medium which enables discourse to be distributed to more people faster.

The language in the e-mails analyzed here are, however, *discourses* specific to Enron Corporation. Given the fact that the larger-level *Discourses* of the new economy have been powerful enough to influence our entire culture, to the point where we still see corporate excesses like those of the banking industry, could those *discourses* in the Enron e-mails have endured or become immutable? Cooren et al. (2007) described how difficult it is for *Discourses* to become dominant and enduring. They must be repeated through *discourses* in a variety of different settings in the process of organizing for them to become immutable. It might be a stretch, then, to argue that e-mail interaction could change an entire system of

Discourse at Enron without those alternative *discourses* finding their way into other written materials and the overall cultural attitude in the organization. The larger *Discourses* of the new economy might have been powerful enough to override the *discourses* of ethical human value if the company had gotten back on its feet and gone back to “business as usual” concerned mainly with making more profits.

Perhaps a better way to examine how present discourses could lead to future action is to start with what Bisel (2009) referred to as *disorganization*. He argues that in addition to a duality bias in organizational discourse studies, we are also guilty of an *organizing bias*, meaning that language can also *disorganize* (Bisel, 2009). Rehn and O’Doherty (2007), argue:

Logically, it is possible to see that one cannot have organization without disorganization and that order and disorder are co-implicated in tense and antagonistic ways, which is constitutive of a dynamic that manifests as phenomena circulating within the socio-technical assemblage of organization. (p. 104)

What Rehn and O’Doherty (2007) suggest here are two things: organization/disorganization form yet another dialectical tension in organizations – that is, there must be disorganization in order for organization to occur and vice versa. However, it also suggests that disorganization ultimately leads to organization in different ways over time. If we discuss that concept in terms of ANT, there will be times when the outcome of disorganization will “black box” itself into a different kind of organization, or create new rules and resources (à la structuration theory) that could lead to different ways of organizing – a *reorganization*, if you

will. Hence, if we consider the alternative discourses in the Enron e-mails from time period 2 as *disorganizing* discourse, perhaps that disorganization could have led to a different way of organizing had it continued. The e-mails stressing ethical and human value, for instance, might have reorganized Enron from a mechanistic, profit-driven organization to one in which people would begin to reorganize according to those alternative values. The very fact that so many of those e-mails exhibited strong emotions compared to those in time period 1 also suggests the potential for new ways of organizing in the future.

Putnam and Mumby (1992), in fact, argued that feminist discourses openly allowing emotion as a normal part of workplace life, rather than as a sign of weakness as dictated in dominant masculine discourses, is one way to organize differently for a more open, respectful organizational environment. Or, as Ashford and Humphrey (1995) argued:

The overrationalized view of organizations, and the consequent attempts to regulate emotion have made it difficult to recognize the pervasiveness and utility of emotion in organizational life and how qualities of the heart give value and meaning to qualities of the head. The ubiquitous role of emotion can be illustrated by applications to motivation, leadership, and group dynamics. (p. 109)

In fact, it is the employees on the front lines, rather than management, Guney, Raymond, and Taylor (2006) argued, who are the ever-evolving elements in the process of organizing. In the Enron case, discourses in time period 2 were evolving toward highly emotion-driven discourses of ethical and human value and away from the rational, mechanistic business process metaphors from time period 1. As such, the employees had the capacity to be the

ones who “authored” the organization. E-mail as “techno-therapy,” then, might have actually worked as more than just a way for employees to vent, but as a way for them to introduce new discourses over time and space, to disorganize and reorganize.

It is important to remember, though, that there were still employees in time period 2 who continued to reify, or “co-author,” if you will, certain dominant discourses dictated by management. E-mail in this case helped reify those discourses. Some of the religious metaphors, for example, upheld Ken Lay as a messianic leader who would save the company from doom. And the military/war metaphors in that time period depicted employees who were willing to fight to the end with their general – Lay – to bring the company back to greatness. And finally, many of the metaphors of the human body showed more concern for Lay than for the employees themselves. In these messages, employees are still strongly identifying with Lay and the company, and so signs of disorganization are not as strong as in some of the other messages. If we consider these messages in terms of future-oriented action and structure, the company would likely have gone back to business as usual before the crisis.

