Chapter 4

Presentational Rituals:

Talking Ideology

> They rebel in their heart against a subordination to which they have
> subjected themselves and from which they derive actual profit. They
> consent to serve and they blush to obey.
>
> —Alexis de Tocqueville
> *Democracy in America*

"It's not just work—it's a celebration!" is a company slogan one often hears from members attempting to describe life at Tech. Less formally, many refer to Tech as "a song and dance company." And, more privately, some agree that "you have to do a lot of bullshitting in groups." Like much of the self-descriptive conventional wisdom that permeates the company, these observations—whether offered straightforwardly or cynically—contain a valid observation: everyday life at Tech is replete with ritual.

Ritual, most generally speaking, is "a rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance."[1] At Tech, as insiders well know, members regularly participate in a variety of such structured face-to-face gatherings: speeches, presentations, meetings, lectures, parties, training workshops, and so forth. Dave Carpenter's planned appearance at Lyndsville and Ellen Cohen's culture seminar are examples, along with more routinely occurring events such as Tom O'Brien's weekly team meeting with the members of the ABC project. Whatever else they are intended to accomplish, these events are also occasions where participants, speaking as agents for the corporate interest, use familiar symbols—presentational devices, stylized forms of expression, company slogans and artifacts—to articulate, illustrate, and exemplify what members in good standing are to think, feel, and do. In short, these gatherings, which I will

refer to as presentational rituals, are where the organizational ideology—the managerial version of Tech culture and the member role it prescribes—is dramatized and brought to life. How this occurs, and what it means to members, is the topic of this chapter.

The meaning and consequences of ritual have long been an object of sociological and anthropological inquiry. Despite the emergence of conflicting schools of thought, most students of ritual see it as a crucial link between ideologies that provide the framework for collective life and the associated forms of individual experience.[2] In this view, rituals—ranging from the mass spectacles of modern politics to the seemingly inconsequential routines of everyday social interaction—are collectively produced, structured, and dramatic occasions that create a "frame," a shared definition of the situation within which participants are expected to express and confirm sanctioned ways of experiencing social reality.[3] Such displays have the power to affect participants profoundly. As Steven Lukes (1975) suggests, ritual may determine the manner in which social reality is perceived, interpreted, and understood. Moreover, Victor Turner (1974: 56) points out, when ritual "works," the reality it portrays assumes emotional significance for participants, resulting in an experience that he calls a "symbiotic interpenetration of individual and society."[4]

From this perspective, then, ritual may be seen as a mechanism of normative control. As David Kertzer (1988) illustrates, ritual has been used throughout history to symbolize authority, to gain legitimacy for rulers, to reinforce adherence to particular ideologies, and to generate and intensify solidarity with and loyalty to collective ties.[5] Similarly, in organizational settings, ritual "offers its managers a mode of exercising (or, at least, seeking to exercise) power along the cognitive and affective planes" (Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989: 49). In this sense, rituals are "mechanisms through which certain organizational members influence how other members are to think and feel—what they want, what they fear, what they should regard as proper and possible, and, ultimately, perhaps, who they are."

It is precisely this quality of ritual that appeals to Tech managers. At Tech, concern with the shaping of members' thoughts and feelings is high. Conventional managerial wisdom has it that extensive and recurring participation in ritual gatherings where the organizational ideology is enacted causes members to "internalize" the culture and infuses them with the right "mindset" and the appropriate "gut reactions." In short, those with an interest in engi-

neering culture consider presentational rituals a mechanism for transforming the abstract formulations of Tech's organizational ideology into the lived experience of members. "They are," in the words of one manager, "where Techies are made." [6]

The experiential outcomes of ritual performances, however, are a more complex and ambiguous matter than those who stage them might claim (or hope). For one, rituals may not always "work." As Jack Goody (1977) argues, ritual often loses its transforming power and conveys little, if any, meaning;[7] and when they do work, as Turner (1969) points out, rituals typically have multiple, complex, ambiguous, and changing layers of meaning that are only partially articulated, understood, or acknowledged by participants.[8] Thus, neither prior theoretical assumptions nor native accounts—informed and sophisticated as they may be—are sufficient to determine what participants actually make of ritual performances and how they experience them. Rather, the meaning of ritual is context-dependent; it is always an interpretive empirical question.[9]

What, then, do presentational rituals at Tech actually accomplish? Depending on the observer's perspective, their significance could be interpreted quite differently. Some, perhaps partial to managerial designs, might indeed find in these gatherings evidence of a "symbiotic interpenetration" of member and company; others, more suspicious of the machinations of authority, might detect little more than meaningless lip service in response to invasive demands for compliance; those attuned to the stereotypes propagated by pop sociology might discover only opportunistic and self-serving adherence to managerial rhetoric fueled by hopes for pecuniary gain. To determine what thoughts and feelings are actually engendered in members, a detailed and contextualized analysis of the form and substance of the performance of presentational rituals is required.

In this chapter, I offer examples of several types of rituals commonly performed at Tech. The analysis focuses on the processes that underlie the construction of the ritual frame in each type of event.[10] What is (and is not) said and done? By whom? How is it understood by those present? What rules govern the unfolding of these interactions? How are they enforced? To what extent do the different kinds of events have different consequences for the experience of participation? And, taken together, what do they reveal about member-organization relations at Tech?[11]

The analysis begins with those ritual occasions on which senior man-

agers—the primary representatives of the company—convey their message to members of considerably less seniority.[12]

Talking Down: Top Management Presentations

Senior managers meet with members on a variety of occasions. Such events usually consist of presentations in the course of which the speaker articulates the managerial perspective on Tech, its business, organization, and culture. The presentations are usually scheduled well in advance; the audience in most cases is large and consists of members of Wage Class 4; the atmosphere is often festive; and the proceedings are typically recorded and made available to those not present.

Dave Carpenter's presentation at Lyndsville is an example of perhaps the most common encounter between a senior manager and a large group of members. As in most such presentations, the speaker focuses on technical and business issues but uses the occasion to make ideological points as well.

In the Trenches

"Tech's Strategy for the Nineties," Dave Carpenter's presentation, is scheduled for three in the afternoon, but at two thirty the Einstein Room—Lyndsville's largest conference room—is already full. The VP's appearance—well advertised in advance and open to all employees at the facility—promises to be a distinct happening. Lyndsville has only recently become part of Dave's organization, and this is his first presentation here. Most managers, many engineers, and a number of members of the support staff are present. The comfortable swivel seats are all taken; people line the walls, while others gather at the door or sit outside within hearing distance. The business decor seems to underscore the significance of what is about to transpire: a speaker's podium beneath an etching of the room's namesake; a large screen; high-tech projection equipment; a teleconference hook-up; a video camera waiting to record the event for posterity. The work routine at Lyndsville has temporarily broken down, and a simmering excitement, anticipation, and curiosity seem to permeate the waiting audience.

The pre-meeting is a transitional stage during which the participants gather and jointly shift from routine to ritual. As they wait, members engage in a variety of interactions. Some take the opportunity to make small talk; others indulge in company gossip (the significance of the recent reorganiza-

tion and the reputation of the speaker are favorite topics). Many interactions have the quality of light, improvisational bantering that allows members to comment on the experience of work. For example, as members of one project group stand around the coffee table outside the room, engaged in animated discussion, John, their project manager, wanders over. Noticing his approach, someone says in a stage whisper: "Quiet, don't talk, John is coming!" John responds: "Careful, you'll burn me out!" Everyone laughs. He adds ominously: "And the next one might not be as good as me."

At a few minutes before three, Dave Carpenter enters the packed conference room, accompanied by Jack, the manager of SysCom, who reports directly to him. Dave's appearance marks the end of the pre-meeting and the transition into the ritual frame—the main event. Other discussions lose their animation and cease as he walks slowly to the podium, smiling at acquaintances in the crowd. All attention focuses on him as the noise gradually subsides and Jack, after a few light taps on the microphone, begins his introduction: "We finally have Dave here. Our seminar series often features outside speakers, but it is hard to get upper management here. So block him if he heads for the door." Some smiles and laughter acknowledge the seemingly lighthearted references to backstage realities that usually precede such sessions. Lyndsville is known for its independent spirit, and it is no secret that Jack and Dave have had their differences since the recent reorganization. Jack allows a few seconds for the whispers to subside and then, in a more ceremonious tone, adds:

> "Like many of us in Engineering, Dave came up the hard way, through the ranks. He knows what it takes to make products and what it takes to get them up and out the door. He is one of us."

Dave appears to concur with this view. He adjusts the microphone, nods almost imperceptibly at the video operator, and says:

> "It's a pleasure being here. It justifies the work we do, and gives meaning to being in Tech. The further you get away from people the more you miss the past! You are doing a good and important job. I know you're having fun; and you're doing good work, really neat things. You're the perfect example of what we mean by 'bottom-up.' And that is not a Tech stroke; it's a *real* stroke!

> Now let me tell you about the challenges we are facing and the role of your group in what lies ahead."

As he prepares his slides he adds: "I gave this presentation yesterday to the Jackson group; I pulled the slides out from my road show. I hope they're in order." The allusion to "Tech strokes," the sharing of some backstage information, and the self-mocking dig at the requirements of the business world are a sign that he feels at home in a crowd of "technical folks." The lights are turned out. The room is momentarily plunged into darkness, and then the large screen behind Dave is lit up with the first of his professionally designed multicolored slides. "High Technologies Corporation: Business Strategy," the first one announces. "Here we go," whispers my neighbor, the veteran of many such affairs; "we're on the air." The transition is complete.

The mildly ironic tone ending the transitional stage disappears, and Dave is all business as, half-turned to the screen, he leaps into his presentation. The presentation follows a standard format used by presenters at all levels. It is built around ready-made slides that are flashed on a screen behind the presenter. On each slide a number of "bullets" are listed: several words succinctly summarizing a point. Each "bullet" is exposed as the point is made, and then a few minutes of elaboration or anecdotes follow.

> "Today we'll talk about what it takes to win and win big. The technologies you're working on—the XYZ series—are a key to our strategy; the potential revenues are enormous. At the executive committee meeting in Atlanta, Sam repeated our commitment to the "We Are One" strategy, and you guys have a key role to play. The challenges are great, but we're ahead of the competition, we can kill them in the marketplace. [First slide.] There are three main pieces to the strategy. First, we want to be the quality vendor *and* the vendor of choice. Not only be, but be *perceived* to be [smile] by the *customer*. [Smile. Heads nod.] This stuff came out of the Atlanta meeting and the new long-range plan that came out of the meeting. So now people can go off and. . . .

Dave continues in this vein, the rapidly changing slides summarizing and illustrating his claims about "customer satisfaction," "market share," "reve-

nue streams," and the kinds of products that are needed to "win and win big."

Much of the discussion is highly technical: Dave reviews the technological intricacies of projects and products and discusses the business issues involved. The hushed crowd seems absorbed, taken by the speaker's enthusiasm. Laughter answers his disparaging references to the competition, and vigorous nods and knowing smiles follow his comments sometimes serious, occasionally humorous—about Tech and its management, organization, and style of doing business. Quite a few people are taking notes. A distinct sense of togetherness, common purpose, and shared excitement appears to permeate the now comfortable, almost intimate, semidarkness typical of such presentations. Temporarily, at least, the reality Dave conjures up seems all-encompassing; he is speaking for an undifferentiated "we," and there appears to be no distinction between the words and the collective experience of the participants.

All, however, are not of one mind. Some people have wandered off (I'll wait for the video"), while others—mostly support staff but also some engineers and managers—continue to work in their cubicles, seemingly unperturbed and oblivious. For the former it is "another Wage Class 4 party" and of no particular concern. The latter consider it at best a waste of time. "I don't need all that happy horseshit," one engineer tells me. "It's the old song and dance, and you hear about it anyway."

Reservations of this sort are not limited to those who stay away. In the room, there is also evidence of some distancing from the proceedings. As the presentation continues, Jack and a number of the senior managers move out into the corridor, away from the crowded doorways, and engage in animated whispering. There is not much new in the presentation for them. "This is more of a pep talk, keep the troops involved type of thing. There is more important work to be done; you know—people issues, politics," one tells me.

The side events, however, go largely unnoticed. The distancing that does occur is usually reserved for private moments and trusted confidants, or cloaked in protective humor. Within the publicly drawn boundaries of the ritual frame, the presentation unfolds in the manner typical of such events. Dave continues for about an hour and forty minutes. He concludes with an exhortation to work hard, meet schedules, and have fun, and then adds:

"We're growing 50 percent on the gross margin. The profits are high and growing! We're the only group in all of Engineering, the only really profitable business. We should be making gobs and gobs and gobs of money! Our products are better. Yesterday we increased the prices by 10 percent [pause] to get gobs and gobs . . . [Laughter.]

Dave sits down, and the audience responds with a round of applause.

The presentation is followed by a question and answer period. This is a structured opportunity for members of the audience to participate more actively in the proceedings. Most ask routine questions that indicate an acceptance of the speaker's point of view and an affirmation of the ritual frame, and the speaker uses them as an opportunity to repeat, elaborate, and reemphasize his claims.

The first question comes from the front row, where the head-nodding through the speech was most noticeable. Flushed, half-turned to face both presenter and audience, and emphasizing the pronouns, a manager from a locally based marketing group says:

"Dave, given what *you've* said about finances, from where *we* are sitting, what single thing could *we* do to help *you* fulfill *your* needs?"

In the back, an engineer, seemingly offended by the overenthusiastic tone, whispers to those around: "Gimme a break!" Dave smiles, thinks briefly, and responds:

"Each of us needs this undying quest for excellence. We set tough goals and seldom meet them but feel good if we are close. That is good, but in tough times we might be tempted to back off, accept only partial fulfillment. My real goal is to pull *together* in *tough* times and go off and *do* things!"

He lists a few projects where this would be in order and takes more questions.

The question and answer period is also the occasion for a member of the audience to challenge the speaker's point of view. Ron, an engineer con-

sidered one of the "walking wounded" since the well-publicized demise of Jupiter, a project he worked on, raises his hand, stands, and says:

> "How is the new management team going to work together? It looks like some of the groups are still pulling in different directions. We might have Jupiter all over again. I think. . . ."

The open reference to "politics" on Dave's staff causes Dave to change his tone. He interrupts the question and says:

> "We are not yet a team, and we have to go through some tough times and pain together. [Turning to Ron with a smile.] Ron, you know a little bit about that, don't you?" [Turning away again.]

