THE MEETING

Gatherings in Organizations and Communities

Helen B. Schwartzman

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For my mother

Preface

In writing this book I discovered that everyone I talked to had his or her own theory about meetings, and yet there is no theory of meetings in the research literature. This makes writing about this subject both exciting and hazardous. It is always exciting to examine the significance of something that has been ignored, but it is hazardous to write about something that everyone already thinks they understand. Without recourse to the legitimacy of a research tradition, readers are likely to evaluate this study based on their own theory. I have tried to take this into account by discussing what might be referred to as American folk theory about meetings (see particularly Chapter 3), and also by juxtaposing my own research in an American organization with research in traditional or non-Western societies as conducted by anthropologists. This juxtaposition throws into relief some of the important differences as well as similarities in views of meetings as well as the form of meetings across cultures. It is also the only way that I know to examine how and when one's cultural context is affecting one's theoretical constructions. If this book is successful, it will challenge what I believe is the most common interpretation of meetings found in American society, that is, that meetings are a blank-slate phenomenon useful as a *tool* for such functions as making decisions, solving problems, and resolving conflicts, but having no impact on behavior in and of themselves. I hope that it will also give the reader pause to rethink his or her specific theory of meetings.

In order to write this book I had to be released from my own meeting and teaching obligations at Northwestern University. For making this possible, I would like to thank Rudolf Weingartner, Donald Sade, and Oswald Werner. A number of individuals have helped me think, read, write, and complain about meetings over the last several years. I am most grateful to all of the individuals at the Midwest Community Mental Health Center for their participation and interest in the study that is

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Part I

Meetings

The Issues and the Approach

Chapter 1

Introduction

"I think I'll go and meet her," said Alice, for, though the flowers were interesting enough, she felt that it would be far grander to have a talk with a real Queen.

"You can't possibly do that," said the Rose: "I should advise you to walk the other way."

This sounded nonsense to Alice, so she said nothing, but set off at once towards the Red Queen. To her surprise she lost sight of her in a moment, and found herself walking in at the front-door again.

A little provoked, she drew back, and, after looking everywhere for the Queen (whom she spied out at last, a long way off), she thought she would try the plan, this time, of walking in the opposite direction.

It succeeded beautifully. She had not been walking a minute before she found herself face to face with the Red Queen, and full in sight of the hill she had been so long aiming at.

Lewis Carroll[1]
Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There (1871:205–206)

Consider a room. There are four tables pushed together, and people are sitting on chairs around the tables. They are drinking coffee or cokes, and there are papers scattered on top of the table. Some of the papers say "agenda," and soon many people will start scribbling on them. There is a hum of conversation, and then one person raises her voice and begins to speak, and the hum begins to die down. Shortly after this a second person starts speaking, apparently in response to the first person's comments, and this is followed by a third person's remarks. All in all, at the end of this event over three-quarters of the people in the room will have spoken at least one or two sentences, but only a few will remember what they have said. Many of the people in this room report

[1]Lewis Carroll's concern with reversals, evidenced specifically in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), is taken as the theme for the study of meetings presented in this book.

that they canceled or rescheduled other events in order to attend this one because they thought it "was important"—afterwards they will say it was a waste of time.

Consider a meeting. The approach to meetings that I develop in this book invites the reader to walk into a social system backwards in order to see it and the forms that produce it, in a new way. It is curious to find that, whereas meetings appear to be everywhere, they are almost nowhere in the research literature. I suggest that this is so because meetings are so basic and pervasive a part of social life and so prevalent as well as ordinary in American society that their significance as a gathering in these settings has not been recognized. People may meet to make a hiring decision, to develop an economic policy, or to resolve a conflict, but what is interesting to the researcher is decision-making processes, economic practices, and dispute settlement. In this book I argue that it is time to see the meeting phenomenon itself as an interesting topic of research.[2] Instead of continuing to view meetings through a cultural lens that focuses on their content or "task," I suggest that researchers begin to examine their form and its various functions within cultural systems. I suggest that it is time to *consider the meeting.*

In order to consider "the meeting," my goal for this study is to use recent anthropological research in traditional and complex societies to initiate a critical examination of the significance of meetings in American society and in social life in general. The approach to meetings developed here is specifically illustrated using research conducted in an American mental health organization. In presenting this anthropological perspective on meetings, I am aided by two developing fields of inquiry in the discipline: research on formal organizations in complex societies and recent research on political speech and oratory in traditional communities. Although these two fields have been developing in relative isolation, they have much to contribute to each other as is suggested later.

An interest in the study of language as a political phenomenon is demonstrated by recent research in what has been called the "anthropology of occasions" (Salmond 1976:3) and specifically in studies of the cultural patterning of political speech and oratory (e.g., Bloch 1971, 1975; Brenneis and Myers 1984; Paine 1981). These researchers come closer than any others to recognizing the importance of the meeting form for structuring and sometimes restructuring social life. What is common to such seemingly disparate activities as speech making in Merina Councils in Madagascar (Bloch 1971, 1975), discussions about pig kills among the Mendi of Papua New Guinea (Lederman 1984), or "crooked language" as spoken by the Ilongot people of the Philippines

[2]Zimmerman and Pollner (1970) present a detailed discussion of differences between making the "familiar, commonsense world" a topic or resource for inquiry (pp. 80–81).

(Rosaldo 1973, 1984) is that they all involve speech and the structuring of this speech by the meeting form.