¹ Latour does not discuss objects as agents, but actants, and humans plus objects as “hybrid actors.” He explains: “We must learn to attribute – redistribute actions to many more agents than are acceptable in either the materialist [guns kill people] or the socialist [people kill people] account. Agents can be human or (like a gun) nonhuman, and each can have goals ... since the word ‘agent’ in the case of nonhumans is uncommon, a better

term, as we have seen, is actant ... It is neither people nor guns that kill. Responsibility for the action must be shared among the various actants” (p. 180). However, the organizational communication scholars using aspects of ANT do in some cases refer to objects as *agents*. In that sense, they are translating Latour’s term actant to mean agent.

CHAPTER 6

ENRON AS REPRESENTATIVE ANECDOTE

In the aftermath of the Enron debacle, during an ethics panel discussion about the company's failure at the University of Santa Clara, Hanson (2002) said:

The collapse of Enron is probably one of the most significant events in the history of American business. Within six months, the company went from one of the most respected in the United States to bankruptcy – an unparalleled failure. What went wrong? (§27)

As this study demonstrates, the answer to that question is anything but straightforward. Certainly, one point of view is that the Enron debacle may be blamed on “a few bad CEOs” who were greedy, callous, and arrogant. However, the analyses in the preceding chapters indicates that the fall of Enron may instead be more accurately “blamed” on a number of micro and macro-level discourses that shaped the actions and assumptions of those associated with the organization, both externally and internally. The overarching, macro-level Discourses of “the new economy” guided Enron executives to adopt a certain rationale and ideology for doing business. Internally, on the micro-level, these discursive formulations seeped into Enron's organizational-level discourse, not only for management, but for employees as well. The wide reliance on dominant metaphors of monetary value and mechanistic/business process metaphors are illustrative of this. By adopting these metaphors as dominant, those inside the company adopted a scene-purpose perspective. The new economy, as *scene*, called for Enron to focus on profits above all else as an overarching

purpose until the end of the company's life, when employees began to adopt alternative metaphorical structures.

In turn, the company's outside support systems bought into the hyperbole as well. As Sherron Watkins observed, Enron "was just a great client to have, so their accountants and lawyers and bankers would do what they wanted" (Beenen & Pinto, 2009, p. 279). The blind loyalty was *so* blind that Arthur Andersen, founded in 1913, and considered one of the top five accounting firms in the world at the time, was convicted of obstruction of justice for shredding documents related to the Enron case. The company subsequently surrendered its accounting license and ceased operations¹.

It is important to point out, though, that the scandal that brought down Enron and Arthur Andersen is not an isolated case. During that same period of time, numerous other companies – namely Tyco, Adelphia, WorldCom, and HealthSouth² – also either went bankrupt or came close to it as a result of accounting fraud similar to that of Enron's. Those examples suggest that the macro-level *Discourses* of the new economy operated on a global scale beyond Enron. One could easily argue, in fact, that the near collapse of the banking industry in the U.S. over the past two years, and the resulting economic crisis, is also a symptom of this macro-level, free market discourse. Alan P. Warnick, former vice president of organizational development and training at Enron, recently remarked:

Based on our recent devastation in the financial services industry, we certainly haven't learned much from Enron. When I see what has gone on at AIG and other financial services organizations, it sure reminds me of what went on at Enron: a

relaxation of regulations that allows people to take risks that ultimately led to greed and corruption – but this time it is on a vastly greater, industry-wide, global scale.

The huge economic pain that we currently are feeling is to a great extent due to systemic similar conditions that led to the Enron catastrophe. (Madsen & Vance, 2009, p. 217)

So while the collapse of Enron and Andersen affected tens of thousands of people a decade ago, the same kind of hubris and excess is now affecting millions. In the early 21st century, the corporations that engaged in excess and corruption were allowed to go bankrupt. Now, we have institutions that are “too big to fail,” and when they engage in excess, the populace must “bail them out.” It appears, then, that not only have we not learned anything from Enron, but the problem has reached a new level.