Ron sits down. Members of the audience exchange knowing looks; some whisper to each other; others turn and stare at Ron. Ron leans back in his chair, then makes some notes to himself. The speaker continues:

> "We have a few off-site meetings scheduled to work on our process. But let me say this about working together: we need the right mindset. I had a library full of books on Japanese management. But they have a rigid managerial system. Once a decision gets made by consensus, there is no questioning it. We need to use a combination of their and our culture. What we really need is some new heroes in Engineering. I took that word from Deal's culture book, and I'm trying to identify the Engineering heroes. People who are strong enough to come forward and then go off and make things happen. Since '79 our theme has been discipline. Jim Morrison from Advanced Technologies is an example of the new kind of hero. I've been pushing it on the executive staff, trying to get the message across without hitting them over the head with it. I learned this in the school of hard knocks. That's enough politics. Any more questions?"

As usual in Engineering crowds, the questions become increasingly technical. The atmosphere is one of friendly combativeness, and Dave is openly challenged by a number of engineers on "the company's technical direc-

tion"; a highly technical and quite emotional debate between different versions of "doing what's right" seems to satisfy the participants. But as five o'clock draws near, others grow restless. At five sharp the meeting breaks up.

The final stage of the event is the post-meeting—a transition from ritual to routine, a return, perhaps, from the sacred to the secular. Participants begin to draw their own meaning from the event. It is an opportunity to savor and interpret their experience, perhaps get a few final words in. Other realities, temporarily submerged, reappear. In the post-meeting interactions, these realities blend. Some participants leave; others stay, talking in small groups, or wander around, lingering, moving between groups. A few approach Dave, who briefly answers questions and then, indicating that he has a late afternoon meeting scheduled, leaves with a few of his managers in tow. One of them says to Dave as they depart: "That was super. You put some important messages in the system and you got their juices flowing." Dave nods and adds: "We have good people—but we need to get their heads in the right place."

Senior managers meet with members in different configurations. In the following example, a vice-president presents a group of engineers and managers drawn from across Engineering with an explicit, comprehensive, and somewhat abstract view of the organizational ideology. The event's essential structure, however, is the same.

Culture in the Cafeteria

The vice-president has been invited to speak to a luncheon meeting of graduates of an internal educational program. The organizers of the lunch—members of a staff group responsible for the program—are lobbying for continued support. Designing such "song and dance" events is one tactic for gaining visibility—some laughingly refer to this as the "hidden agenda." For the participants—managers and engineers from across the Engineering Division with few or no current work connections—lunch is a chance to network, to gain visibility, to learn, and perhaps to take a break. The VP considers it one more opportunity to "spread the word." He has agreed to discuss his view of how to succeed at Tech, and his talk is titled "My Career and What I Learned on the Way."

The pre-meeting stage occurs around an extended and fairly elaborate catered lunch, served in a large meeting room behind the corporate cafe-

teria. Roughly fifty people are present: some old-timers who know each others from past battles; a number of senior engineers and managers; some new hires; a manager, chain smoking, who is known by all to be "on the way out"; and all the members of the staff group. All are wearing name tags prepared by the organizers as an aid to (and a symbol of) networking.

Lunch is an opportunity to interact, meet new people and old acquaintances, introduce oneself, gossip, badmouth, observe others, pick up and pass on information ("Isn't that the notorious Bill Jones? He looks burnt out. They say he's drinking again!"), and attempt to make sense of it all. When it draws to an end, and the vice-president indicates readiness, the crowd is transformed from a loose, complex, energetic network into a hushed, focused group ready for the next stage—the main act. The rapid moving from table to table, the huddles, the jokes, the watchfulness, draw to a close. The VP stands up, arranges the viewgraph, and taps the microphone. In the background, unnoticed, moving in a different space, the contracted workers clean up under the eye of a discreet supervisor. All eyes are on the speaker. The transition into the ritual frame is complete, and the presentation begins.

First, the VP describes Tech. He states a cultural principle and elaborates it with supporting maxims and anecdotal evidence. The top of the first transparency reads: "Tech is a bottom-up company." Below this maxim, exposed one by one as he talks, is a list of "bullets" summarizing Tech wisdom in this regard:

- "If ideas came from me we would be in trouble."
- "He who proposes does."
- "Earn your reputation."
- "Your boss can't make you fail—*you* can!"
- "You get what you inspect."
- "You're second-class if you think you are."
- "If you see a problem fix it."
- "Committees live forever, task forces get to conclusions."

The VP accompanies each bullet with anecdotes from high up ("Sam told me . . .") or from the distant past ("Back when Engineering was still . . ."). When he completes the list he offers a graphic summary. "This is the Excellence Triangle," he says, turning to the board and drawing a large triangle.

Along each side he writes one word: "quality" on the left, "discipline" on the right, and "commitment" on the bottom. "That is the foundation!" he says, turning around again. A number of people jot it down. "It is what 'bottom-up' is all about." Each pronouncement is greeted with nods and smiles of acknowledgment from the audience.

The VP then offers advice on how one is "to be" and what one is to feel in a bottom-up company. Success will follow, if one is to judge from the speaker's experience. He reveals the first bullet, "RESPECT":

> "Treat others with respect and the consideration you expect, the way they want to be treated. I get *very* upset when I hear someone say 'that turkey.' It says you don't value people. Build on what others have done. Avoid the NIH [not invented here] syndrome. Nothing is more fun than making; but if others have done it, for God's sake use it!"

Nods increase in vigor as the speaker's gaze moves across the audience. He reveals another bullet: "TRUST."

> "Cooperate with other groups. Hell, its not Middletown and Lyndsville [sites of two engineering groups embroiled in a well-known finger-pointing duel] that are enemies. It's Chiptech! It's Silicon!" [More vigorous nodding; another bullet: "HONESTY."] Say what you intend. Make it public at Tech. Avoid situations where you can't be honest."

The presentation lasts for about an hour and is followed by a lengthy round of applause.

The question and answer period follows. After a number of routine questions, an extended challenge to the speaker develops. A member of the audience—an engineer known as an outspoken veteran—stands up and says with the air of a celebrity:

> "I'm Rick Danko. You said this was a bottom-up organization. That's the way it was and that's what made us so good. Are you aware that the new technet network security regulations get in the way?"

The theme of this question is familiar to all: engineers versus managers, freedom versus control. Members of the audience exchange glances, smile, raise eyebrows; they have seen and heard this before. But the tone is sharp and all seem interested as the tension rises. The vice-president reviews the policy briefly and adds:

> "We need both: security *and* communication. The new trend in the culture is security! We need to give our new engineers the full picture. We are open but we need security. Next question?"

Most questioners would have given up here. But Rick, standing again and obviously fired up, persists:

> "I disagree! People are cutting back in the name of security! Some things don't get around internally any more! I send stuff over the net all the time and I'd get upset if management said stop, or if they made it difficult! Networking is one of the ways this company works! Tech was an engineering bottom-up company, but not all Tech managers behave this way these days. Some managers actually think they run this place! I don't know what *you* think, but you've got managers who work for you, and there aren't mechanisms to get rid of them or educate them!"

The tension peaks. Rick has gone beyond the customary exchanges of the question and answer period to challenge the fundamental assumption that all present—and particularly the presenter, share the principles of the ideology. A brief silence follows, and then the vice-president smiles. Everyone in the room laughs, releasing the tension that has been building up. Rick sits down looking satisfied. Someone says to him: "I'm on your distribution list and your information is wonderful. It keeps us all up to date." Someone else says: "Loose lips sink ships. We have new hires from other companies who still have friends there." The presenter waits for all this to subside, makes a note to himself, and says:

> "Security of info is your personal responsibility! We tracked down a competitor's phone tied into a node on the net. It was plain dumb! Next question?"

The challenge is over. The VP's smile was a subtle reframing of the situation, eagerly and loudly joined by the audience and—willingly or not—accepted by the challenger. An event that came close to an open attack on the ritual frame has been reinterpreted as a playful, humorous incident, an affirmation—albeit an overeager or even eccentric one—rather than a rejection of the presenter's point of view. The roles of manager and engineer have been dramatically pitted against each other, but both can claim to share the member role. Bottom-up communication and the legitimate conflicts it requires have been enacted, and their limits subtly enforced. The rest of the questions seem mild and good-natured in comparison, and the session is declared closed.

The post-meeting is an occasion for more interpretive interactions. Ellen Cohen, the resident culture expert, still scribbling at her table, exchanges impressions with the editor of *High Performance*, the in-house publication.

> "I got some *super* quotes for my next paper!"
> "I liked the 'Excellence Triangle'; maybe we should do a piece on it."
> "Did you notice how many times he said the word 'system'? It's the new buzzword."
> "Yeah. The message from the culture is *systems*!"

Two engineers talk on the way out:

> "These speeches are interminable, like the Kremlin."
> "I was falling asleep but it was worth coming. I've never seen this guy before."

Some petitioners approach the speaker. A few ask for copies of his transparencies. A group of young engineers address Rick Danko. One says excitedly, seemingly awaiting his approval:

> "We had this jerk for a supervisor; she thought she could run the project alone, but we went to her manager and got rid of her. . . ."

Rick, however, is clearly not interested; he nods perfunctorily and wanders off in the general direction of the VP, who is still at his table. The intimacy

of the spokesman role was reserved for an earlier setting. It is a sentiment that exists only in the ritual frame. The rejection is a lesson in ritual life for the new hires: ideological articulation has its place and time; now status and tenure begin to reassert themselves. As the younger engineers move to leave, the VP walks out with Rick and two of his staff members. The few stragglers are quickly gone, leaving the room to the cleaners, who have been patiently waiting at the door.

Discussion: Talking Down

As these two top management presentations illustrate, such events follow clear rules for the construction of the ritual frame. The main act, the presentation itself, is characterized by expressions of what Goffman (1961b: 106) calls "role embracement": participants publicly embrace the ideologically defined member role as an authentic expression of their experience as members. The speakers, whose words are recorded, videotaped, highlighted, amplified, and decorated with graphic devices, use vivid images that draw on an inscribed version of the organizational ideology to describe the company and its members. In particular they emphasize the company's communal nature; they attempt to speak for the collective interest; they imply a certain intimacy with the crowd; and they present themselves, their experiences, and their presumed accomplishments as an example of the successful enactment of the member role and its just rewards.

Members of the audience, although a more passive and undifferentiated group, are also expected actively to affirm the ritual frame. For the most part this consists of collective nonverbal responses—laughter, applause, nodding, note taking; questions and comments confirm the speakers' claims and demonstrate a sharing in the required emotional tone. Occasional debates on specific technical points are typically conducted in the spirit of "doing what's right" and dramatize the legitimacy of conflict in the context of commitment to collective goals. Thus, the ritual frame consists of articulations and enactments of role-prescribed beliefs ("the centrality of profit," "the importance of technological accomplishment") and feelings ("loyalty," "commitment," "excitement," "fun," "togetherness").

The main act and the collective expression of role embracement it occasions are bracketed by transitional stages: relatively unstructured periods prior to and following the presentation where participants are present and

interacting either informally or around staged events such as meals. These phases seem to be governed by different rules for appropriate participation; here members typically engage in what Goffman (1961b: 108) refers to as "role distancing": "effectively expressed pointed separateness between the individual and his putative role." In these rituals, role distancing takes a specific form: participants improvise playful, yet critical, renditions of life at Tech, make joking references to known facts that are not about to be discussed, self-consciously qualify their own ideological statements, or engage in interpretive discussions. Members of the audience assume a "wise" or "cynical" stance that focuses on creatively exposing hidden meanings, debunking explicit intents, parodying conventions, and conveying an instrumental interpretation of events and an awareness of their theatrical nature. The speaker remains more reserved but may subtly convey an awareness of these undercurrents; such knowing hints are generally appreciated and applauded. Thus, role distancing, for the most part, is subtly, playfully, or humorously expressed within recognized and mostly self-imposed boundaries that protect the ritual frame and the expressions of role embracement from overt challenges or open contradiction. If anything, such episodes are considered manifestations of the company's openness and informality and, when properly performed, become a recognized feature of the event and part of the prescribed ritual form.

In short, the construction of the ritual frame appears as a sequence of stylized stages in which participants collectively and voluntarily follow the rules for appropriate role performance, shifting from playful role distancing to serious role embracement as the situation requires. Occasionally, however, the rules are broken and the underlying and often disguised workings of power in the construction of a shared reality are exposed. Thus, Rick's persistent questioning of management's commitment to the principle of "bottom-up decision making," and Ron's frame-breaking reference to politics are "out of order," raise tension, and require the speaker to draw on his authority to enforce his views. Since the gap in formal status between presenter and audience is large, and there is little to be gained—and often something to be lost—from such challenges, the speaker's smile, a raised eyebrow, a dramatic pause, a well-placed word, along with the more raucous assistance of an audience adept at reading such nuances and typically impatient with disruptions or eager for scapegoats, are enough to restrain the

challenger and maintain the dominance of the ritual frame and the manifest allegiance of the participants to what it requires of them.

In sum, talking down is a ritual in which a member of senior management uses his authority and status to frame and elicit support for the official version of the organizational ideology. Yet, although senior managers are well placed to speak for the collective interests, their authority also potentially belies their own message: it is easy to interpret participant support as obsequious, opportunistic, or contrived; and the speakers' use of their status to enforce a particular view potentially contradicts their own depictions of Tech as an open, nonauthoritarian community.

The following section illustrates presentational rituals in which the organizational ideology is conveyed by formally designated spokespersons much lower in the hierarchy.

Talking Across: Training Workshops

Training and education workshops are carefully choreographed to convey to members, in a nonauthoritarian "learning environment," aspects of the organizational ideology and the knowledge and skills that members are thought to require.[13] Trainers or invited speakers on a temporary assignment are usually lower-level managers or engineers. Higher-status presenters make occasional videotaped appearances but are not the main focus. Participation typically involves lower-status members: Wage Class 4 employees up to level 4 (principal engineer or supervisor), and some Wage Class 2 employees. Higher levels are presumed not to need "training," or receive it more privately under the label "development" or "consultation."[14]

Two training workshops are described here. The first is an off-site introductory workshop for new hires, limited to pre-enrolled Wage Class 4 employees, where new members are first exposed to a systematic and comprehensive view of the organizational ideology.