The importance of language and contexts of language use is also becoming increasingly emphasized by researchers investigating bureaucratic organizations in complex societies (e.g., Bailey 1977, 1983; Conkling 1979, 1984; Handelman and Leyton 1978; Schwartzman 1984; Van Maanen 1973, 1977; Weick 1979; Wolcott 1973). These studies examine formal organizations as social constructions of members, and they represent a move away from concepts that treat *organizations* as stable, concrete, objective, and essentially unproblematic entities and toward consideration of the *organizing* processes and forms that "enact" the organization (see especially Weick 1979). Attention is focused specifically on the interpersonal occasions in which "organizations" are realized, and this means that talk and the forms such as meetings that structure it become important contexts of research interest.

The political language and the "social constructionist" approaches discussed here both recognize the importance of meetings as distinct types of social gatherings in societies that seem otherwise as different as the Mendi of Papua New Guinea and school administrators in the United States. I use these two approaches as the major theoretical resources for this study because they represent a convergence of interest on the meeting as a social form and because they underline the need for studies of traditional societies and studies of complex societies to inform each other, theoretically and empirically. My belief in the value of such comparisons (as well as the lack of their development in the discipline) is supported by Marcus and Fischer's (1986) analysis of the use of cross-cultural juxtaposition and epistemological critique to produce anthropological forms of cultural criticism. In their view, these two approaches:

> are variants on the basic critical strategy of defamiliarization. Disruption of common sense, doing the unexpected, placing familiar subjects in unfamiliar, or even shocking contexts are the aims of this strategy to make the reader conscious of difference. (p. 137)

In this book I am attempting to "defamiliarize" the all too familiar form of "the meeting" for individuals in American society. When meetings are defamiliarized in this fashion, it is possible to see how the local cultural worlds (which anthropologists have traditionally studied) and the larger political and economic systems that impinge on these worlds can both be examined in the contexts in which these worlds interact and are enacted. I argue that meetings are often a context for these interactions and therefore this form provides researchers with a unique opportunity to examine both micro- and macrolevel processes and dynamics.[3]

[3]In this sense, the study of meetings provides researchers with an opportunity to link the

Meetings: Three Perspectives

The meeting as a distinct type of social gathering is the topic of concern in each of the three sections of this book, but each section approaches this phenomenon in a different way. In Part I the meeting as it has been revealed and concealed in the research literature is examined, and an approach for the anthropological study of meetings is presented. In Part II the meeting becomes the key to interpreting events in an American mental health center as well as to reinterpreting standard concepts in organizational and anthropological theory. The focus is shifted in Part III, first to a comparison of the forms and functions of meetings in traditional communities and finally to an examination of the significance of meetings and their role in social and cultural life in general.

The recent convergence of interest in meetings demonstrated by the political language and "social constructionist" approaches is used in Part I to develop an approach for the study of meetings and their role in organizational systems in particular and in social life in general. In Chapter 2 research in the anthropology of occasions is examined, using examples from studies of complex organizations as well as recent political language investigations. A concern with making the everyday world a legitimate topic (as opposed to resource) of research is related to work in both ethnomethodology (e.g., Zimmerman and Pollner 1970) and ethnoscience (e.g., Frake 1969; Werner and Schoepfle 1987). A turn toward the study of political speech by researchers is specifically considered as it provides an approach for examining the issues of power, domination, and subordination as they occur *on the ground* in "clearly occurring events, that is, people speaking to each other" (Bloch 1975:2). This turn toward speech, and specifically political speech in everyday settings, is particularly important because is has begun to turn researchers attention directly to the phenomenon of meetings. The theoretical review and argument that I present in this chapter suggests that the study of meetings requires rethinking traditional distinctions and

---

interpretive tradition in anthropology with analyses that focus on larger systems of political economy. As Marcus and Fischer (1986) suggest:

> What is most impressive from our perspective is the sense among political economists that it is the understanding of political and economic processes themselves, at the level of facts, which is in doubt. These processes are more complex that the dominant paradigms seem able to represent them, and thus one obvious course is for political economy to rebuild understandings of macrolevel systems from the bottom up. In its most radical form, the new political economy is pushed toward the particularlistic, toward the interpretive and cultural, and finally toward the ethnographic. (p. 80)

oppositions between micro- and macrolevel studies, and I locate this argument in relation to recent critiques of these distinctions formulated by researchers such as Bordieu (1977), Brown (1978), and Giddens (1984).

One of the distinctive features of the approach outlined here is its ability to show "how ordinary behavior can reveal much of the machinery for the workings of social structures" (McDermott and Roth 1978:323). It is this approach that facilitates the critical examination of meetings as ordinary behavior with extraordinary significance in specific social systems that is presented here. In Chapter 3, recent literature in the social sciences is examined in detail as it reveals cultural assumptions about the purpose and value of meetings in American society. The neglect of meetings as a topic of research is considered here, and a framework for making meetings the topic of investigation is presented. The work of Bateson (1972), Goffman (1961), and Hymes (1962, 1974) and Gumperz and Hymes (1964, 1972) is used to define and delineate specific features of meetings as communicative events and frames for behavior, and an approach for producing ethnographies of meetings and their relationship to social systems is offered.