Despite the numerous examples of corporate excess and fraud beyond Enron, particularly the most recent ones on a larger scale – Enron, for some reason, seems to this day to be discussed as an extreme case of corporate corruption, an anomaly of some sort. Given the discourses of the new economy, I argue, instead, that the Enron case is a *representative anecdote* (Burke, 1945) for corporate greed and corruption. Representative anecdotes³ are “named stories, and the attitudes they represent” (Mahan-Hayes & Aden, 2003, p. 36). As a representative anecdote, then, the Enron story is truly to be considered a warning for how certain discourses can lead to corporate corruption rather than simply as an isolated case. The *attitude* that laissez-faire, free market discourse brings about has obviously led to more than just the Enron case. The “Enron story” continues to repeat itself, and so this

story is representative of present and future problems. As Brummett (1984) explained, the representative anecdote is a story that maintains its form (Burke, 1932)⁴: “Because one is looking for an abstract dramatic form, one is looking for the same *story structure* to be told in different guises” (Brummett, 1984, p. 163, emphasis in original). One should therefore be able to look back on the Enron case to find answers as to why that story has become so familiar on a systemic level.

In his explanation of the representative anecdote, Burke (1945) argues that language contains both *selections* and *deflections* of reality. “Insofar as the vocabulary meets the needs of reflection, it has the necessary scope. In its selectivity, it is reduction” (1945, p. 29). Crable (2000) explains that *deflective* terminology becomes a simplification of the subject – leaving out much of the account that would give the critic a complete picture. It involves “looking away from one’s subject matter in hopes of seeing it more clearly,” (p. 325), leading to an incomplete interpretation. *Reflective* discourse, on the other hand, simplifies the subject matter while still retaining enough scope to fully examine it. The representative anecdote “is not a rejection of other perspectives, but a harmonious arrangement of them in a new – dialectical – ordering” (Crable, 2000, p. 326). In the Enron case, as has been demonstrated in this project, we see the macro- and micro-level discourses of monetary value and profit working in a dialectical fashion. As indicated in Chapter 3, these discourses in many ways stemmed from larger systemic discourses of the new economy, which were adopted by Enron management and dictated to employees as an overarching value system. Employees, in turn, reified these discourses and were enabled and constrained by them. Chapter 4 then explained

how these discourses indicated employee identification with the ideology of profit above all else, which, again, reified the value systems pushed by management and new economy discourse.

In sum, selecting the Enron case as an exception, or an extreme case, presents a reductionist stance – a *deflection* from overarching discourses of capitalism that have obviously continued to breed corporate excess and corruption. In addition, blaming the company’s demise on “a few bad CEOs,” or on “new economy” discourse alone, also results in a reductionist stance that leaves out important ingredients for seeing the subject matter completely. One must look at all of these factors to gain the necessary scope. As Boje and Rosile (2005) argued, the ongoing “tragic” perspective on the Enron case is simply an “effort to generate smoke and mirrors that shroud goings on in the wider political economy” (p. 88), leaving out the crucial involvement of free market economics, the government, and other institutions:

Our hypothesis is that conscribed tragic narration across education, news media, and political fronts keeps the charade in play. ...In the case of Enron, tragic narration diverts public attention from the epic narration of the White House’s Enrongate to the mere tragic hubris of errant executives and their accountants and lawyers. In sum, rather than choose one over the other, we want to see how tragic and epic narratives interact. (p. 88)

This project demonstrates the two narratives interacting in terms of scope and reduction, or how the macro and micro-level discourses (*Discourses* and *discourses*) worked

dialectically as the Enron story unfolded. Considering the Enron case this way enables the critic to see, to *reflect* as Burke says, on a variety of players – internal and external – that contributed to the discourses responsible for the Enron fiasco. Brummett (1984) argued that Burke’s representative anecdote contrasts well with the pentadic and cluster-agon methods used earlier in this project, as it is a more macro-level tool to accompany the word-specific focus of those methods. Looking at the Enron case as a representative anecdote, then, helps bring this project full circle.