Bootcamp: Learning the Culture

The Orientation Workshop, titled "Intro to Tech" but often referred to as "bootcamp," is a two-day training event offered several times a year. Designed for engineers with a few months experience in the company, it is fairly popular and draws attendees from beyond the target population.

Since the workshop is thought to transmit valuable knowledge about the company, participants occasionally sign up for more than one session. More experienced managers from Engineering and other functions occasionally participate too, believing that understanding the company and its engineers provides an edge over the less knowledgeable.

Like other in-house training events, the intro workshop must be marketed and sold in order to survive the internal entrepreneurial process. "Bootcamp" has made it in the marketplace. It is a flagship event and an important vehicle for "getting the word down" and "getting the message out." Each session is advertised across the technet, and enrollment averages about twenty.

The workshop has a carefully planned and well-defined structure. The history, business interests, products, and culture of Tech are covered in sequence. Each topic is treated in a discrete module: a two-hour session based on a presentation by a trainer or an invited guest speaker. Participants sit around a large table. Each is given a name tag and a package of materials: paper, pencils, markers, the "Engineering Guide," an employee handbook, copies of Tech newsletters, a booklet describing the history of Tech, a number of internally published research papers on Tech culture, and a mimeographed copy of "The Sayings of Chairman Sam"—a compilation of anecdotes about Tech attributed to its founder and president. The schedule is heavy, running from early morning coffee through lunchtime yawns to five o'clock fidgets on two consecutive days. There are short coffee breaks between presentations, and a one-hour lunch break.

The module on Tech culture comes first. Ellen Cohen is the invited speaker. Introductions are made. The twenty-five participants give brief descriptions of their organizational location and technology. Most are "new hires" three to six months out of school; some have transferred from other companies. One or two have vaguely defined jobs in Corporate, there is an older engineer from Manufacturing, a fairly senior finance manager from Engineering, and a technician from Field Service.

"Culture" is not a notion that engineers take to easily, and newcomers are often unfamiliar with the appropriate behavior in Tech training seminars; consequently, the module—designed as a series of interactive exercises—requires some goading. After passing out handouts summarizing the talk, Ellen writes the word "culture" on a large flipchart and says:

"The topic today is culture. We have a spectrum of people here from all over the company. Feel free to chime in. 'Culture' has become something of a fad. First, what is 'culture'? What do you think?"

A young engineer slouching in the corner answers: "Fungus. I had a culture for my senior science project. But my dog ate it." Some laugh. Ellen smiles too, but continues undaunted. "We're looking at behavior, at people. What is the characteristic of people at Tech?" She waits, marker in hand, with a warm, inviting-looking smile, nodding in anticipation, perhaps indicating the signs of affirmation she is looking for. Her question hangs. No answers. Some coffee sipping. "You feel like you've all been chosen, right?" she says, nodding her head more vigorously and still smiling. Still no replies. The stony silence highlights the incongruity of her demeanor, but she persists. "What else? What are people like at Tech?" Some volunteers speak up, drawn in by discomfort, if nothing else: "Friendly." "Amicable." She writes it all on the flipchart. The tempo picks up: "Individual- and team-work." "I'm expected to be a good corporate citizen." "Strong customer orientation." "People tend to like Tech no matter how confused," she says, and adds: "How do you feel?"

Some of the participants raise their hands. She calls on each in turn.

"I like it here. I hope for profit. I respect Sam Miller a lot. Where I worked before you'd hope they fail! Here the executives aren't as ruthless as in other companies; they are more humane. I haven't met anyone here I don't respect."
"I flash off on the technet and get to people without them wondering why; they are open and willing to share information."
"People understand. There is tolerance for new people."
"There's a supportive atmosphere."

As they speak, Ellen makes encouraging sounds and lists key phrases on the chart: "profit; not ruthless; humane; respect; open; share info; tolerance; supportive."

When the sheet is full, she pulls it off the flipchart, pastes it to the wall, and says: "This is what makes Tech a different kind of place. People are relaxed and informal. What else?" Someone says: "There is little difference

between engineers and managers; it's hard to tell them apart." "Authority Not a Big Deal," she writes in bold letters on the flipchart. Then she adds: "In other places you're incompetent till proved otherwise; here it's the other way around, right?" Not waiting for an answer, she writes "Confidence in Competence," and says: "They know what they are doing, or believe it." "A little too much," the guy sitting next to me whispers to his neighbor.

Disagreement soon surfaces. Jim, a technician who has been around the company for a number of years, raises his hand. In the interchange with the instructor that ensues, she uses his objections to make additional cultural points:

Jim: "You may be right. But I've noticed subcultures. It depends on where you work. Technical writers are considered lower than the dust on the floor. They are there to serve the engineers. In Field Service we are considered above them but not equal to engineers."
Ellen: "Tech is a technical company founded by engineers. Engineers hold a special place in some people's eyes. There are status differences based on what you know. But if we don't work together—we don't sell."
Jim: "Another thing I've noticed: Tech is in continuous meetings. Decisions are made by committee. It stifles creativity—"
Ellen [interrupts]: "You find ways to break loose yourself. It is a company of continuums. There are pockets. There is no such thing as 'no'; it depends on how far you wanna push. You'll get uncooperative people, status-conscious people. But I've threatened people with talking to Sam Miller. It works!"

Ellen turns to the flipchart, writes, "We Are A Family," and says:

"This is the most important one. We have a no-layoff policy. It's the ultimate backup plan. It would break some people's hearts if we had to do it. We face it as a family: cutting costs, hiring freezes. Every member is asked to contribute."

A young woman from Corporate who has been silent so far bursts out in a concerned, almost angry tone:

"I work in Corporate. A lot of the stuff is only a myth there. I see the very high up people fighting to the death. There is no clear person with the last word. They bounce responsibility around."

She starts to give an example from a well-known failed project, but Ellen interrupts her rather brusquely:

"Tech isn't wonderful or glowing. It's not. It's human. But it's the best I've seen! I was a nomad before I came here. I'm sorry you haven't seen the rest of the companies so you can appreciate Tech. [Pause.] That is another thing about Tech. People are quick to point out faults, as if they didn't have any. Where I worked before there was rampant empire building. Tech is much better. We are a state-of-the-art pioneer. There is great love and great criticism of the company."

The challenger has been reprimanded and temporarily silenced, and her challenge reinterpreted to support rather than undermine the ritual frame.

For some participants the culture module appears to make sense, and they join the discussion as supporters, challengers, questioners, or learners. Others seem more skeptical. They smile to themselves, or to a neighbor, or pull out computer printout, clearly indicating their lack of interest. They prefer the "hard data" and the facts. They see explicit cultural analysis as "fluff," the engineer's term for discourse identified with the social sciences or with "people-oriented" managers.

The emotional intensity of the module's conclusion, however, seems to captivate all the participants. Ellen flips off the viewgraph, puts down the marker, and gives a short talk that sounds off-the-record, very personal, almost motherly:

"There is a down side to all of this! There can be a lot of pain in the system! Be careful; keep a balance; don't overdo it, don't live off vending machines for a year. [Laughter.] You'll burn out. I've been there; I lived underground for a year, doing code. Balance your life. Don't say: 'I'll work like crazy for four years,

then I'll get married.' I heard this from a kid. But who will he marry? Don't let the company suck you dry; after nine or ten hours your work isn't worth much anyway."

The sudden switch to a subversive-sounding message creates an air of rapt attention. All eyes are on her as she walks slowly from the flipchart to the center of the room. After a brief pause, she adds the finishing touch: "What kind of company do you think allows me to be saying these things to you?" Nobody stirs for a few moments, and then a break is called.

The next event is a videotaped interview with Sam Miller. His "philosophy" is presented in his own words. As the equipment is being prepared, an instructor frames the event with a transitional reference to backstage realities.

"It was shot over three days. It is a selection from the material. He is really good in this one. It's not like the times we handed him a script to read."

The lights are turned out, the large screen flickers to life, and the tape begins. After the fancy graphics and titles fade away, the familiar figure of Sam Miller appears. He is sitting in a room very much like the one we are in, speaking to a group of people in business attire. They ask earnest questions that serve as cues for lengthy monologues. After a question is asked, a full frontal image of Miller's head and shoulders fills the screen. His eyes are unwavering as he talks rapidly, punctuating points with a quick smile.

Confident, charismatic, and very personal, the image of Tech's founder seems to capture the attention of everyone in the darkened room. First, he uses the history of the company to illustrate the "philosophy" that guides him.

"In the university nobody cared. I wanted people who wanted to be artists. So we started Tech. In the beginning we cleaned the johns ourselves. I put linoleum up alone! When pigeons came in through the windows, we chased them till they fell. We said we were manufacturers, not scientists. And we wanted to make a *profit*. [A quick, punctuating smile.] Everyone here *knew:*

we are out to make a profit. And we weren't embarrassed to
make people work hard. [Smile; a brief shot of nodding heads.]
We made a profit, and we were very proud. People still didn't
believe we would make it. 'Nobody succeeds this soon and
survives,' they said." [Smile; laughter.]

Questions from the filmed audience elicit his rendition of the ever-ready
abstract principles.

"Sam, do you have any tips on how to better understand the
culture in order to succeed?"
"The company is big now. Work at it. Get to know everybody.
Volunteer for jobs. There aren't rules for how to succeed. But do
a good job. The job counts. We tolerate all sorts of schedules. I
just worry when it hides incompetence. Some people look odd
to hide incompetence! Learn. Stay in an area long enough to
learn from mistakes."
"Sam, what is unique about Tech that you want to preserve?"
"Keep the openness, trust. We hired consultants to examine
things. They came back and said: 'We found trust, openness,
and cooperativeness, little selfishness.' Those were the words I
wanted to hear. [Smile.] They knew how to flatter me. But it *is*
important. Growth is not that important."

It is dark. Workshop participants are barely identifiable silhouettes. All at-
tention is on the screen. As he talks, the company's history and philosophy
are personified. A larger-than-life image takes over and seems to control the
room. He is far above, but the first name, the image, and the dark all suggest
intimacy and closeness, if only temporarily.

The tape lasts for half an hour, but it seems to have a lingering effect on
the bootcamp audience. When the lights finally go on, the participants stay
seated, clearly impressed. The session generates a lot of discussion.

"I keep noticing his eyes. It's the second time I've seen him, but
I've never seen him in real life."

"He is really impressive."
"He actually spoke to me a few times, but only in groups."

The participants hang around for a while talking about Sam Miller, a legend
in his time. The instructor is happy to talk to all of them. She seems to
consider the awed reaction of the crowd a personal success.

Another module focuses on technology. This is the real thing; this is for
engineers. It has everybody's attention. An instructor introduces the guest
speaker:

"John is a consulting engineer and was project leader for Posei-
don. Good stuff! Without it, the company would have been
history! Even though it was a little late [smile]. Perhaps he can
tell us about that too."

John takes over the floor. He is a tall, blond, bearded man, clad in jeans,
sneakers, and a shapeless striped shirt, well-built, with a slight paunch and
a tremor in his hands that is revealed as he arranges the transparencies on the
viewgraph. Poseidon has just been completed, and he is between projects,
giving talks, making himself known.

He does not acknowledge the introduction, as if the trainer has not earned
the right to make it. Turning on the viewgraph, he launches into a soft-
spoken description of the project he was leading. A set of ready-made trans-
parencies ("my road show") presents his view of what can be learned from
the project. Bullets capture specific points:

- "Your work can be killed by a large number of other people."
- "You can ruin the work of many others."
- "Cooperate."
- "Discuss."

For each rule he has an anecdote fitted into the time it takes to change trans-
parencies. It is practical advice: how to communicate with others, where
to find information, how to avoid "finger pointing," fights, and "pissing
contests." "It can save you six months! Six whole months!" he says, and,

dropping his voice, adds ominously: "and a lot of pain!" The latter refers to the generally recognized experiential price of fast-track engineering.

Finally, technology has its say, as the talk reaches a crescendo. The participants are alert. They ask technical questions and the discussion comes alive, capturing the attention of those who have so far been passive. The nontechnical people look helpless, yet they are swept along. John passes out a prototype of the product his team has designed, and explains its attributes. It is passed almost religiously from hand to hand, each person turning, looking, feeling, with more, less, or no authority. The finance manager, holding it, hears John matter-of-factly describe its revolutionary qualities. "My God! My God!" he says out loud. "This is awesome! Think of the business implications! It will cannibalize the whole product line! It will eat the competition alive!" He passes it on to the young engineer from Advanced Development, who is enjoying the reaction of the older, more senior, yet nontechnical person next to him. "Neat, huh? What does cannibalize mean?" asks the engineer. But he doesn't wait for an answer. The air of rapt attention persists. Here technology, not business, reigns supreme. Question follows question, and the speaker is kept on well over the scheduled time.

The session finally dissolves under pressure from the lunch schedule and the temporary workers waiting impatiently at the door with the lunch trays. While lunch is served, a few of the engineers capture the speaker in a corner and continue with questions as he lights a cigarette. He takes some of their names for consideration for future projects and invites them to communicate with him on the technet. The finance manager and the engineer from Advanced Development remain in their places. The younger man is engaged in a monologue, and the older man is listening in fascination and with almost paternal pride. Others continue to talk over the buffet lunch. The instructors are pleased. The module seemed to work. "John gave a *super* talk. He got them all excited. They learned a lot. We'll invite him again."

The next module focuses on business issues—an attempt to put the involvement with technology into a business perspective. The module is thought by those in charge of framing reality to deliver an important "message": the realities of business are something engineers need to learn early on; the joys of technology are inextricably tied to the company and its financial concerns.

The speaker is the manager of a staff group reporting to a vice-president. He starts by collecting and listing the reasons people are at Tech. Participants

are now adept at this and respond easily: "State-of-the-art work." "Corporate philosophy." "I didn't want to sell soap." Then he gives the engineers a business view of their work.

> "We're no longer in the business of boxing other people's stuff. Other companies can manufacture us out of existence. You're the only ones who can get us to quality products. You came to work on neat things. What makes 'em neat? They are close to the state of the art. Others are forced to develop garbage and be compatible with shitty products. We're state-of-the-art for people who are turned on by technical things."

Discussing the company profits, he paints a rather bleak picture: "Our current rate of return is below the bond market! Without Poseidon we'd be history!" Using the flipchart, he illustrates the declining profits as an engineering problem. At the center of his causal map is the goal in big red letters: "MAKE MONEY." Little blue arrows point into the statement, and participants are asked to label them. ("It's a little technique I learned in Japan. A neat engineering tool.") He takes suggestions: "Quality." "Neat Design." "Low Cost." The suggestions flow in, and he places them in appropriate places. Soon the chart is complex, colorful, almost indecipherable.