As conceptualized here, a meeting is a specific type of focused interaction (see Goffman 1961). More specifically a meeting is defined as a communicative event involving three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group, for example, to exchange ideas or opinions, to solve a problem, to make a decision or negotiate an agreement, to develop policy and procedures, to formulate recommendations, and so forth. A meeting is characterized by multiparty talk that is episodic in nature, and participants either develop or use specific conventions (e.g., *Roberts' Rules of Order*) for regulating this talk (see Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee 1978:149). Participants assume that this talk in some way relates to the ostensible purpose of the meeting and the meeting form frames the behavior that occurs within it as concerning the "business" of the group or organization (p. 149).

The approach to meetings described here suggests two general types of research questions that are taken up in the next two sections of this book. The first questions are concerned with what a meeting is and how it is constructed as an event by participants in specific social settings. This requires developing an understanding of what local knowledge participants use to produce and recognize a meeting as a significant event and what the meaning of meetings is to actors in an organization or community. These questions focus on the form of the meeting as a social gathering and the type of talk, actions, and processes that must occur for participants to produce an activity that is recognized

as "a meeting." Because most researchers have taken the construction of a meeting for granted, there is very little information available about the processes, knowledge, stages, and meaning of meetings in specific contexts.

A second series of questions concerns why meetings exist and persist in specific organizational and cultural contexts, how meetings are used, and what the outcome of meetings is believed to be in particular settings. Studies that examine what naturally occurring meetings do for individuals and organizations, how individuals use meetings in their day-to-day life, and how meetings affect individuals in particular contexts are very important to pursue in this regard. An anthropological approach to meetings recognizes that it is important to understand both the construction as well as function of these events in particular social systems.

In order to illustrate the value of the approach to meetings that is developed here, I turn in the next section to research conducted in an American mental health organization that I call Midwest Community Mental Health Center (Midwest). It is argued that this is an organization that cannot be understood apart from its meetings that both constitute and maintain it in an unpredictable environment. This was an alternative organization developed in the community of West Park located in a large midwestern city and studied by the researcher between 1975 and 1976. The center was initiated in the early 1970s in direct opposition to public and private mental health facilities in this area that were perceived to be too bureaucratic, generally inaccessible, and very ineffective. This was a time when alternative organizations such as free clinics, free schools, food co-ops, collectives, and communes were flourishing in American society. These are particularly interesting organizational systems for anthropologists to study because they embody many traditional American values (community roots, small-group democracy), but they are also "exotic" social systems by choice as they experiment with "nonbureaucratic" ways to organize and structure their activities. I argue that investigation of these settings provides researchers with an opportunity to develop new perspectives on previously unquestioned aspects of American culture.[4] Meetings are an example of a social gathering that in most settings has gone unnoticed, but in the context of alternative organizations, which frequently turn to face-to-face meetings as the place to

[4]For example, in Mansbridge's (1983) study of American participatory democracies of the early 1970s, she elucidates the difference (generally unrecognized by those who study political institutions) between *adversary democracy* that assumes underlying conflict and is characterized by electoral representation, majority rule, and one citizen/one vote, and *unitary democracy* that assumes underlying common interests and is characterized by face-to-face consensual decision making and equal respect and status (p. 3).

enact ideals such as equality of status and consensual decision-making (see Mansbridge 1983), the significance of this form begins to stand out.

The process of discovering meetings and attempting to specify their significance to Midwest is discussed in Chapters 4 through 9 in this section. The status of the center as an "organized anarchy" (March and Olsen 1976) characterized by ambiguous goals, unclear technology, fluid participation of membership, conflicting histories, and multiple environments is specifically discussed in Chapter 4. The process of conducting fieldwork in such an organization is described here. The role that the meeting played as both a tool for research and ultimately as the subject of study is specifically examined in this chapter.

Chapter 5 considers the meeting in the context of the other gatherings that occurred at the center (e.g., treatment sessions, lectures, workshops, chats, storytellings, one-on-ones, dinners). The process of recognizing the importance of "the meeting" as a pervasive gathering in this context and making it the topic of my research is detailed here. The role of meetings as the place for achieving the center's antibureaucratic ideals (e.g., community participation, status equality between professionals and paraprofessionals) and also as the context for dealing with the structural and cultural ambiguities and contradictions that members of an organized anarchy experience is examined in this chapter. It is argued that, in such a context, the meeting assumes great importance as a sense-making form for individuals and organizations. Meetings provide the organization with a form for making itself visible and apparent to its members, whereas they also provide individuals with a place for making sense of what it is that they are doing and saying (Weick 1979:133–134) and what their relationships are to each other in this context.

When viewed from this perspective, it is important to understand what individuals must do to construct an event that they recognize as a meeting and how they evaluate this event and its effect on their daily life. What type of talk and actions had to occur for a gathering at Midwest to be recognized as a meeting? What did participants say about meetings before, during, and after their occurrence? These are the types of questions that are answered in Chapter 5 by outlining the several stages of meeting construction apparent at the center and by presenting the participants' interpretations of their meetings.

Once the process of meeting construction is described, it then becomes important to understand how meetings reproduce themselves, and this requires making a break with cultural assumptions about the purpose of meetings. Instead of accepting task-focused assumptions that suggest that decisions, crises, conflicts, and the like are what meetings are about, the opposite is proposed here, that is, *that meetings are what decisions, problems, and crises are about.* Meetings reproduce them-

selves by the volume of decisions, problems, crises, and the like that an organization produces. The more sense-making a setting requires, the more meetings it needs and therefore the more decisions, problems, and crises it produces.