From the Enron representative anecdote, we learn not only how this level of corporate failure could occur so easily and quickly, but also how it might have been averted. The dominant metaphors in time period 2 of ethical values, the human body, and religion, demonstrate in some cases an outright rejection of new economy discourse compared to time period 1. In this way, the perspective changed from scene-purpose to scene-agent, where money becomes a devil term, and responsibility for the company’s demise is placed directly into the hands of human agents. Had those discourses been distributed more widely over a longer period of time, perhaps Enron could have served as the representative anecdote for how greed and corruption could be *derailed* through discourse, as employees used alternative metaphors to bridge dialectical tensions of coordination and control. The analysis in Chapter 5 demonstrated how e-mail plays a role in the wide dissemination of both dominant and alternative discourses. If the company had continued to operate beyond December 2001, perhaps this medium could have helped begin the process by which present discourses become future projection of what the company could be. The Enron case might then have

been able to serve as the representative anecdote not only for how new economy discourses can be disrupted, but also for how e-mail, as hybrid agent with its users, can provide the means for alternative discourses to disrupt them.

Future directions and limitations

As argued in Chapter 5, however, it is difficult to determine whether the alternative discourses in the Enron e-mails would have made much of a difference given the fact that the company went bankrupt shortly after employees began using them. We may be able to draw better conclusions from a company that survived bankruptcy, such as WorldCom. In that case, one would be able to analyze the discourse before, during and *after* bankruptcy, in which case it might be possible to see whether future-oriented discourse would have led to disorganization to the point of *reorganization* through discourse. Of course, bankruptcy does lead to a new way of organizing in that it requires a level of restructuring that would undoubtedly change the face of the organization to a degree. However, what is being referred to here is a new way of organizing through *discourse*, in which different *value* systems would emerge rather than just a different structural organization. Nevertheless, this project does demonstrate how metaphor enabled employees at Enron to bridge dialectical tensions with the use of e-mail. The analysis demonstrates that it is possible, at least for fleeting moments, for employees to author the organization against management value systems, and that new communication technologies are a powerful tool in those efforts. However, since there are indications that macro-level *Discourses* of the new economy endured beyond Enron, could those micro-level *discourses* have made much of a difference?

There are several other theoretical questions in addition to the one above that call for more study with regard to future-oriented action and structure, and the concept of disorganizing. First, are disidentification and disorganization inherently synonymous? That is, when employees use alternative discourses to disidentify from overarching organizational values, does that mean, in terms of the *durée*, that disorganization is occurring? Does disorganization go hand in hand with resistance? If so, what are the implications of that in terms of future action and structure? Similarly, how can we study disorganization in terms of *future* organization?

This project suggests that one way to approach all of those questions is via a longitudinal study of e-mail messages. The analysis of the Enron database has demonstrated that this kind of text can be fruitful in examining organizational discourse over time, and the potential ramifications of any changes that occur over time. There are other existing e-mail texts available for this type of study, such as a large set of messages related to the 2003 Space Shuttle Columbia disaster released by NASA. In addition, government e-mail messages are public record, and therefore provide resources for future study. There may be other private corporations, as well, that might be willing to release large sets of messages for this kind of study. Of course, we always have to keep in mind that e-mail messages have a tendency to disappear, as companies and governments have been accused of deleting messages that may implicate leaders of wrongdoing. For example, the Bush administration has been accused of deleting e-mail messages related to harsh interrogation tactics of suspected terrorists (Johnson, 2010). And, former North Carolina Governor Mike Easley's

administration has been accused of deleting e-mail messages that should have been kept in accordance with public records law (Eisley, 2008).