Learning occurs on many levels. The speaker calls on a participant who has raised her hand. When she begins: "I'm not an engineer, but . . . ," he cuts her off with a quick: "So get out!" in an exaggerated high voice, apparently meant to indicate an attempt to parody accepted practices and points of view. The participants, mostly newcomers, are not ready for this, and there is a moment of embarrassed silence. He laughs and asks her to continue. The incident illustrates for the newcomers conventional wisdom concerning status at Tech, but they also learn something about the correct ritualistic behaviors—in this case the joking style of dramatizing cultural awareness used in many presentations.

Timeouts offer a release from the intensity and emotional grip of the main events. In the course of timeouts, participants often discover a different reality lurking in the background, usually expressed in the form of humorous interchanges. For example, when five participants enter the toilet together in the break following the business module, still talking about Poseidon, profits, and neat things, they encounter three older engineers from the local

facility who are getting ready for a basketball game. They are talking about life in Tech.

"To make it here you have to have made a lot of friends here."
"No. It's more important not to make enemies."
"You're both wrong. You have to not make waves."

On the way out of the toilet a participant observes: "Maybe we should move the workshop in there."

For some newcomers, the timeouts are an opportunity to express confusion and attempt to make sense of the multiple realities they encounter. During one break an engineer says, over coffee, to others at his table:

"After the first day I was high; I thought: 'What a great place.' I went and put all these glowing messages in the system. But this business stuff really depressed me. I was shocked to find out that we were just saved by Poseidon. But my boss wouldn't cooperate with them. He told me not to answer any questions that Poseidon people would ask!"

The last session of the workshop captures and enacts the multiple and confusing realities and demonstrates one way of living with them. It is a study in the management of ambiguity. Mike, the guest speaker, works in Sales and is an expert on every product the company has to offer. He has agreed to review the company product lines. He has been to the workshop before and is liked by the organizers, who consider him a "good show." For a salesman, he is very knowledgeable about the technology. "The engineers like that," says an instructor.

Mike rushes in a few minutes late. The organizers breathe a sigh of relief. Mike doesn't waste a minute. He takes off his jacket, loosens his tie, unbuttons his vest, and pulls slides from his brief case. His transitional opening comments are rather extended. First, he comments on his three-piece suit: "You can tell I'm from Sales, right? I'm dressed to the image," and then jumps to the side, pretends to be an engineer looking at Mike the salesman, and pulls a face suggesting laid-back disdain mingled with feigned horror. "Jerk!" he says to the audience. He laughs quickly, and leaps back into

his earlier position. As he is readying his slides he talks rapidly, offering a general characterization of the company:

"In the beginning, we were Tech, you were the customer; we were the best, and if you had a problem, that's tough. We made a huge revenue. We make it in rupees, yens, pesos. Read Techworld if you want to see where the money goes. But then the shift came. Last year we had a hiring freeze. Still, we hired you."

He leans back, rubbing his hands, and imitating a Fagin-like dirty old man, he says: "We wanted your ripe young minds."

Mike's high energy and stylized performance wake up the late afternoon group. Some laugh. Others look at each other as if ready to comment, but they are preempted by his self-mockery and exaggerated takeoff on them. He straightens up and continues:

"But seriously—there are people here not working. Our clear commitment is not to let people go. It hurts but we're still paying them. This seeming lack of any organization forces on you the need to communicate, to network. It'll be nerve-racking but it'll be fun. The big problem here is info: too much! Forty percent of the technet is used by the car clubs, the freaks, the photographers. Walk around, bump into others. Find out. No one has charts. As soon as they're published, it changes, so why bother? Go and do one yourself; I'm not facetious. It's the most disturbing thing for newcomers: no structure. Especially for people out of school. Assume there is constant change. It keeps you on your toes and your desk clean. So communicate. Get on the phone, get on the technet. Reinvent the wheel. If you don't like the job, wait a minute—it will change. Move around. Your project might just disappear. Do more than one thing; you could find yourself anywhere: in Manufacturing, in management, in a dark corner growing mushrooms. And a final thought: never give up. There are a thousand places. Go next door; ask for more challenge—you'll get it. And remember: you'll own your mistakes forever."

The last statement is ambiguous. It is seemingly in contrast to the earlier, straighter presentations and draws a correction from one of the instructors, an ever-alert master of ceremonies who suspects that the speaker has gone too far in his playful deviance:

> "It's hard to get fired. You'll have to club your manager over the head. If you don't draw blood, you still won't get fired."

"You might get promoted," Mike adds with a knowing smile, drawing another round of laughter from the participants. He adds:

> "Now that you've heard the song and dance, let's get down to the real thing: T-e-c-h-n-o-l-o-g-y. What else is there in life— right? Right!"

Mike shifts into his main act, a review of the company's entire product set. Using high-quality color slides, he displays one product at a time, and discusses each. He seems genuinely excited and impressed with technological achievement and conveys an insider's view of engineering life. He asks participants to name the projects they are working on and comments on the technological aspects of the projects they mention. Identifying the technical shortcomings in a particular product, he says:

> "Yeah! That is what we need. If you wanna be a hero, figure it out. Do it in your spare time! Someone will be interested."

Everyone in the room seems interested. The review lasts almost two hours. When it is over, Mike hands out evaluation forms and says:

> "Tech is considered an engineering company. In the field we are proud of it! The commitment to engineering pleases us! The products are great! I sold for other companies, but here I feel good. Wonderful products. There it was real selling—pure skill, selling shit. You should move to Sales. It's good work! Give me a call or flash me a note. Come down and see what we're selling. We have a party there."

He jumps aside, imitating a distressed engineer: "What?! And compromise my soul? Lie?? Never!!!! I'd rather die!" and then answers:

> "Yeah! No big deal. I come from Engineering myself. Sales is a good career if you're looking to be a vice-president. Sales reps can be rowdy. We're into hype, into pep rallies [salute]. We're very competitive; it doesn't have to be over anything, so long as we can drink and sing songs [hand on heart]. We don't have these Techie decorations. [Points at the large etching of Von Neumann on the wall.] We have these big flash cards on the walls: Success. Enthusiasm."

He turns around and faces the imaginary cards, arms spread. Then he turns around again and says in a lower voice:

> "All this altruism. The bottom line is: if I win megabucks tomorrow—hey! Am I coming to work? [Shakes his head slowly.] Damn right! The bottom line: it's the check! Every Thursday! M-o-n-e-y!"

An instructor laughs, another subtle attempt to frame all this. As the participants fill out the questionnaires, Mike sits on one of the tables and imitates the call of the sirens in a barely audible singsong: "Come work for us. Where do you wanna go? Paris? London? We can arrange it for you—you won't be sorr-eeeee."

Bootcamp ends quietly. A trainer thanks everyone and makes a final pitch asking them to send others, to come again. Some file out slowly, some remain talking to new friends. They each get a printed certificate with their name on it, proclaiming them graduates of the "High Technologies Orientation Program." It might be used as an office decoration. Some are friendly, saying it was a useful program, commenting on its various parts. Others pick up their certificates politely, even shaking the trainer's hand in recognition of the attempt at a parting ceremony. A tall young engineer with the fixed smile and awkward posture of the overly bright (the one whose dog ate the culture) refuses the certificate. The instructor, holding it out, insists. He declines. She pushes it toward him. He relents, takes it from her, and, still smiling,

tears it up and deposits it in the wastebasket under the table with all the Tech material. He is the last to leave. The trainers collect their materials and then meet to review the event and perhaps finetune the design for the next time. Bootcamp, they agree, appears to have earned its reputation once again.

Such comprehensive views of the company are offered only to newcomers. Most training workshops are designed for experienced members, and they focus on specific topics, as the following example illustrates.

The Career Seminar: Working the Culture

The Career Seminar is a packaged workshop offered by one of the training groups to interested groups in Engineering. It is intended to teach personal skills and an understanding of Tech culture, making participants better able to "design their own career." The seminar was contracted by the manager of the Lyndsville facility, who wants to emphasize "people issues" in his group. It is offered to the entire group on a voluntary basis and was advertised well in advance. Repeated reminders were sent over the technet, announcing "a three-part series on career management—three two-hour sessions over three weeks." Notices are on the library board and, on the day of the seminar, on a flipchart next to the cafeteria, highlighted with yellow marker. It is scheduled in the time-slot of the regular bi-weekly technical seminars at Lyndsville.

Toward three o'clock the seminar room starts filling up. Alan, the trainer, paces the corridor nervously. He is worried about his own career now that training budgets are being cut. "Overhead" people are always nervous around this time of the year. "My wife told me this morning to start applying some of this stuff to myself," he tells me.

At three, about fifty people are sitting in rows in the seminar room. Almost all the members of a development team that is in serious scheduling trouble are here. They have just come out of a reorganization meeting with their new manager, who has "read them the riot act." Their presence is the public version of getting one's resume ready, being in a career-evaluation mode. Also present are two or three principal engineers and a few supervisors from other groups. They are the most senior people around. Most others are junior engineers. Five or six secretaries are grouped together in a corner. Two are temps with a strong interest in becoming permanent. There are quite a few outsiders from other facilities who have somehow heard of the event, as well as people from Sales and support groups affiliated with

SysCom. One of the group personnel managers sits against the wall. Her aloof manner makes it clear that she is there as an organizer, not for herself.

The transitional phase of the session is quick and perfunctory. The manager of the sponsoring organization enters. He often refers to himself as a "people person" and takes great pains to display this orientation. This seminar is another opportunity. He puts the microphone around his neck and gives a brief introduction:

> "I just want to say two things. This is in response to requests. It is a kickoff in SysCom for activities planned for the last nine months but delayed because of changes in the personnel organization. You asked for topics beyond the technical stuff usual in our seminar series. You wanted more exposure to management issues, information, opportunity. We will get involved in the process of career management and development. We will put formal procedures in place. This is a beginning."

He moves to the business of the day with an oft-repeated "message":

> "*You* own the responsibility for the management of *your* life and career. Not your boss, your spouse, your organization, your company, but *you*! We want to *help* you take responsibility for your career and life because [smile] I don't want you to blame it on me. [Laughter.] This will start a process for you to help you understand if you are realistic or not, if you need to finetune your plans. That is it."

He turns and leaves. The personnel manager joins him. Alan takes over. He seems comfortable, exuding an air of practiced public speaking.

> "I wanna wholeheartedly support Jack's perspective: *Your career is your own responsibility!* Your career, your life, is in your own hands. I found at Tech that there is an expectation that management takes care of you. Tech expresses that in the form of lifetime employment. It is an expression of commitment to you. If the company goes down the tubes, you will find out

soon enough. But if it doesn't, take an urgent look at career management just the same. We will take a look at the why, what, and how of career management."

As he shifts to the main act—his prepared script—he tries to establish a bond of similarity with the participants. Fumbling with the transparencies on the viewgraph, he gives personal testimony, evoking the image of a chaotic Tech and its long-suffering employees:

> "I have been fired once, unfunded twice, reorganized twice. I was moved like a piece of old meat, and when I finally found something—"

"They canceled it!" someone in the audience completes his hanging sentence, as others laugh in recognition. He ends the introduction with an Arlo Guthrie imitation:

> "I *wanted* to work at Tech. I've been reorganized, disorganized, relocated, dislocated. But despite all the frustrations—it is exciting."

The transparencies are ready. He hands out photocopies. The session begins. The first one, titled "Why Career Planning—The Use of Time," moves the discussion to the realm of the personal. Alan walks a thin line between humor and seriousness as he elaborates:

> "We are all on a train. Moving toward the inevitable: Death. [Pause. Silence, then a few nervous laughs.] You all know it. We only have a certain time on this planet. And death is inevitable. We all have aspirations, what we want to do, to be. [Pause.] Basketball was mine."

He straightens up, attempting to add a few inches to his rather short frame. More laughter, and quiet glances between engineers, public questioning of hype, of style. But he has the attention of the crowd as he adds: "Think of your epitaph. If you assume you will perish, you get control of your life."

In the course of the presentation, Alan keeps up a constant stream of chat-

ter through which the central ideas are repeatedly conveyed: self-reliance and individualism serve everyone; employees are expected to take initiative; there is no contradiction between loyalty to the company and to oneself; to serve the company one must take action in one's own interest. The message is framed in a number of modes. It is supported by anecdote:

> "I was down in Everett; a lot of reassignment. I worked with them, had conversations. People there felt like their devotion to the corporation and product was enough. No need to take time for career management. 'But you're being redeployed,' I said. 'Would you have spent your time differently?' 'You're advocating disloyalty to the company!' they said. 'No! I'm advocating loyalty to yourself. If there is something you don't like, change it. What's your 'to-do' list? If part of your job stinks, change it! Talk!' 'But I have considerations, children.' 'This is not some primitive agrarian society—we're talking moving in the company. And they *pay* for it!' "

To reinforce the idea, he involves the participants in dialogue, calling on people who raise their hands:

> "What actions have you taken?"
> "I spoke to another group to find an opportunity."
> "*Good* for *you*!"
> "I spoke with my manager."
> "Yeah! *Good* for *you*!"
> "I came to this seminar."
> "*Great*! [Pause.] But it's not enough!"

Cultural analysis serves to convey the same idea. Familiar scenarios and experiences are sketched. But instead of the critical tone with which they are often accompanied, the tone here is upbeat: you can, indeed you should, do something. The next transparency is titled "Do you know any of these people?" Alan reveals the bullets one by one, reading them out loud and commenting:

"Here is one you all know: 'My project has just been canceled.'
[Laughter.] How many times have you heard it? It's got to be
up there with 'Do what's right'! Look at this one: 'I'm burnt
out. My manager is a turkey and my work is unrewarding and
confusing.' [More laughter.] Here's one who needs help! What
is the phrase you use? What is the tape in your head that keeps
you from doing something?"