The effect that this process had on the daily lives of individuals at Midwest is specifically examined in Chapter 6 in terms of the time that individuals were able to devote to particular activities and their ability to attend to issues. A typical work day is sketched here, and it portrays life as it was experienced "from meeting to meeting" by participants and by the researcher. The impact of meeting cycles on the ability of individuals to attend to specific issues and the relationship between issues and meetings in the "competition" of gatherings that occurred at the center are also examined in this chapter.

The importance of what are called key meetings for understanding the history of Midwest's development as an organization is discussed in Chapters 7 through 9. Key meetings are like key informants except that, instead of focusing attention on individuals, they focus attention on a context of action. Key meetings at the center were events that became significant because of the special status accorded them by individuals in the organization. This special status derived in part from who attended the meeting and how and what was discussed. Key meetings were very significant as a sense-making form for the organization because they distilled the significant events of a specific time period for individuals, whereas they also provided everyone with a forum (it often seemed like a stage) for very emotional and frequently conflictual commentary on their relationships to each other. Five key meetings are identified in Chapter 7, and they are used here and in the next two chapters to tell the story of the center's development and implementation of a "community-based" treatment model for mental illness.

In telling this story, each of these chapters places a meeting, or meetings, in the foreground for understanding the actions that are described and presents a critique of concepts typically used in organizational and anthropological research for understanding events in an organization. In this way the giveness of history, environment, and ideology is questioned by "the council meeting" and "the training meeting" in Chapter 7. The unquestioned assumption of the importance of decisions in organizational systems as well as materialist and individualistic definitions of power is challenged by "the committee meeting" and "the board meeting" in Chapter 8; and the value of what are presumed to be "expressive" activities is questioned by "the staff meeting" in Chapter 9. Meetings have generally been the background structure for examining and assessing what are assumed to be the "really" important matters of organizational life, for example, power, decisions, ideology, and con-

flict. In this book these concepts become the background structures for examining the significance of specific meetings at the center, and these meetings are used in turn to critique these standard concepts.

In the end, what is significant about the story of "Midwest" as it is told here is not the results of its attempt to restructure mental health services (at best these results were equivocal). What is significant is the organizational form and processes that this attempt revealed. In the concluding section of this book, Part III, I argue in Chapters 10 and 11 that meetings are a form that is basic in many ways to all social systems (whether it be IBM, Samoa, or Mendi society), but we have only just begun to appreciate the importance as well as complexity and variability of this form and its functions across cultures. An approach for comparing and contrasting the relationship between meetings, culture, and society is presented in Chapter 10 as it builds on the approach developed in Chapter 3 and illustrated in Part II. It is argued that meetings exist within a sociocultural system, but they also play a major role in shaping this system, as they both create and then respond to the context that they have generated. Meetings provide individuals with a way to make sense of as well as to legitimate what otherwise might seem to be disparate talk and action, whereas they also enable individuals to negotiate and validate their relationships to each other. Finally, I suggest that meetings are a form that frequently stabilizes but can just as easily destabilize and transform a cultural system in ways that are often unrecognized and even unintended by actors in the system.

In the concluding chapter, a summary of the arguments presented in this book is offered and suggestions are made for ways to develop a more comprehensive research strategy for the anthropological study of meetings. The processes of "doing meetings" and "seeing" with meetings are examined, and the role of "the meeting" in "doing ethnography" is discussed.

Meetings: Backwards and Forwards

It seems backwards to put meetings in the foreground for attention and analysis, but it is just such a defamiliarizing approach that allows anthropology to function as a form of cultural criticism. By approaching a social system "backwards," it is possible to question taken-for-granted assumptions and activities and throw them into relief for description and interpretation. When placed in the foreground, as they are in this book, it is possible to see how meetings can both generate and maintain an organization by providing individuals with activity and with a way to make sense of this activity and their relationships to each other. It is also

possible to see how the processes that a meeting puts into place may produce results that are unanticipated by, and even nonsensical to, participants. The fact that we do not normally see meetings operating in this fashion is because of their taken-for-granted status in American society, but this is why it is sometimes necessary to go backwards in order to move forwards. It is this process that allows us to see the familiar from a novel perspective. This book urges the reader to make such a context shift about meetings, to consider them as an extraordinary as opposed to ordinary phenomenon, to view them backwards and forwards.

Chapter 2

Occasions and Gatherings

Gather v.
—assemble; muster; bring together, get together, draw together, scrape together, lump together, batch together, bunch together; collect, collocate, colligate; get in, whip in, gather in; hold a meeting, meet. . . .

Roget's International Thesaurus
(1956:42)

There is a tradition in the social sciences that says that when researchers engage in the analysis of detailed interactional sequences between individuals, they are engaging in a microlevel study; and when investigators examine the operation of large-scale, external forces and the impact of broadly defined structures on populations and areas, they are engaging in macrolevel analysis. This tradition sets these studies in opposition to one another. There is a developing set of theoretical challenges in the social science literature that says that this distinction is false, misleading, and unproductive (see, for example, the work of Bordieu 1977; Brown 1978; Giddens 1984; Karp 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986; McDermott and Roth 1978; Ortner 1984; Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood 1980). I locate the theoretical review and argument that I present in this chapter in terms of these recent challenges because I believe that the study of meetings requires rethinking micro- versus macrolevel distinctions and is itself one of the important contexts for linking, theoretically and empirically, the concepts of practice, process, structure, and agency.