Nevertheless, as an attempt to bring interpretive organizational discourse studies into the 21st century through the examination of e-mail text, this project demonstrates the value of studying the role of communication technologies in the process of organizing. E-mail text, as argued in Chapter 5, can play a major role in the *distribution* of discourse over space and time, which allows for discourse to travel faster and further to more people (Sivunen, 2006; Sommerfelt, 2007). Organizational *Discourses* can be reified by *discourses* traveling via this medium, as the messages from time period 1 demonstrate, or the *discourses* can disrupt those dominant *Discourses*, as those messages in time period 2 illustrate. The question then becomes, what role does e-mail play in *disorganization*? Perhaps the mutability of the texts in time period 2, as opposed to the immutability of those from time period 1, indicates disorganization in process. In turn, that disorganization could possibly indicate what future action and structure might have been like had the company been able to avoid, or at least emerge from, bankruptcy.

Of course, as with any study, there are limitations to this project. One of those limitations is indicated by how easy it is to delete e-mail messages from servers. It would not be a stretch to argue that this likely occurred at Enron along with the shredding of numerous documents implicating company leaders of fraud. The Enron e-mail database itself is also limited in that it only includes messages sent and received by a small number of employees (specifically, the top 151 executives). The database nevertheless offers a useful snapshot of

how employees used metaphor to reify certain dominant discourses related to profit and greed in time period 1, and rejecting those same metaphors in time period 2, replacing them with metaphors of ethical and human value. In addition, studying an organization through e-mail messages posthumously like this is limited in that it is difficult to supplement the findings with discourses obtained through physical observation and interviews. This limitation has been mitigated somewhat in this project through the interview with Sherron Watkins, in addition to including other printed employee accounts, and company documents and videos, to demonstrate how certain discourses permeated the organization in contexts beyond e-mail. And finally, since this is an interpretive, rhetorical study of artifacts from one organization, illumination and explication of the workings of organizational discourse are the goals, rather than generalizability. However, this project demonstrates the value of this kind of interpretive study in reference to how discourses work on a macro-level that can have a more global effect, but also on the micro-level as to how individual organizations have their own, specific discourses which drive employees identification, and hence, organizational culture as a result of these macro-level discourses.

Conclusions and implications

In closing, this project began with three overarching goals: to explore how metaphor helps create, maintain and change organizational discourse; how the use of metaphor can transform dialectical tensions; and to examine the role communication technology, specifically e-mail, may play in this same process. The rhetorical and theoretical analyses here have shown that metaphor use can, at times, maintain dominant discourses while at

other times, lead to potential change. In changing dominant metaphors from monetary value to ethical value, employees at Enron were able to bridge dialectical tensions of identification/disidentification and power/resistance. In turn, e-mail served as an agent with its users in this process by giving employees a way to communicate these alternative metaphors to Ken Lay. What does this mean in terms of how organizational discourse works? At the very least, it demonstrates how Burke's (1937) perspective by incongruity operates, as employee use of alternative metaphors illustrated a change in employee perspectives on the company, its values and its leaders. And although employees were probably unaware of their use of metaphors, much less the potential power of those metaphors, this project shows the value of interpretive organizational communication research. For it is through this kind of research that an individual organization's use of language can be illuminated, and suggestions may be made from those analyses as to how language can challenge dominant discourses in organization's with oppressive cultures like Enron.

Deetz and Mumby (1985) suggested at one point that perhaps metaphor training programs could be introduced to teach employees new ways of expression.

The chances of success of a metaphor training program are probably limited, but the possibility of providing new ways of expression seems within reach, especially when the new metaphors are in some sense compatible with the dominant metaphor system, or when major structural changes are occurring. (p. 383)

This case shows that employees do know how to express themselves differently than what management dictates, but only when the situation became dire, and possibly only when the

dominant metaphor system was already breaking down. What was needed was a way for Enron employees to use metaphor to make the familiar strange in an ongoing day-to-day manner. At Enron, certainly there were major structural changes at work, which led employees to use alternative metaphors. The main issue is that the employees probably were unaware of their use of metaphor in either time period, much less how those metaphors structured their experience in the process of organizing.