Social science is cast in a supporting role. The next transparency reads: "Responsibility in the Process. Employee Self-Understanding." Alan explains:

"There are a lot of snake charmers: books, everything you
always wanted to know in fifty pages. It's fun, it's astrology.
But not many good ones. A famous psychologist, Rogers, says:
'The ego does two things. It seeks information that confirms
itself and throws out things that it doesn't like.' So seek feed-
back; find what you really need, what suits you, and do it! I'll
give you the literature [holds up two books], without the redun-
dancies. There is a lot of garbage out there. But these two books
are the best: *The Three Boxes of Life* and *What Color Is Your
Parachute?* Good stuff!" [15]

The session flows smoothly, having struck an acceptable balance between
seriousness and humor. But soon an open challenge temporarily disrupts the
collective mood. Jill, a gray-haired woman in her late forties who has been
taking an active, assertive role in the proceedings, raises her hand. She is a
temp who has been working as a secretary for one of the development groups
for about a year. Like other temps, she makes it well known that she wants
to become permanent. Alan calls on her.

Jill: "You're assuming we are lifetime employees, always here
in Tech."
Alan: "No I didn't. Find something, dabble. Wanna be a song-
writer? Tech doesn't employ songwriters? Are you sure? Maybe
there's a newsletter? *Tech-sing?* [Turns to the audience.] Maybe
Sing Sing if we keep shipping to the USSR."

Jill [loudly]: "Maybe I should look somewhere else?"
Alan [turning back to her]: "*Good* for *you*! I wanna open a
shop in Vermont someday myself! Alan's Antiques. Any more
comments? You, in the back.

The challenger is from the lowest rung of the hierarchy, and even though
she persists, she is easily silenced. She tries to respond, but someone else
is talking, and the session continues. The incident appears to have caused
some discomfort, but it is soon buried under Alan's cheerful chatter and
other questions from the audience.

The transitional post-meeting stage, a shift from ritual to routine, pro-
vides participants with an opportunity for sense-making, for interpretation.
Alan concludes his presentation with an attempt to sell the next session. His
headcount is important.

"Come next week; I'll give some tools. We have this joke
among trainers. The guy is too stressed to take a stress work-
shop, doesn't have time for a time-management seminar. Think
about it."

People begin to leave. On the way out a temp says:

"I wonder why the company is doing this; maybe they believe
that turnover prevents burnout? It sounds good, but I still want
to know if they practice what they preach. Will they really offer
me a job? Or else why encourage us? I've started networking.
I go over the job book every day and call up these marketing
people."

Two engineers talk on the way out:

"It was a lot of common sense turned into observations with
gobbledygook thrown in. He fit thirty minutes into ninety. But
some of it was useful."
"Maybe; but a lot of the stuff was written for the real world, not
this company!"

Others come forward, some to browse through the stacks of self-help books. A secretary pulls Alan aside and asks in a low voice: "How should I tell them in the job interview that the reason I want to move is to be closer to home?" She appears not to want others to hear her concern. He thinks for a while, furrowing his brow, and finally pronounces loudly: "Honesty is the best policy. Always tell the truth in job interviews!" An older technician says: "You should teach this stuff in high school. Used to be that it was start at the bottom, finish in the middle, gold watch, and out. Now it's getting real fancy."

The next two sessions follow the same format. The topics become more specific: a review of the career-management resources at Tech (job posting, counseling, and so forth) and an introduction to a technique for personal career planning. Between the lines, the characterization of the company and its members remains the same. Some attendees have dropped out, but most are back for more, and the room appears full, much to Alan's relief; informal ratings are of central importance to him.

Discussion: Talking Across

The dramatic structure of talking across is similar in many respects to that of talking down. In both cases formally designated company spokespersons use similar techniques and formats to frame the same ideological "messages" for a specially gathered audience. However, important differences in the presenter-audience relationship stem from the "educational" nature of the event. First, the status gap is small: most presenters are professional trainers, considered low-status by engineers, and are often roughly equal to participants (and occasionally lower) in formal rank, income, seniority, and tenure. Ideological expression is their work, and they depend on participant approval and support for their livelihood. Guest speakers are also close in status to participants. Second, the groups are usually small, and active participation is encouraged: speakers frequently call on all participants to make statements, ask questions, articulate their opinions, and express their feelings. Third, participation is not perceived to have organizational ramifications beyond the event itself and whatever individual changes might occur. Participants are there to learn, to take a break, to have fun, to network; in most cases, their groups have paid a fee and expect a service in return.

These qualities of the presenter-audience relationship have two consequences for the construction of the ritual frame. First, compared with top

management presentations, the rules for participant behavior are less rigid and prescribed. The speakers, with little or no formal authority and no assurance of audience support, use more elaborate techniques for eliciting expressions of affirmation and controlling dissent: they present facts, offer insider knowledge, argue, cajole, debate; they engage in catchy monologues and improvised comedy to identify themselves with the experience of members; and they use public ridicule, open interruption, and sharp responses to silence challenges. This results, on the one hand, in more heated debate: role distancing and open challenges to the ritual frame occur frequently and quite openly. On the other hand, expressions of role embracement are less suspect: when they occur—the sign of a good workshop—there are fewer reasons to doubt sincerity, to question stances, to search for hidden agendas. Thus, displays of role embracement are experienced as more authentic and spontaneous, and may therefore be more compelling.

Second, the appropriate performance of the speakers' role is more complex. Although the speakers are temporarily acting as agents of the company and its ideology, they are less identified with it than senior managers. They do not have the mystique of perceived power to fall back on, to protect, or to justify, and it is more apparent that they are not only agents of the ideology but, like the audience, its subjects as well. Consequently, they are in a bind: they need both to establish some authority for their claims as agents and, as subjects, to justify their recourse to ideological formulation beyond the routine (and therefore less trustworthy) doing of a job. Thus, whereas senior managers subtly indicate their awareness of alternative realities, trainers engage in an elaborate and careful presentation of a self- and culture-conscious stance based on frequent and skillful shifts between expressions of role embracement and expressions of role distancing.

In sum, training workshops, like top management presentations, are company-sponsored attempts to generate commitment to the organizational ideology. Here, however, debate is more open, audience responses are experienced as less contrived, and the speakers' claims are more ambiguous. At the same time, participants seem to have less stake in the proceedings and consequently may treat the event as possessing little or no significance. The messages of spokespersons, whatever their status, are qualified by their formal and open association with the managerial perspective, and are limited to events that, from the point of view of individual participants, occur relatively infrequently and at some remove from "real life." [16] In the

following section, the focus shifts to the third type of presentational ritual: those gatherings where the members themselves talk ideology in the course of their routine work life.

Talking Around: Work Group Meetings

Work group meetings are planned face-to-face gatherings of members of formally defined work groups. Although they are explicitly intended to accomplish specific organizational purposes, all are occasions for members to engage in structured forms of ideological discourse. Tech's complex organizational structure has spawned many different meeting configurations, reflecting different types of association and reasons for meeting. Most meetings, however, fall into one of three main categories. Team meetings are periodic work-related meetings of a manager and his or her immediate subordinates (also known as "direct reports"). The team is usually the members' primary formal affiliation in the organization.[17] Intergroup meetings involve members of different groups with formally defined work-related interests in common. Members from many levels may be present, but there is no single reporting relationship.[18] Timeout meetings are periodic meetings of members of work groups where the explicit goal is not work-related. Rather, the meeting is intended to provide some collective respite from the intensity of work requirements.[19] In this section, examples are offered from each of these three basic meeting types.[20]

Team Meetings

Team meetings occur at all levels of the organization. The meetings—referred to as *staff meetings* by managers and *project meetings* by engineers— are where information sharing, communication, and joint decision making are thought to occur. They are typically closed, but guests are occasionally invited. Most meetings occur on a regular basis (usually weekly) in one of the meeting rooms close to the main working space. Senior staff meetings with heavy agendas might take place off-site in one of the Tech conference centers. The following descriptions are taken from team meetings at several hierarchical levels of the organization: VP staff, product development group staff, and a staff organization (see Chapter 2 for organizational charts).

The transitional pre-meeting stage of team meetings is often quite elaborate: since members work together, they have much to discuss. A staff meeting of the management of a large engineering group begins early as members arrive and congregate around the coffee pot. Some of their conversation is personal, but most is company-related. The content is informational: company events ("I heard about your talk at the state-of-the-company meetings. I heard it was great." "Yes, they're making a video out of it. But they're taking out some of Sam's stuff; they really have to edit him these days . . ."), company policy and strategy ("We have a window of opportunity before . . ."), technical ("They found a bug in the new X-101 . . ."), political ("I hear Smith's program is in hot water these days . . ."). These interactions are an opportunity to collect, disseminate, and exchange information and draw conclusions for oneself.

Bob, the group's manager, is late, and as they await his arrival, the staff members gravitate toward the table and take their places. In the group discussion that develops, members self-consciously balance their organizational roles with seemingly light-hearted references to alternative realities.

> "Who owns the T-675? You?"
> "No! Ken Smith does, but he reports to Cranston, so now he has that monkey on his back—or some other animal."
> "I hear he is hanging out the window by the shoelaces."
> "He could slip any minute!" [Laughter.]
> "He must be getting midnight phone calls. [Pause, then a loud feigned sigh.] It's such a nice day outside."
> "Let's start without him."
> "No. Let's break up."
> "Let's take a vote. It's a perfect day for golf."
> "Why do we have to be here?"
> "I just want to be a beach bum. But I'm trying for the big bucks now."
> "We all had the same reason to come."

One manager seated at the table notices the late arrival of a peer with whom he has been involved in a well-known and protracted finger-pointing duel—a public conflict concerning the allocation of blame for the failure of

a particular project. He calls him over. Others at the table, recognizing a "political situation," watch with interest. The following interchange ensues:

> "Jack, I'd like a one-on-one with you soon; we have some stuff we need to do. Off-line."
> "I don't have my calendar here."
> "Oh. The old 'I forgot my calendar' routine, huh?"

Everybody laughs. The rejection is real, but the script has been named, its meaning noted and filed. Jack joins the group, and the bantering discussion continues until Bob arrives. "We were discussing why we have to be here," one of the more outspoken members informs him. "Because you are a member of the staff," he replies in a clipped tone as he seats himself at the head of the table. He pulls a sheaf of papers from his brief case and, glancing over the day's agenda, says in a more conversational tone: "Any big ones? Any bombshells? Anything off the street? Any names?"

The request for company information and gossip indicates a shift into a more structured mode, typically dedicated to the sharing of information by the group manager, who has access to more senior forums and more privileged information. The discussion that follows seems to mobilize the role-appropriate energies and emotions held at bay or very self-consciously displayed during the pre-meeting phase.

> "I heard that Geerson is leaving."
> "And Spencer is in a career-reevaluation mode."
> "Guess who's getting promoted: Jim Abbot!"

Then, in an enthusiastic tone, Bob relays some information:

> "The state-of-the-company meeting was *superb*! I spent three evenings with marketing people. We had serious discussions; none of the rah-rah stuff. And thanks to Jim, who gave a *super* presentation. It was by far the best Tech talk I've heard! They walked away with powerful messages. It was *fantastic*!"

Heads are nodding. Some of those who were present at the event give their own interpretive comments:

> "Sam is moving to another level now. He got people to be successful, and now he is challenging them."
> "Yeah, and he took Jackson to task."

Others ask questions, and Bob answers:

> "Is Jackson going to change directions?"
> [Pause.] "The statement I would like to make at this point is this: Sam asked me what were the three major issues over the next four years. I said: One, get Engineering thinking business. [A round of vigorous nods.] As an old Tech watcher, let me tell you—and this is only an hypothesis—that the matrix will shift again and Engineering will take up more of the Marketing space. And Marketing will have clearer deliverables. Let me also tell you the mood on the executive staff. There is a general swing in the company to get out of the happy horseshit of 'go off and do your own thing.' And I am one of the proponents of that swing. We are going to take a harsh look at projects."

The discussion continues in this vein. The tone is excited and animated. The focus is the company and its success and, in particular, on the role of the present group (and its enemies) in the great achievements. Members appear fully engaged in the proceedings. After a few minutes Bob says:

> "OK. That's enough. Now let's get down to business. No more intergalactic stuff. I don't want another 'where the rubber meets the sky' meeting today. What's the first agenda item?"

The transition into the ritual frame is complete.

The main act—the working part of the team meeting—consists of the discussion of prearranged "agenda items," business or technical subjects usually presented by one or more of the regular participants, or by a specially invited outsider. The time spent on each agenda item is often limited. Some items are designed to convey information to participants or solicit their input. In other cases a decision is expected. Many agenda items consist of a formal presentation followed by a group discussion.

The presentations focus on substantive discussion of the issue at hand,

yet they are frequently the occasion for explicit references to aspects of the organizational ideology. These references are often initiated by the group manager, but other participants also make ideological comments as a feature of their own presentations or as part of the discussion. For the most part, such discussion occurs within the context of apparent consensus and commitment to the group goals, validated by the ideological correctness of this stance. A typical example occurs at the staff meeting of a large development group. On the agenda is a review of the group's projects by the product manager. Using a viewgraph, he runs through all the projects, emphasizing schedule slips and resource shortages. He concludes with one of the more problematic projects, now a few months behind schedule:

> "The main issue here is that X-121 is in trouble. So we'll have a group review every week to meet and review the process. We *own* it, and we have to *work* the issue."

As the presenter returns to his seat, the group manager looks around the table. The air is one of solemn concern. The implications of "ownership"—a central ideological principle—seem clear to all. He emphasizes and elaborates the point:

> "I agree! When you own it, you *better* work it! Before you comment, I want to say something. I feel damn good about the business. I'm only upset about X-121. Very upset and frustrated. We have to get control. We *own* it. If we have to, 80 percent of our efforts will be focused on this. We'll manage it. And we're going to play it by the culture—bottom-up. We'll get our proposal ready. We'll take it to the VP staff for their buy-in. Then we'll take it to the strategy committee and say: 'This is what we can do for you and this is what we need.' And from there we go to the executive committee, and if that isn't enough to Sam, and say: 'Use your individual prerogative money, use your skunk money, anything.' We'll be polite, but we'll play real hardball."

A round of comments from the participants follows. A project manager who is responsible for X-121 says:

> "Jim and his people have been giving an arm and a leg and a brain to make this happen. Some of them are flat out."

Others nod. Another staff member adds a suggestion:

> "We need to give a rah-rah speech to the development managers so they understand the implications of a slippage. My people on the X series saw it in all its seriousness, but everyone should know."

After the comments, the group manager concludes:

> "They all know it's in trouble, but they must understand the magnitude of it. I'll give a state-of-the-group talk and say some macho words. We'll invite everybody out even if we have to fill the cafeteria twice. It's important to get everyone. My belief about teamness is that we must also get the secretaries, the techs, the writers, the manufacturing people. I want teamness."