Practice: Micro and Macro

In seeking to move beyond the micro/macro dichotomy, researchers have turned toward a range of established as well as newly developing traditions and concepts, suggesting ways to scale ethnomethodology

"up" to the level of structure and Marx "down" to the level of interaction (see Brown 1978:365). These discussions invent, invoke, and utilize a range of theoretical concepts and terms such as *activity, action, interaction, structuration, performance,* and *agency,* all of which, according to Ortner (1984:127), appear to be coalescing around the concept of *practice* as the "new key symbol" of theoretical orientation in anthropology and, more generally, in the social sciences. Karp (1986) relates this concern with practice to a concern with examining "how, in specific settings or social formations, structure is an emergent property of action at the same time that action presupposes structure as a necessary condition for its production" (p. 131). As conceptualized by Bourdieu in what is probably his best known work to American audiences, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), practices are not merely executions of a social world that appears as a representation because the theory of practice insists "that the objects of knowledge are *constituted* [and] . . . that the principle of this construction is practical activity oriented towards practical functions" (p. 96). But, this is con*struction* and invention within limits (see Bourdieu's Chapter 3), and it is this interest in both construction and constraint that seems to characterize this approach.

All of this suggests a concern with questioning the "thinglike" nature of society, by asking questions about where the "thing" comes from and how it might change (Ortner 1984:159). This turn toward practice in anthropology and in the social sciences more generally may be related to a turn in organization theory from a study of organizations as concrete things toward a concern with organizing processes and the meaning and sentiments participants attach to their behavior.[1] In each case, concern is focused on questioning the objective, concrete, and nonproblematic existence of social and organizational structure and systems. In each case, this focus represents a turn or return to the analysis of specific individuals or agents and the interactions, situations, or events in which *they* engage in practical activity and in which *practical activity* engages them:

[1]A concern with the study of the meaning and sentiments that organizational members attach to their behavior has been evident in the organizational literature at least since the appearance of the well-known Hawthorne study (see Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939). However, concern with these issues has waxed and waned in the organizational field over the years (see Burrell and Morgan 1979). A developing interest in the phenomenon of organizational culture (Smircich 1983) is probably the most recent and most publicized example of a renewed interest in these topics on the part of organizational researchers. As a general approach in the social sciences, a concern with "the web of meaning" in which both the researcher and the researched are suspended is characteristic of interpretive studies (see Rabinow and Sullivan 1979).

> The specifics of such socially pervasive facts as gender, ethnicity, status, and role are, to use Sapir's phrase, "reanimated or creatively affirmed" from one moment to the next by members constraining each other to appropriate ways of proceeding given the environments they have reflexively generated for each other. In constraining each other to the display of different social facts at particular times, participants make the social order observable to each other and to analysts in the finest details of their behavior. (McDermott and Roth 1978:323)

It is assumed that individuals are attempting to accomplish something in these actions and events (to maximize self-interest, to solve problems, etc.), but there is also a great divergence of opinion as to the significance of intention in this model (see Ortner 1984).

This focus may also be related to a turn toward a view of culture and language as embodying "the shared meanings, practices, and symbols that constitute the human world," but this is not an approach that exalts "subjective" awareness over scientific objectivity (Rabinow and Sullivan 1979:5–6). In fact, this interpretive approach (as it is sometimes called) challenges assumptions concerning the giveness of knowledge (including scientific knowledge and the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity) as it challenges the giveness of scientific "objects" such as organizations. Culture, as it is conceptualized here, is "always multivocal and overdetermined, and both the observer and the observed are always enmeshed in it. . . . There is no privileged position, no absolute perspective, no final recounting" (Rabinow and Sullivan 1979:6).

The significance of cultural situations and gatherings as occasions for practice begins to stand out when examined in the previously mentioned terms. Of course, the importance of situations and encounters, strategies and manipulations, and transactions and negotiations is not a new field in anthropology and sociology. Typically, however, interactional studies have been set in opposition to institutional or structural studies, as the micro/macro contrast dictates, making it difficult to focus on areas of compatibility. In anthropology, the debate between researchers who "abstract from situations in terms of enduring relationships, institutions, groups and organizations; against those who . . . adopt an actor-oriented perspective and abstract in terms of ego-centered networks of relationships" has been usefully reviewed by Garbett (1970:214–215).[2] The former approach stresses the framework of

[2]In this article, Garbett considers the development of this debate specifically within British social anthropology as he contrasts the actor-oriented perspective of researchers such as Barnes, Barth, Boissevain, Kapferer, and Van Velsen with investigators such as Fortes, Gluckman, and Mitchell who use social situations to illustrate "the operation of abstracted structural principles" or to demonstrate how "certain features of the wider social setting . . . were manifested in the situation" (Garbett 1970:219).

institutions that constrains behavior, whereas the latter perspective emphasizes the strategies and manipulations that individuals use in their daily transactions with one another as they create the social world around themselves (p. 215). In concluding this review, Garbett suggests that the conflict between these two approaches is not easily resolved and that it may be "that the subject is not yet ripe for reconcilation" (p. 226).[3] In sociology, Peter Blau comes to a harsher conclusion in his suggestion that the study of structural frameworks is incompatible with the study of interactional processes and any "sociological inquiry . . . seeking to encompass both is unlikely to produce a systematic empirical or theoretical inquiry of either" (Blau, quoted in Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood 1980:3). One of the important contributions of researchers such as Bourdieu and Giddens is in questioning the "phoney war" (Giddens 1984:139) between micro- and macrostudies by stressing the compatibility and interdependence of practice and structure.[4]