Perhaps, however, business schools can begin teaching how language structures our experience and use case studies like Enron to demonstrate how employees might have been able to make a difference through the use of language. These points are already being covered in communication programs, but those programs unfortunately don't often reach students in MBA programs. Jameson (2000), in a commentary on how business communication programs may have contributed to cases of corporate greed and corruption argued that in many ways business schools are responsible for corruption because they do not focus enough on big picture discourses:

We can't claim credit for the success and achievements of our students if we don't also accept some of the responsibility for their mistakes and failures. Business communication courses focus more on individual communication choices and strategies than on the collective impact of communication within larger, economic, cultural, political, and societal contexts. We need to get students to ask, "What is the significance of the report, presentation, etc. in the larger context?" (p. 503).

She goes on to argue that programs that teach future corporate leaders “business communication” skills wield the power to teach students responsibility and ethical communication practices at the very least. I echo her argument and suggest that the ethical use of language is an important step in becoming more responsible in teaching future business leaders.

Or perhaps Kenneth Burke better explains that idea in his argument that everyone is a critic. We must first recognize, however, how language *uses us*. It is then that we can employ some of the methods he sets forth for understanding not only language, but motive. In the case of metaphor, he argues for perspective by incongruity, in which we employ different metaphors to illuminate the alternatives to existing metaphors and how they affect us and what motivates us. It is clear from some of the e-mail messages examined here that employees were in fact engaging in perspective by incongruity, perhaps just not consciously. Stepping outside of one’s own language system is not an easy task, but this project shows that it can be done and that doing so has the potential to bring about discursive change in the process of organizing.

¹ In 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the conviction as a result of faulty jury instructions. The company, however, still has not resumed operations. For more information, see <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/04-368.ZS.html>.

² Two Tyco executives were accused in 2002 and convicted in 2005 of stealing more than \$150 million from the company, which they called “compensation” (For more information, see <http://www.secinfo.com/dVut2.11yz.htm>). “The sentences end a case that exposed the executives’ extravagant lifestyle after they pilfered some \$600 million from the company including a \$2 million toga birthday party for [the CEO’s] wife on a Mediterranean island and an \$18 million Manhattan apartment with a \$6,000 shower curtain” (Associated Press, 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9399803/>). The company survived the scandal. Adelphia, at one time the fifth largest cable company in the U.S., filed for bankruptcy in 2002. Five executives were charged and two convicted of securities fraud. Like Enron, Adelphia imploded after it was forced to report more than \$2 billion in off-balance sheet debt (For more info, see <http://www.sec.gov/news/press/2002-110.htm>). WorldCom filed for bankruptcy in July, 2002, replacing Enron as the largest bankruptcy filing in the U.S. From 1999 to 2002, the company used fraudulent accounting methods to mask its declining earnings to keep the stock price from suffering. An investigation found that the company was underreporting expenses and inflating revenues to the tune of \$11 billion. For more info, see <http://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/723527/000093176303001862/dex991.htm>). HealthSouth barely avoided Chapter 11 bankruptcy after executives were accused of falsely inflating earnings by \$1.4 billion to meet investor expectations and to control the

price of the company's stock. For more info, see

<http://www.sec.gov/litigation/litreleases/lr18044.htm>.

³ The representative anecdote has been used as a method of inquiry on its broadest level, and “as way to unify otherwise-disconnected bits of discourse” (Crabbe, 2000), on its basest level. Crabbe (2000) argued the Burke did not intend for it to be a method, but rather as a way for him to justify dramatism as a superior method of critical inquiry. Moreover, it helps the critic to justify our inquiries’ presuppositions. “It calls us, in short, to enter into inquiry with the *correct* set of presuppositions, presuppositions that are *adequate* to our subject matter” (p. 322, emphasis in original). In this project, I am referring to the representative anecdote in the way that Crabbe describes.

⁴ In *Counterstatement*, Burke introduces form in terms of literature. “A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence” (p. 124). We may argue that the Enron case, as representative anecdote, presents “repetitive form,” which involves “the restatement of a theme by new details” (p. 125).

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