Next, some "actions" are assigned to various participants—Tech terminology for the responsibility for getting something accomplished. A date and a list of participants for an X-121 review meeting are set, and responsibility for preparation is allocated. Then the group manager leans forward:

> "Before we move on to the next item, I'll give you one of my one-minute lecturettes—I can't stifle myself. This group is getting into a leadership position. Others will follow using the same tools. I'm pleased we're in the single largest growth industry. *But*—engineers are the worst strategic planners. We teach them, we beat it into them: micro thinking. Control, specify, and understand all the variables. An engineer can't see the large scheme, can't work with loose concepts, with unspecified stuff. It's right for engineers—that is the way they should be doing things. Or else they should be doing something else—like being managers. [Laughter.] But seriously: we have to help our engineers. We have to have a small number of strategic goals. Three,

maybe four. Macro ones that can last for five years. Something like: 'Reach a billion in sales in '88.' Something they can understand and don't have to micro it to death. Or maybe: 'Use standards to competitive advantage.' So if someone comes to a meeting we can ask them: 'How does that help us, or is there a new goal?' I wanna see buttons, posters, repeated over and over again: 'Use standards.' 'Make a billion.' So even secretaries understand and know the strategy. We'll become well-organized and aggressive. But we'll still get quality products out the door. That's always the number one priority. It's always being tops. Maybe there is only one thing above it: being honest. Boy, I didn't know I would be getting philosophical [laughs]. This is the end of my presentation; I'm not good at this."

His words are accompanied by distinct signs of affirmation from those present. He calls for the next agenda item.

Not all interchanges are consensual. Conflicts of interest between the participants frequently surface, and in the interactions that result, central tenets of the ideology or their interpretation in specific contexts might be challenged or debated. This may occur in conflictual interchanges between peers. Here, for example, the no-layoff policy occasions a heated exchange between senior staff members. A manager presents a forecast for future hiring needs to the group. John, one of his peers, introjects a suggestion that the company "get rid of some of the deadwood in Manufacturing" so that more engineers can be hired. The presenter responds hotly:

"Sam's position on the corporate culture is clear: no layoffs! But the business types are anxious, and they say that the solution is obvious—change the policy. Well, let's get it straight. I don't care about the profitability! Nothing gets my loyalty to this company more than the current policy! These are people out there, real people and real bills. I was laid off once and I know what it's like."

His emotional rendition of commitment to a central ideological principle silences the group momentarily, but John retorts with a well-known company joke: "And I thought they were interchangeable work units." They stare at

each other as the tension rises. But the agenda is heavy, and a third party offers a compromise drawing on an equally central principle—profitability:

"Tech's run on emotion too much! We need facts, not religion! The numbers can get us out of all this emotional stuff, all this 'do it my way'! The only thing that is real is making money!"

On this all seem to agree. The tension visibly subsides, and the issue is temporarily suspended. The ritual frame is restored, and the meeting moves on.

Overt challenges to the ritual frame are handled more directly. For example, Jim, a development group manager, is specifying to a VP staff meeting the resources his organization requires. The presentation goes smoothly until he mentions that he wants to hire people who have left Tech and now want to return. He is under severe scheduling pressure, and he wants people, good people. The group's personnel manager says that the corporate policy is clearly against rehiring. Others are concerned that Jim's increased headcount will come at their expense. The tension rises as participants offer different interpretations of the corporate policy. Finally, the vice-president intervenes to explain the ideological underpinnings of the policy, until Jim interrupts:

"In the past people left and returned. Now you need a VP approval to rehire someone. Some people left and returned with higher salaries. Sam was mad. He claimed there was no loyalty. That is why the policy is there. We can't hire back anyone who left 'for significant financial advantage,' or who 'competes against Tech,' or who has 'burnt bridges.' "
[Loudly] "Do you want this product? Right now we are flat out! Either we cut back expectations or we OK outside hires. And forget this loyalty crap!" [Silence.]
"Jim, I'll take that with you off-line."

The suggestion to take it "off-line" is a mild rebuke. Jim is a group member of relatively high status with whom a continuing working relationship is necessary. The vice-president, aware of his dependence on Jim, knows he must be careful and at the same time preserve his authority. Likewise, Jim knows he has gone too far and takes the opportunity to withdraw. He continues

his presentation, and the subject of rehiring does not resurface. During a break they schedule some time for a one-on-one. The issue now becomes a private one. Whatever action is taken will not get in the way of the ritual frame within which members may claim to share comfortable ideological formulations.

Occasionally, group members who challenge the ritual frame do not respond to subtle attempts to silence them. Here, more blatant techniques of control are used. For example, at a meeting of a project team, the group manager tries to close a debate by describing the "Tech disease":

> "We think that we're in terrible shape, but in fact we're in good shape. We are very self-critical and love to beat ourselves up. There is an 'ain't it awful' attitude. A lot of good people left because of it. It might be a self-fulfilling prophecy."

It is an often heard observation that many members almost automatically acknowledge as true. However, Mike, who has recently joined the group after his project was dramatically "unfunded," and who has been quietly but demonstratively leaning back in his chair, sits forward and bursts out:

> "What is all this talk of Tech? I don't see any Tech! What is this 'we'? I haven't met anything called Tech! I work with some people and get a paycheck!"

There is a brief, tense silence. The manager swivels his chair back to the flipchart and says loudly: "Moving right along . . ." as he brings up the next agenda item. Some people exchange glances, and a few under-the-breath titters are heard. Mike's presence is keenly felt. But the next time he starts talking ("I don't understand. What exactly do you *mean* by 'leadership'?"), Bill—an older manager known for his outspokenness—laughs and says: "I figured out a way to get him to stop." Turning to Mike, he takes a dollar bill from his wallet and says: "I'll buy you a beer if you stop talking." He puts it on the table. The next time Mike tries to intervene, someone throws the bill at him and somebody else pastes it on the wall next to the charts they are working on. Mike is quiet for a while and then joins in the discussion. Later someone explains to me that Mike was "burnt out" in his previous job and is now recuperating. "Bill handled him just right."

The intense, highly charged, and often conflictual interchanges that are characteristic of the working stage of the meeting are interspersed with short timeouts. During these, participants temporarily suspend their show of emotional involvement in the proceedings and assume a shared interpretive, often playful, stance. A VP staff meeting illustrates a sequence of conflictual engagements and interpretive timeouts.

A presentation proposing the funding of a new development effort—considered "an emotional issue" by those involved—turns into a shouting match between the presenter and a manager who is competing for the funding. The emotions seem real and dangerous, and the protagonists almost attack each other. The vice-president says nothing. The personnel manager, one of the few women in the group, intervenes a number of times in an attempt to calm the discussion, but to no avail. Finally, after a decision to take it "off-line," the episode is closed and a short break announced. The presenter walks out and lights a cigarette in the corridor.

The next scheduled agenda item is a guest presentation by a manager from a competing development group reporting to a different VP. Frank, the scheduled presenter, has been waiting outside. He is here to talk about a product he is developing and its connections to this group. There is potential for disagreement. Frank sticks his head in. He knows a good number of those present. "Is it safe to come in yet?" he asks, opening the door just enough for his head to pass through, holding on to an imaginary helmet and ducking to avoid flying shrapnel. The participants laugh, and someone replies: "It's OK, we're ready for you, we have you all set up." He is referring to the collusion among members of one group to cause the failure of others—a well-known scenario frequently referred to and often used. They all laugh. Frank makes his way to the front of the room, exchanging pleasantries with the VP:

> "I heard about your talk at the state-of-the-company meeting. Did they tape your session?"
> "Yeah."
> "Good! I'll catch it."

The VP formally introduces Frank. Frank slides up the blackboard covered with leftovers from previous discussions. The one revealed underneath, however, still has the day's agenda listed on it. Frank does a double take

and says with mock horror: "Aha! A hidden agenda!" This causes loud and lengthy laughter. As he is arranging his slides he offers some additional cultural commentary:

> "This company is really 10,000 ten-man companies—and everybody talks! I sent out a draft of this proposal over the net to a few people and got back comments from people I've never heard of. The presentation takes an hour—*without* participation."

The last words are accompanied by a meaningful wink, indicating he knows what to expect. Frank begins his presentation. The timeout is over.

Frank is all business as he works his way through his prepared slides. Everyone in the room is clearly opposed to his ideas, and the hostile comments reflect it. Occasionally, however, the tone shifts from his serious presentation and open conflict to a brief, dramatized, humorous observation, as in the following interchange between the VP and Frank:

> "It'll never get across the executive committee!"
> "I hear you, but in spite of it we're gonna get our funding—eighty big ones."
> "Does Sam know? I would make sure through some mechanism (not yourself!) that he does."
> "You're right. Give us the 'didn't happen on my shift' option if anything goes wrong."
> "And then stand back."

Frank steps back against the wall, raises his arms, and remains for one second in the crucified pose, recognized by all as the penalty for tangling with Sam. Everybody laughs. Someone says: "Well, Frank, you know we're behind you!" Frank retorts: "That's the problem!" All share the joke and the good cheer that comes from this interchange. There appears to be comradeship—even mutual appreciation—in the lighthearted acknowledgment of enmity between groups and their representatives and in the playful naming of conflict-laden scripts: the set up, the hidden agenda, the crucifixion, the backstabbing.

Frank is followed by a lawyer from the corporate legal department, who

warns the group to be careful in their documents to avoid antitrust issues and trouble with the Federal Trade Commission. He explains the law and concludes:

> "We're not the little old high-tech company from down the street any more. You can't round 11 percent market share into 20 percent. I've seen letters say: 'We have 85 percent of the market share and by God we'll get it all!' Your mail is claimable in court. Think of everything you write as being forwarded to the FTC! One case is enough. You don't know where it will hit us from—a disgruntled distributor, an irate ex-employee."

It is "we time." The group responds with solemn nods, confirming their concern with the company good. A coffee break is called. The corporate interest is not something to be openly questioned, but humorous interchanges during the break allow members to express alternative views. A group of managers stand together in the corridor discussing the presentation and its implications.

> "It's bullshit. Nothing to worry about. A lot of the documents we write are on the technet. So they're here today, gone tomorrow. I always keep my mail in order. Delete the sensitive stuff is the first thing to do."
> "You're forgetting one thing. They can go over the tapes! Everything stays on tapes!"
> "What?!"
> "Uh-oh! Someone better run through the tapes with a magnet! I'm gonna be more careful."
> "Did you hear? Alan just had a great line. The lawyer said: 'Don't get the documents in the wrong hands,' and he said: 'I know what he meant. Keep them away from the executive committee!' " [Laughter.]
> "Yeah, especially anything with funding on it!"

Team meetings usually end abruptly, particularly when the session has gone over the scheduled time. Thus, the post-meeting stage is often short. Members indicate that they are under time pressure. Many have scheduled

events elsewhere or have planned meetings with one or more of the team members on specific topics. Participants leave rapidly, but the events of the meeting are often discussed between friends, acquaintances, and confidants for days, and some are reported by participants at other group meetings.

The Intergroup Meeting

The second type of work group meeting involves members of a number of different groups and teams. Tech's matrix structure (see Chapter 2) requires members from a variety of functional groups to work together on shared or interdependent projects. Program managers, for example, hold formal responsibility for projects that involve many different functional groups and organizations. Authority is vaguely defined and often the subject of dispute. Program participants meet in a variety of configurations, but less regularly than team members, so that participants are less familiar with each other.

The ABC program is a corporate program aimed at linking technologies and products from a number of independent groups into a unified package designed to appeal to customers. The program is highly visible and, like many similar matrixed programs, the subject of considerable debate: some in the company are opposed to it; others feel that they should own it; still others would rather not be involved. The program manager calls meetings when necessary. Most involve relevant small groups (for example, all the marketing managers, or all the project leaders responsible for a particular technology). Occasionally, all the members involved in the program are invited to a program review meeting. The meeting is convened by the manager responsible for the program and is designed as a mini-conference, an opportunity for representatives of all groups to interact, exchange information, views, and impressions, negotiate, learn, network, scout the opposition, and build coalitions.

The ABC program meeting takes place in a large conference room at the local Hilton. It is a fancier setting than most Tech affairs, befitting the importance of the event. Carefully choreographed ahead of time by the program manager in consultation with managers of participating groups, the meeting is organized around a series of presentations by members of the various interested groups. Over a hundred people are present. This well-publicized event has drawn participants of several statuses and functions: managers from the level of supervisor to group manager, and engineers from junior engineer to senior consulting engineer. Also present are representatives from

Marketing, Manufacturing, and other functions. Many know each other or of each other. The gathering reflects the tension between group interests. Potential conflict is in the air.

The transitional stage begins as participants slowly arrive. The milling around is cut short at nine when Jane, the program manager, opens the proceedings with a short talk. She is in her late thirties, chain smoking and apparently nervous. These events are important for forming the public opinion of the program, and of her. Many participants are of higher rank and status; it is on such occasions that reputations are made and take on a life of their own. This kind of visibility is essential both to her career and to the program. She starts with some interpretive comments and a joke.

> "Welcome to the meeting. The point is to share info, to get people together. So introduce yourself. The person next to you may be vitally important to what you are doing. We need consistent communication. We need to keep talking. To start it off I have a joke. A policeman stops a man driving a car full of penguins. He orders him to drive them to the zoo, to 'do what's right'—'do what's right' is a Tech term, you know. The next day he stops them again, this time all wearing sunglasses. He gets mad and says: 'I thought I told you to do what's right!' The man answers: 'I did. I took them to the zoo yesterday. Today I'm taking them to the beach.' "

The joke falls flat. People are still walking in and seating themselves behind the rows of tables, looking around to get a sense of who is there. A series of presentations begins. Participants listen carefully, watching for any sign, any message, any clue, to the various hidden agendas. The words of each presenter are important, and so are the reactions in the crowd. First to speak is Tony, who heads one of the larger development groups involved in the program. He starts by conveying a "message":

> "I have no jokes. I'm a warm-up show. Not much content, like at a rock concert. A group that may make it someday, but now is getting everyone to scream, jump, and clap. [Pause.] My message to you is this: ABC is a *corporate program*. It's not ours. We don't own it. But we do support it, and encourage others to.