In anthropology and in the social sciences in general, two important shifts in attention are relevant here as they are related, at least in part, to both the practice and interpretive approach and also because they have begun to turn researchers' attention to the study of meetings as a significant but neglected social form in a wide variety of cultural settings. The first shift may be characterized as a turn from the study of extraordinary to the study of ordinary occasions. Although recognizing that ordinary, everyday life has long been a subject of concern in anthropology, Ortner contrasts the practice approach with the emphasis in symbolic anthropology on extraordinary and spectacular practices, especially ritual

[3]Abner Cohen suggests that the difficulty in resolving differences between these types of approaches is one of focus. "To put it metaphorically, the microscope that this school [action and transaction theories] holds is so powerful in disclosing the details of face-to-face political interaction that it is powerless, or out of focus, to reflect the wider structural features of society" (1974:41). However, Vincent (1978), in a more recent review of action theory in political anthropology, suggests that it is possible to widen the arenas in which action is analyzed. The strain between making the individual versus the group or institution the unit of inquiry, which is a theme running throughout a great deal of this literature, is exemplified in Barth's (1966) work, as he poses his individually based "transactionalism" against traditional structural/functionalism. A critique of this type of oppositional argumentation is offered by Evens (1977) who specifically examines the notion of the individual and the relationship of individual transactions to values in Barth.

[4]Giddens argues that researchers such as Goffman, in his "studied refusal to be concerned with issues of large-scale social organization and history," have contributed to this war by implying that we have to chose between one approach or the other (1984:139), whereas researchers adopting a macroperspective suggest that "the most significant issues are those of broader scope" whereas the study of everyday activity is concerned with trivia (p. 139).

(1984:154).[5] Giddens (1984) suggests a contrast between concern with "abstract rules" versus the "routines of daily life":

> It is commonly taken for granted among social analysts that the more abstract rules—e.g., codified law—are the most influential in the structuring of social activity. I would propose, however, that many seemingly trivial procedures followed in daily life have a more profound influence upon the generality of social conduct. (p. 22)
>
> All social systems, no matter how grand or far-flung, both express and are expressed in the routines of daily life, mediating the physical and sensory properties of the human body." (p. 36)

The work of ethnomethodologists such as Garfinkel (1967), Cicourel (1972), and Zimmerman and Pollner (1970) have become particularly important resources here in their efforts to examine the familiar, commonplace and taken-for-granted assumptions of actors' actions and interactions. This approach has been particularly effective in calling attention to the confusion in most social science research (including anthropology) between using the everyday world as a *resource* for research, in contrast to making the everyday world a *topic* of investigation. In the view of Zimmerman and Pollner (1970), everyday concepts are utilized and intermingled with social science theories in a multitude of ways, but all of this has left the everyday world (as a topic) relatively unexplored by investigators:

[5]The works of Gregory Bateson among the Iatmul and Bateson and Margaret Mead in Bali are now recognized as pioneering (but neglected) attempts to develop an interactional and communication approach to the study of everyday behavior. As Bateson & Mead suggest in the introduction to *Balinese Character* (1942), they wanted to write a book that would *not* be about Balinese custom

> but about the Balinese—about the way in which they, as living persons, moving, standing, eating, sleeping, dancing, and going into trance, embody that abstraction which (after we have abstracted it) we technically call culture. (p. xii)

This interest can be compared, for example, with the attention Bourdieu pays to

> the little routines people enact, again and again, in working, eating, sleeping, and relaxing, as well as the little scenarios of etiquette they play out. . . . All of these routines and scenarios are predicated upon, and embody within themselves, the fundamental notions of temporal, spatial and social ordering that underlie and organize the system as a whole. (Bourdieu, discussed in Ortner 1984:154)

The work of Arensberg and Kimball (1968) in Ireland and Chapple's interactional approach for the study of industrial organizations (see 1940, 1953) are also landmarks in the anthropological development of an interactional perspective as applied to the study of everyday behavior. For a variety of reasons, these studies did not develop into a school of research until more recently as they now provide the foundation for studies of communicative codes and information management (see McDermott and Roth's 1978 history and review of interactional research).

> In contrast to the perennial argument that sociology belabors the obvious, we propose that sociology has yet to treat the obvious as a phenomenon. We argue that the world of everyday life, while furnishing sociology with its favored topics of inquiry, is seldom a topic in its own right. Instead, the familiar, common-sense world, shared by the sociologist and his subjects alike is employed as an unexplicated resource for contemporary sociological investigation. (pp. 80–81)

The practice approach as it appears to be developing in the literature accepts this judgment as it seeks to define the everyday world as a legitimate topic of research. An important shift in attention here, as expressed in ethnomethodological investigations, is the suspension of "the assumption that social conduct is rule-governed" (Wieder 1974:41). And with this suspension, the subject of research becomes understanding how participants work at "producing the appearances of orderly conduct through such procedures as analyzing events as instances of compliance with a rule" (p. 41). The social order, in these terms, is an accomplished order that is accomplished by accounting practices, practices that make "familiar, commonsense activities of everyday life recognizable *as* familiar, commonplace activities," and, whereas the "hows of these accomplishments are unproblematic" to participants, they become the topic of interest to the ethnomethodologist (Garfinkel 1967:9–10).

In the area of organizational research, this approach is evident in studies of what may be described as "the non-rational basis of rational conduct" (Brown 1978:368). For example, a specific interest of Garfinkel and others is in the emergence, application, and interpretation of organizational rules, logics, and rhetorics. In his examination of jurors' discussions, Garfinkel (1967) focuses on the emergence of rules from processes that are "chaotic and stumbling" but are retrospectively described and experienced as orderly and rational. "Thus rationality, rather than being the guiding rule of organizational life, turns out to be an achievement—a symbolic product that is constructed through actions that in themselves are nonrational. We could even say that the dicthotomy between rationality and nonrationality is itself ultimately unfounded, emerging mainly from the legitimacy in our culture of 'rational,' and the illegitimacy of 'nonrational,' conduct" (Brown 1978:370).

This concern with examining the commonsense interpretations, explanations, and "rationalizations" of organizational participants as well as researchers, in fact, dominates the work of researchers adopting an ethnomethodological and interpretive perspective. The focus in these studies is on making problematic what is traditionally treated as unproblematic in organizational life. The meaning of specific actions in specific settings is the primary focus of study, and therefore the data of researchers are necessarily "talk-based." As pointed out by Brown (1978:368), American formal organizations have frequently been the con-

text for research in this area including studies of the justice system (Bittner 1967; Cicourel 1968; Garfinkel 1967; Sudnow 1965; Van Maanen 1973, 1977), educational institutions (Cicourel and Kitsuse 1963), medical organizations (especially mental health organizations) (Goffman 1961; Scheff 1961; Strauss *et al.* 1964) and welfare organizations (Zimmerman 1970a,b). For example, Bittner (1967) has studied how skid-row police construct and define their own actions and those of the populations with whom they work in this area. Van Maanen (1973, 1977), a sociologist and major proponent of the use of qualitative methods by organizational researchers (see especially 1979), has produced a variety of sensitive portrayals of the everyday life and taken-for-granted assumptions of police officers. His research includes specific studies of police agencies, recruit behavior (based on his own field experience in a new recruit training program), and street behavior of police.

The work of James March and Johan Olsen is also important to consider here especially because it contains important insights about the relation between individual intention and action in organizational settings. In *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (1976), March and Olsen bring together the work of a number of colleagues in Scandanavia and the United States, all of whom are engaged in the study of what they refer to as "illigitimate organizations" (such as free schools) as well as a variety of public bureaucracies (such as educational institutions, especially universities). All of these settings are said to experience severe ambiguity in all areas of their operation, and it is this experience that is characteristic of what they refer to as an *organized anarchy*. In these settings, according to the authors' model, one finds: (1) ambiguous or inconsistent goals and ideologies; (2) unclear or fuzzy technologies; (3) fluid participation of membership; (4) confusing histories; and (5) unpredictable environments (p. 12). It is important to emphasize here that organized anarchies are not viewed as "bad" organizations in this model. In fact, the actions that occur within them are often quite creative in the authors' view, but these systems have been "badly understood" by traditional theories of organizations.

> None of the case studies we report will strike usual readers as "surprising." Yet many of the things we observe seem to be understood badly by our ways of thinking about organizations. We believe this contradiction between what we observe in organizational behavior and the way we talk about organizational behavior is fascinating but often confusing. Our objective is to take a few steps in the direction of talking differently about organizational decision making. Perhaps, reducing the confusion slightly without destroying the fascination. (p. 9)

Although they state their objectives very modestly, the major thrust of the work of March and Olsen has been a sustained challenge to both rational and coalition-bargaining models of decision making as these

have been developed by American researchers. These models are said to be faulty because they assume a tight connection between the desires of decision makers and organizational action. In both models, organizations are interpreted as instruments of rational individuals who either all share the same goals and make decisions based on a rational assessment of problems and potential solutions or whose decisions reflect the bargaining and compromise that naturally occurs among rational individuals and groups with differing interests (1976:83). In contrast, March and Olsen view organizations and the decision-making process as a confluence of participants, problems, and solutions that does not always make sense. In their view:

> An organization is a set of procedures for argumentation and interpretation as well as for solving problems and making decisions. A choice situation is a meeting place for issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they may be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they may be an answer, and participants looking for problems or pleasure. (1976:25)

Choice opportunities in such a system can best be viewed as a *garbage can* in March and Olsen's terms:

> Suppose we view a choice opportunity as a garbage can into which various problems and solutions are dumped by participants. The mix of garbage in a single can depends partly on the labels attached to the alternative cans, but it also depends on which garbage is being produced at the moment, on the mix of cans available, and on the speed with which garbage is collected and removed from the scene. (1976:26)

The organized anarchy approach is particularly interesting because it is one of the few approaches to use the experience of working in organizations to critique traditional psychological concerns with intention and motivation without regard to context. Instead, this approach focuses on what appear to be inconsequential processes of time allocation, attention, and focus, concerns with pleasure and pain, the range and types of choice opportunities available, and learning in organizational systems, all of which must be considered in relation to specific contexts and events. March and Olsen are concerned with choice *situations* and what they accomplish besides choices, and this has been a very influential approach in directing my thinking about meetings as will be evident in this book.