[Pause.] I delight in heretical, paradoxical things; well, here's one. The ABC program is bad! It's to our disadvantage. It will homogenize the products and take away our edge! People with crappy products get the advantage back."

As he speaks, the audience becomes engaged in interpreting the significance of what he says. Some whispering starts. ("He wants to be a good corporate citizen and cover his own ass.") Next to me, a manager from Tony's group turns and studies the reactions of senior engineers and managers. Tension rises in the row in front of us, where the English contingent sits. They are known to be strong supporters of ABC. Others turn discreetly to eye the group that might be taking offense, now huddling with their heads together, whispering. Someone near me says: "He'll get things thrown at him." Tony, noticing the reaction, smiles and says: "Sorry to those of you who have to make it happen!"

After establishing his reservations, Tony moves to the viewgraph with transparencies listing the reasons for supporting the program. He turns it on. A typical presentation ensues: dim lights, a rather eerie setting, the presenter shaded, the messages glowing in the semidarkness. The lighting dims participants' views of each other and creates the impression of a darkened mass focusing on the issue, the person, and the message. It is against this background that the ritual frame is constructed. Tony reads his first transparency:

"Well, here is my warm-up message: 'ABC is a competitive weapon.' We're doing it not because we're good guys, not for religious reasons, or because it is best. We're doing it to use as a competitive advantage. It is suited to what we have to do as we move to the future."

The message is clear. This is business. Advantage. Pragmatism. Hardball. No "religion," no "fluff." We. We in Tech. As he uncovers each bullet, he reads it out loud, chanting rhythmically as he emphasizes each "we":

"*We* believe that Silicon Tech is our primary competition.
We believe that Silicon Tech is stuck with crap.
We believe that they cannot move into ABC technology easily.

We believe that this is our great opportunity.
We believe our other competitors will have the same problems.
We have to put our energy, our creativity, into development.
We have a strategy.
We believe it is the way to go.
We think it's a win. [Another transparency.] We would like to be the leader in ABC. People worked hard to make ABC acceptable. We normally knock ourselves for not doing this, but this time we did it well. We increased the market share in the Far East! Many believe that 60 percent of revenues will come from there in the future."

Tony is followed by a long series of presenters. Each says some personal words. It is an opportunity to get known, to work on one's reputation. A marketing manager is next. Assuming the reflective style and "wise" approach that many adopt for such occasions, he introduces himself and starts:

"We want people to think of Tech and immediately of this product. It is better than sex! And to think of Silicon and theirs as slavery!"

There is little response. Hype from marketeers is familiar, now standard and without shock value, not even worth an engineer's raised eyebrow. He continues:

"We have to enhance the Tech image, appeal to the consulting industry, cultivate them, use them as press announcers, have them become our missionaries, carry our messages. [Chanting rhythmically.]
We need to maintain high levels of quality!
We need to give customers the warm fuzzies!
We need to make management feel good all over!
[Lowered voice.] Our assumptions: Engineering will continue to produce quality on time. The competition will be tough. We need Engineering's support. We're not technical people. We need help in setting it up, getting it running. Marketing got in-

volved late in this process and is behind. We need to work as a team, to further define and enhance this product."

As the presentations continue, the elements that make up the ritual frame—the "messages," the jokes, the metaphors, the exhortations—become repetitive, even stale. Yet it is the seemingly endless flow of public platitudes, the style of their delivery, and the audience acknowledgment that provide the framework and the means for interaction. In their substance and their rhythmic chanting, these expressions celebrate the organizational ideology: the unity and integrity of the company, the "we," the common purpose.

Tech's organizational ideology, however, is interpreted not only within the ritual frame and in the familiar words and phrases of the speakers, but in the backstage activities of the participants. Quiet reactions and whispered conversations must also be monitored, decoded, and stored for future use. Here the focus is on the subgroup rivalries, the conflict, the politics. A number of participants have moved outside. Discussions are taking place near the coffee, just outside the main door. Inside, flurries of whispers accompany the presenter's words. A woman sitting next to me scans the room and explains the scene. She points to a ruddy-faced man sitting in the back row and engaged in energetic whispering with his neighbors:

"That is Cliff Laing! He is God! He is one of the chosen! He made the president's list last year! And that is Bob Howe next to him. There was a reporting line, but now it's dotted. They both are gurus. And if they are having a fit right now, they are right! But it isn't serious, or else Cliff would have spoken up."

She notices her boss, a few rows away, making notes, and turns her attention to the presenter, opening her own notebook with renewed interest.

Since it is a large and open forum with many strangers, the felt tension between public unity and private strife, between the ritual frame and the reality, is rarely acknowledged. Nevertheless, tension between organizations and their representatives is not far from the surface. Occasionally, the differing perspectives clash and erupt into open conflict. The first indication of disagreement between the presenter, who has been extolling the virtues

of a project titled Jupiter, and a member of a competing group working on Apollo comes during the question and answer period:

"What is the probability of a slip? What would you do?"
"It's like asking me what I would do if my house burned down. That means that on the date we said we'd deliver we won't deliver. I guess that is the definition of a slip. [Laughter.] Well, in the event of a disaster I have no plan. You are actually asking what is my contingency plan. I will tell you that when it happens. Next question."

Open hostilities emerge in the course of the next presentation. Tom, who manages Apollo, stands and interrupts: "Jupiter is not known in the U.S., while Apollo is. It doesn't help the company to keep pushing it." The presenter responds sharply, and Jerry, a member of the Jupiter group in the audience, says quite loudly: "Those Apollo people, they are a closed community and are on the inside looking out." When the presenter is interrupted again, he becomes visibly more agitated, raises his voice, and says: "What you are proposing is high-risk; you don't want to argue about that now!" The debate ceases for a while, and the presentation resumes its earlier tone.

Both sides have made their points, and the show continues. The level of open aggression rose too high and was managed in a rather curt way. But it reappears when the marketing manager for Apollo makes his presentation. Jerry gets involved again, surfacing the conflict that started earlier: "Forgetting all the religion, . . ." he says of the just presented technical and business arguments, and makes his own point. It is an open challenge, but the scene is cut short again by the program manager, who stands and calls for the lunch break. "Have those conversations that you were dying to have," she says, as behind me people laugh quietly. The room empties rapidly as lunch and "those conversations" beckon. But Jerry is not done yet. Tom saunters over to his side of the room. Jerry is still lounging, paging through industry journals, waiting, pretending not to notice the approaching challenger. Others, expecting a juicy showdown, wait too. Jerry closes the journal and looks up. A heated exchange follows. Ideological formulations are a resource in such exchanges. Opponents are accused of breaking the norms, of being

"countercultural," of misunderstanding or not manifesting the appropriate membership role:

> "The industries don't care about your product! The financials don't give a shit either! So I don't have to agree to the markets defined by XYZ!"
>
> "Read the popular media, see who has more references! No one mentions your stuff!"
>
> "You're raising flags and alienating people. If you don't quietly sell people on the religion, you won't get anywhere in this company."
>
> "I'm arguing that XYZ is the way to go."
>
> "That's religion! What evidence do you have? What numbers?"
>
> "Take the popular press—"
>
> [Interrupts.] "That is not my measure. Ask the companies. And you're not successfully selling people in Tech; you're alienating them. You move in with your whole contingent and you're beating 'em over the head with it."

It is getting distinctly unpleasant. Tom has a fixed smile on his face, and Jerry rises. They move away from each other, Jerry almost walking out on Tom as they make their way to the door. It is lunch time, time for a temporary suspension of hostilities.

There is a long line for a buffet lunch. Lunch is an extended timeout that allows participants some respite from the effort to navigate through the rule-bound events. Plate in hand, people move toward the dining room and sit around large tables. Discussions seem animated. Participants may relax and feel freer to associate with like-minded others, to enact realities of their choice, to inhabit a more comfortable place on the continuum between engagement and detachment. Lunch is also an occasion for interpretive discussions with people of one's choice ("Did you notice he didn't mention John Cummings and the chips folks in his org chart?"), an opportunity to mingle, to exchange information, to impress one's superiors, to have a drink, to check the box scores or the Tech stocks, to play politics, to wander off. After lunch, there is time for leisure activities. Senior managers are still in shifting huddles. Others line up at the public telephones, taking care of other business. Some of the engineers wander off alone. Three or four Englishmen

make a show of walking off in search of a bar. One responds to a question with the grin of a naughty boy: "Where do you think we're going? We're English!" They spend the lunch break in the bar.

Toward one o'clock, people are again congregating at the doorway of the still-darkened conference room. The earlier showdown remains the topic of discussion. "XYZ are the new kids on the block. They have to push and shove to get recognition. That's the way it always works," a manager explains as he watches the protagonists return to their seats. "And it isn't over yet!" Such conflicts are not resolved; rather, they develop into ongoing battles that erupt whenever representatives of the warring factions cross paths. These feuds are an openly acknowledged and much discussed part of the Tech scene.

The rest of the day is dedicated to more presentations. Some people leave early, others show up late; the conference room and the adjacent corridors are constantly in use. At five o'clock the day is formally closed.

Timeout Meetings

The third type of work group meeting occurs when members gather as part of a formally designated timeout. In contrast to other work group meetings, these events are designed to introduce leisure—or at least relaxation—into work settings for the explicit purpose of "building morale" and increasing "motivation." Rules that govern work life are, at least partly, suspended, and standard configurations are broken down. Thus, timeout meetings have the almost oxymoronic goal of formalizing and authoritatively prescribing the unstructured playfulness and self-awareness that characterize informally occurring timeouts in the course of regular meetings. Consequently, the ritual is a mirror image of rituals in other settings: the playful, tongue-in-cheek component is emphasized, while the transitional stages preceding and following it contain reminders of the serious side of organizational life.

At Tech there are many occasions for timeout meetings. "It is never too late to party," members often assert, and the company is generally thought to encourage leisure activities and socializing. However, the boundary between work and play is vague: the definitions of organizational time are flexible; there are many attempts to annex and colonize members' time; and work and play are often combined. Thus, as the following examples show, what is "time out" and what is "time in" is never quite clear, and the distinction is a matter of degree. The monthly meeting of the SysCom

development group is close in style and substance to regular work group meetings, whereas the playful component is dominant in the preparations for "the SysCom Olympics."

The Monthly Meeting SysCom's monthly organizational meeting is open to all employees. It takes place before lunch in the cafeteria of SysCom's new facility. The cafeteria is in the corner of the building and has large windows that open onto a spectacular view. All managers, many engineers, and some secretaries—about 150 people—appear. The manager has made it known that he would like full attendance, and this has been informally encouraged.

The pre-meeting phase is short. Members gather at tables, busy "talking shop." All work in the same facility and see each other on an ongoing basis. In front of the crowd, ready for presentation, is the "golden bull"—a monthly award. It is a garish trophy, roughly six feet high, of fake gold. At the top is a miniature bull. Underneath it are an assortment of others: a bust of Einstein, a dolphin, a golfer on a stage supported by golden columns, and a faithful reproduction of the *Manneken Pis*. Around the golden bull on a table are twelve statuettes of golden angels about eight inches tall. Some members examine the trophies up close.

The transition into the main act is quick. Jack, the group manager, stands. Quite a bit shorter than the trophy and seemingly oblivious to it, he begins with a review of the group performance, focusing on the feelings appropriate to membership in this group.

> "The new building we will be moving into is great: three floors, *windows* at the end of the corridor, plenty of lab space. The old building will be taken by someone outside Engineering. They want a cafeteria, and it will be a significant improvement for them. You look at those funny things [points at the window] and it will make you feel: I'm a professional, I'm valued. I sense the beginning of momentum, feeling good about ourselves. We've shipped some important products. Those who have been down on us can look now. We're shipping and we're even going to make a profit this year. I want to salute the Poseidon people. They nursed it and brought it back to health, and we're even making a bunch of money on it! The overall product strategy is coming together. I feel really good about it, and so should you."

He spends about fifteen minutes discussing the status of various projects. Despite the golden bull in the background, this portion of the meeting is straight and serious in its dealings with the group's success and is similar in tone and style to other types of meeting.

When he has concluded his speech, the manager smiles broadly, steps aside, and looks at the trophy. The mood in the room is transformed as the golden bull becomes the center of attention: it is now more playful, semi-serious, almost tongue-in-cheek. In an intentionally exaggerated dramatic tone, he says:

> "And now—the golden bull award, representing the spirit of the bull: put your head down and plow through the problems. [Pause.] It goes to—Ed Williams and the people who made X-101 happen." [Applause and some cheers.]

Ed, the project's development manager, walks to the front of the room, waving at the audience. The group manager gives an account of the project's difficulties and its current business success, naming major corporate clients. Then he reads the names of the project team, stumbling on the foreign-sounding ones.

> "Sorry if I slaughtered the names, but it's Ed's fault. I asked him to spell the list carefully. I was going to get money for a restaurant, but money is short these days—the squeeze is on. Maybe we can afford McDonald certificates, though. [Laughter.] Today I also have new trophies. We'll have to find a reason for each. These are genuine metal—not plastic. They come in male and female versions, so if you get the wrong sex, let me know."

Everyone seems amused. When the laughter subsides, it is back to business. Jack introduces a new manager, then asks if there are questions. No answer. "No problems?" he repeats. Someone near me snorts audibly. The meeting is adjourned. The golden bull is transported to Ed's office by an engineer who carries it horizontally in one hand, highlighting its nature as a prop. For a month it will protrude into the open space above Ed's cubicle, visible from anywhere in the building. The crowd disperses rapidly.

The SysCom Olympics Every summer SysCom management sponsors the "SysCom Olympics," organized sports competitions that occur during the lunch break or in the late afternoons. Art, the manager of one of SysCom's main development groups, is responsible for organizing the event. Invitations have been out for weeks. All nodes on the technet were informed by Art's secretary. For the marginal, the unconnected, or the disconnected, notices were posted all over the building, along with sign-up sheets for the various sports. A five-dollar charge covers the red or green T-shirt that represents one of the two randomly chosen teams.

The first event is the opening ceremony. At three o'clock, the 40 or so participants gather in the conference room that usually serves the senior staff meeting. They are a cross section of the organization: engineers, managers, secretaries, support staff. All are crowded around the long, shiny table, waiting. Suddenly the door opens, and Art, with a torch made of rolled-up computer printout and a crown of leaves on his head, enters the room and circles the table in slow motion. Those who have seen this before smile; the others look rather surprised. Art assumes his place at the head of the table and with a practiced motion flips on the viewgraph, removes the playful accoutrements, and gives a presentation.

The presentation lasts about fifteen minutes. The first transparency covers the history of the SysCom Olympics; the next one, the purpose; the next one, the rules; and the last, the administration. At this point, the event resembles a regular presentation, despite the red and green T-shirts, the unusual mix of people, and the crown of leaves on the table. Art, a technical-type manager, is clearly not comfortable talking. He follows the transparencies closely and seriously, uncovering one bullet at a time by lowering a sheet of paper. He calls on his secretary to give the administrative arrangements. She, straight-faced, replaces him and reproduces another perfect presentation with her own transparencies. Finally, Art sums up:

> "I want to say a few words. It's good that we are doing this. I'm glad you came. I know that things have been a little rough lately. There has been a lot of pressure. [Heads nod.] This will give you people an opportunity to relax and take your minds off things, to work off your excess energy, feel a little better about what's going on. Get a little more motivated. Also get to know each other, improve your morale. But remember. Nobody is

> watching you. This is *not* a Tech event. So don't take off company time too blatantly. There is enough of that anyway. And don't get hurt. Benefits are great—but you're not covered on this one!"

Timeout fades back to timein. The ambiguous interpenetration of work and play and the significance they lend each other hang over the dispersing crowd, as people return to their daily routines. A departing engineer says to another: "I feel my morale improving already. How about you?"

Discussion: Talking Around

Compared with top management presentations and training workshops, work group meetings are less explicitly focused on delivering ideological messages. For the most part, they are ostensibly designed to accomplish work-related purposes, and talking ideology is an incidental activity. Nevertheless, it is here that members experience most acutely the pressures to express role embracement. This occurs for a number of reasons. First, work group meetings are perceived as more "real." Participants have salient and often conflicting interests, and they are constantly in the presence of those who are—or who might become—formally charged with evaluating their performance and allocating rewards. Second, the meetings take place on a regular basis and often in recurring configurations. Participants have extensive and ongoing ties with each other and will continue to serve as a relevant audience long after a particular event is over. Third, members experience the role of presenter most frequently at work group meetings. In any particular event a number of participants may share the role of presenter, and those in passive roles in one meeting are often active in another. Under these circumstances it is in the participants' interest to engage in what some refer to as "raising the flag": making oneself visible, creating an impression, and generally jockeying for the ideological high ground by positioning oneself as an agent of the ideology—a shining exemplar of the member role and a caustic critic of the failures of others.

However, the same features that exert pressure to express role embracement work in the opposite direction as well. The members' familiarity with each other, the need to maintain a semblance of order and harmony in the face of continued conflict and potential chaos, and the desire to preserve working relationships also result in extensive efforts to suspend and defuse

conflict. More than in other gatherings, work group meetings are characterized by elaborate and highly structured displays of role distancing during transitional periods and timeouts—momentary and extensive, spontaneous and designed.

Thus, work group meetings are where members experience the contradiction between role embracement and role distancing most acutely. Consequently, these meetings are characterized by a studied ambiguity, a shared ironic stance, and frequent timeouts. The distinctions between "on-line" and "off-line" and between humor and seriousness, and the occasional need to achieve compromise or suppress deviance, become a central aspect of the ritual form. This dual significance is best captured in the use of ambiguous symbols such as the golden bull: a valued prize for company-approved technical accomplishment whose grotesque nature carries self-parodying connotations of "bullshit." Such ambiguity allows the ritual to take its course while also commenting on it and making available aspects of the submerged realities that rituals often obscure. Thus, the various meanings built into the ritual frame collapse into each other: the ritual is imbued with self-parody, ideology with common sense.

Conclusion: Ritual and Normative Control

Presentational rituals at Tech are an integral and ongoing feature of members' work lives. In one form or another they are a pervasive presence on the Tech scene and constantly make demands on the way members present themselves. Most generally speaking, the performance of the ritual—whether in large and festive settings or on smaller and less formal occasions—is a framing device: members, acting as agents of the corporate interest, attempt to establish a shared definition of the situation within which reality claims derived from the organizational ideology are experienced as valid. To this end, participants are presented with slogans and metaphors ("Tech is a bottom-up company," "We are like a football team") with which the complex reality that is Tech is to be expressed. In particular, a distinct and somewhat abstract view of the member role and its appropriate behaviors ("doing what's right," "working hard," "he who proposes does"), cognitions ("the importance of technological accomplishment," "the centrality of profit"), and emotions ("commitment," "having fun," "enthusiasm") is presented or implied, and, more crucially, specific instances of their correct

application are dramatized, noted, and rewarded. In short, like all rituals, these occasions are used as vehicles for the exertion of what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) refers to as symbolic power—the power to define reality.

Tech rituals, however, have two distinct features. First, they are characterized by a decentralization of power. Symbolic power, as one might expect, is clearly possessed by those invested with formal authority and high status, and most effectively applied when the status gap between participants is large or the power of reward or sanction well defined. But in the context of ritual life at Tech, this type of power may accrue to those who possess other resources as well: the power of numbers found in the pooled resources and the concerted action of groups; temporarily assigned formal roles; acknowledged technical expertise or relevant experience; an open endorsement of the organizational interest; the threat that in Tech's open and shifting environment, reputation, status, and real rewards are in the hands of numerous, often unknown, others; and, if nothing else, a fluency in the language, mode of thinking, and style of ideological discourse.[21] In short, from the point of view of the individual participant, agents of control are everywhere: one is surrounded and constantly observed by members (including oneself) who, in order to further their own interests, act as spokespersons and enforcers of the organizational ideology.

Second, since the ideology is one of openness, informality, individual initiative, and real feelings, symbolic power is exerted, for the most part, quite subtly: overt, centralized control and forced compliance would belie the messages of the ideology. Nevertheless, its presence is revealed in brief episodes that resemble a small-scale version of what Turner (1974) calls "social drama." In Turner's view, a social drama is a fundamental and recurring part of the process of group life that unfolds in predictable stages: a public and dramatic breach or a challenge to the prevailing order is followed by a sense of mounting crisis and a series of attempts at redressive action, and culminates in either an unbridgeable schism between the opposed parties or reintegration and reestablishment of order.[22] At Tech, mini-dramas of control are an ever-present part of presentational rituals. Although they vary in length and intensity, these mini-dramas follow a predictable pattern: a challenge to the ritual frame causes the tension to rise, and members acting as agents for the corporate interest (in the rituals we have observed, these roles are widely shared by participants) use various techniques—Bourdieu (1977) refers to these as "symbolic violence"—to suppress or redefine dissent, silence the

deviants, and gain the participants' support.[23] Thus, collective support for the ritual frame is bolstered by the organization's symbolic power, exerted through particular members.

The most dominant response to the exertion of symbolic power in the context of ritual life at Tech is the expression of role embracement: participants express their acceptance of the member role, including not only the prescribed behaviors but, more crucially, the beliefs one must espouse and the emotions one is to experience and display. This occurs to different extents in the various types of presentational rituals: it appears whole-hearted and festive in top management presentations; reserved and tentative in training workshops; and pragmatic, conflictual, and continuous in work group meetings. Despite the subtle and occasionally overt pressures to conform, many members, if asked, would claim that this stance—whether an expression of sincerely held convictions or a scripted role—is freely chosen. Such a response may reflect the participants' experience, but it is also consistent with the ideological depiction of the company: the open community, freedom of expression, "bottom-up decision making," informality, and so forth.

Whatever their causes, displays of role embracement may have a considerable impact on those who perform them. Public expressions of support for an ideological point of view may cause cognitive dissonance: members who, under pressure, publicly espouse beliefs and opinions they might otherwise reject tend to adopt them as an authentic expression of their point of view.[24] Moreover, as Arlie Hochschild (1983) suggests, when institutionally prescribed roles include definitions of appropriate emotions, they require "deep acting": the performer must try to "feel" rather than feign role-prescribed emotions.[25] Consequently, participation in ritual enactments of the member role at Tech—no matter how tentative—may lead to what she calls emotive dissonance: members are inclined to experience the emotions they display as authentic.[26] Over time, cognitive and emotive dissonance may blur the boundary between the performers' perception of an acted role and the experience of an "authentic self." This, in principle, should occur for all displays of role embracement, but it is probably more acute for sustained and scrutinized performances. Particularly susceptible in this regard are those members who perform the various spokesperson roles and those who act as agents of control, whether in their capacity as possessors of authority, as temporary volunteers, or as individuals recognizing the advantages of speaking for the company interest. The performance of such roles, Lewis

Coser (1974) points out, is a particularly effective mechanism for instilling commitment to ideological principles among those who perform them. Thus, extensive and ongoing participation in ritual life at Tech, may, as Mills (1940: 908) put it, induce people to become what at first they merely sought to appear.

There are limits, however, to the power of ritual to elicit the expression of role embracement. Some members—perhaps at some cost to their reputation—minimize their participation in ritual events. Others participate as a "secondary audience," excluded from the actual event but aware of it and participating after the fact through reports and reenactments. Such secondary participants may share in some of the potential for "deep acting" of the member role offered by presentational rituals. But in many cases their form of participation is also an indication and a demonstration of lower status, marginality, passivity, or lack of interest. Many members experience both primary and secondary participation at different times, and their effects might not always reinforce each other. More extremely, for many in support and service roles—mainly members of Wage Class 2 and temporary workers—such ritual performances make clear their status as what Goffman (1959) calls "nonpersons": individuals who are present in body only and not considered a relevant part of the scene. Here, too, there might be potential for deep acting, albeit of marginal or alienated roles.

More crucially, however, the ritual form itself contains built-in opportunities for temporary suspension of role embracement: transitional phases and timeouts that bracket and intersperse the ritual frame. These episodes resemble those stages of ritual that Turner (1969) has called "liminal": a relatively unstructured period that occurs between structured modes of relating where the participants' relationship is characterized by "communitas," a relatedness temporarily unmediated by social structure.[27] Liminal phases of ritual, Turner suggests (1969: 167), tend to highlight the most significant dimensions of a specific culture. For example, in his exemplary studies of tribal societies, liminality was shown to be the occasion for role reversals between subordinate and superordinate members: dramatized exchanges between up and down, strong and weak, having and not having authority (Turner, 1969). These he saw as variations on the theme of hierarchy.

At Tech, however, the liminal phases of ritual have a different flavor: not role reversal, but role distancing is their central attribute. These episodes are occasions for members to assume a reflective and openly self-conscious

stance and to share a variety of dramatized and often structured commentaries on their condition and on the ritual frame. Thus, in the course of liminal episodes, a commonsense point of view that is sometimes at odds with the official one is expressed.[28] It includes less sanguine views of managerial ideology ("the bullshit that comes from above") and behavior ("the song and dance"), as well as a different view of member attributes: colorfully labeled behavioral scenarios ("setting up," "finger pointing," "midnight phone calls," "pissing contests," "backstabbing," "crucifying") and experiences ("hanging from shoestrings," "pain," "the fear of God," "burnout"), a cynical awareness of manipulative intents and disguised meanings (giving "Tech strokes," managing and exposing "hidden agendas," doing "rah-rah stuff"), or dispassionate "Tech watching." Expressed differently in the various ritual forms—subtle and controlled in top management presentations, aggressive and critical in training workshops, widespread and playful in work group meetings—the liminal mode provides an alternative reality: participants temporarily detach themselves from their performance of the member role, comment on it, and share with others the awareness, either cheerful or disdainful, of the theatrical nature of the proceedings. Thus, the liminal stages of Tech rituals differ from liminality as Turner depicted it: it is not the meaning of hierarchy (who is up and who is down) so much as the meaning of authenticity (who is "real" and who is not) and inclusion (who is "in" and who is "out") that is being enacted.

Although the centrality of these meanings to the participants' experience of the ritual would seem to undermine symbolic power by juxtaposing common sense and ideology, questioning the ritual frame, and contradicting expressions of role embracement, the reverse is often true. Controlled self-consciousness, appropriate and timely use of an ironic stance, and the ability to shift frames and stances are considered signs of elegance.[29] Members evaluate each other on their ability to express both embracement and distancing and to know when to stop. By structuring and defining as playful those occasions where commonsense alternatives to the formal ideology are pronounced—the shared interpretive routines, the more formally designed timeouts—real dissent is preempted. Moreover, a particular kind of "communitas" between members is fostered: not the one Turner seems to describe (and Kanter [1983: 203] attributes to employees in "strong culture companies"), but the communion of self-aware and talented actors commenting on their roles and performances.[30] These qualities of liminality are interpreted

as further evidence of the benign nature of the company and its normative demands. Consequently, within very broad boundaries delineated by those incidents where deviance is openly suppressed, contradicting or escaping an adherence to normative demands is often difficult if not impossible. Participants may become mired ever deeper in a paradoxical normative trap within which whatever one does, thinks, or feels can be—and often is—interpreted as confirmation of ideological reality claims.[31]

Thus, ritual life at Tech is composed of a paradoxical, counterpunctual weaving of common sense, ideology, and the experiences associated with them that brings to the attention of participants a complex, multifaceted, and ambiguous reality. Participants are systematically presented with an explicit awareness of the dramatic mechanisms that underlie the process of framing reality, and an open acknowledgment of the manufactured nature of cultural categories and symbols, including those that are central to the ritual performance itself.[32] A self-consciousness that could be considered a fatal flaw in the ritual performances now becomes its central theme and is itself highly ritualized. This produces a potentially unstable balance between role embracement and role distancing that constantly calls into question the authenticity of the experiences associated with the member role precisely for those members who are the main targets of normative control.

In sum, presentational rituals are occasions for enacting, enforcing, and reinforcing the display of the managerially sanctioned member role and are thus a mechanism for mediating normative demands and normative responses. The mediating function of ritual, however, is not simple. The juxtaposition of "ideology" and "common sense," of subject and agent, of obligation and choice, of seriousness and humor, of affirmation and denial, of engagement and detachment, of being "in" and being "out," of work and play, of participation and withdrawal, creates a complex web of normative pressures. These pose the central dilemma of membership: to what extent is the enactment of the member role and its cognitive and emotional components the expression of a "real self"? To what extent are behavioral displays and presentations of self no more than scripts consciously enacted in response to organizational requirements? More deeply, to what extent do members control the differences between these modes and the different selves implied? And, ultimately, what is a real—or a false—self? These questions, seemingly inherent in normative systems of control, are explored in greater depth in the following chapter.