Karl Weick (1979) continues this emphasis in organizational research by stressing the need for researchers to focus on the *organizing* processes out of which a sense of organization unfolds and is "enacted." He sets this interest in opposition to traditional organizational research that continues to examine organizations as objective, concrete, material, and unproblematic entities. Weick suggests that the basic theme for his

"organizing model" is found in the recipe for sense making that he describes as follows:

> "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" Organizations are presumed to talk to themselves over and over to find out what they're thinking. . . . The organism or group enacts equivocal raw talk, the talk is viewed retrospectively, sense is made of it, and then this sense is stored as knowledge in the retention process. The aim of each process has been to reduce equivocality and to get some idea of what has occurred. (pp. 133–134)

The important elements of Weick's model have been summarized by Pondy (1977):

> 1. Organizations are not material, substantive, entities with objective properties; the organization is not an object. . . . Organizations are sets of interlocked organizing processes that create order (remove equivocality).
> 2. The organization environment is, in part, enacted by the organization itself, not just given in a predetermined, independent variable sense. Some of these enactments are random, and some contradict the retained order.
> 3. Rational, goal-directed, instrumental behavior plays a relatively unimportant role in organizing. Instead, organizing is treated as an evolutionary process of variation. . . . Rationales for behavior are developed retrospectively, after the behavior has been completed and is available for "bracketing" and sensemaking.
> 4. Organizing is primarily an interpersonal process. Realities are *socially* constructed. Therefore, communication and the use of language are important processes. (Language also affects what is selected out for attention.) (p. 229)

In anthropology, the work of researchers who adopt an ethnoscience perspective may also be related to the practice and interpretive orientations, specifically because of their concern with examining the everyday cognitive worlds of informants. Because of this focus, ethnoscientists have been attacked repeatedly for their concern with what is often considered to be trivial. However, the ethnoscientific tradition has remained steadfast in its commitment to examining how cultural knowledge is categorized and how it is used by individuals to interpret their social experiences and also to develop models and standardized fieldwork methods for examining these issues (see Werner and Schoefle 1987). Ethnoscientists derive their models from linguistics, logical analysis, and mathematics, but they search for particularistic structures that informants employ to structure specific cognitive domains. In these terms, culture resides in the mind of the informant, as Goodenough's famous definition makes abundantly clear. "It is the forms of things that people have in mind," and not the things themselves, "culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behavior, or emotions" (1964:36). Arguing similarly to the ethnomethodologists, eth-

noscientists have suggested that anthropologists have spent too much time studying the culture of anthropologists and not the culture of other peoples. According to Steven Tyler, anthropologists have "been much more concerned with discovering what anthropology was than, for example, what an Eskimo was. In a sense anthropologists were studying only one small culture—the culture of anthropology (1969:2–3).

In this way, the work of ethnoscientists and ethnomethodologists converges in their concern with the everyday world as a topic and not a resource for analysis, but they appear to diverge in the locus of interest and observation (mental categories vs. processes of interaction and interpretation). In fact, as suggested by McDermott and Roth (1978), although the rhetoric of the ethnoscientist is "mentalistic," the "methods and problems tackled consistently pointed to a concern for knowledge as public displays for which natives held each other accountable" (p. 333). In order to produce the kinds of descriptions of knowledge that are the ethnoscientists' goal, it is always necessary to produce descriptions of the environments, contexts, scenes, and the like in which the knowledge is used. "As the environments generally are set up by group members for each other, social interaction was never far from the concern of the cognitive anthropologists" (McDermott and Roth 1978:333).

The work of Charles Frake illustrates this important point and directly relates to the development of "native" definitions of meetings. In his terms, a description of culture "derives from an ethnographer's observations of the stream of activities performed by the people he is studying" (1969:148). As the initial step toward producing such descriptions, it is necessary to be able to distinguish events from one another. He illustrates this approach by describing how the Yakan (Philippine Moslems living on the island of Basilan) label and identify interactional events, for example, differences between "discussions" (*mitin*); "conferences" (*gisun*); "negotiations" (*mawpakkat*); and "litigations" (*hukum*). The taken-for-granted categories for interpreting types of interactions become the topic of concern as this approach provides researchers with another way to examine everyday life.

What is most significant about the studies described here is *not* that they call for a return to concerns with examining the role of "irrational," "expressive," or "trivial" behavior in social life but that they challenge the cultural dichotomies (e.g., between rational versus irrational, expressive versus instrumental behavior) that categorize behavior and actions in this fashion. This challenge is made by examining the processes that construct these beliefs and judgments, but these attempts are consistently interpreted by the "rationalizing" rhetoric that dominates the explanations of most researchers (as well as organizational participants) as another example of concern "merely" with the expressive, symbolic,

and nonrational domain of organizational life. Because these areas are considered to be only marginally important to the *really* important concerns of researchers (e.g., the material and objective foundations of organizational life), this research tradition is dismissed (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979, for an excellent discussion of the different research paradigms that currently guide the study of organizations). These problems are the subject of the second shift in research concerns to be described next.

The second shift in attention that is evident specifically in anthropology combines a concern with the constitutive features of speech and language[6] (as preceding discussion) with an interest in examining the issues of power, domination, and subordination as they occur *on the ground,* in "clearly occurring events, that is, people speaking to each other" (Bloch 1975:2). This approach also requires challenging the assumption that researchers focus on the production of *either* micro- or macrolevel studies.[7] In going beyond this micro/macrolevel dichotomy, McDermott and Roth (1978) argue that interactional research (presumably a microlevel approach) consistently shows how detailed analysis of "ordinary behavior can reveal much of the machinery for the workings of social structure" (p. 323). In other words, macrolevel forces and con-

[6]The importance of speech and talk is reconceptualized with this orientation, as it is not interpreted in terms of its typical descriptive or propositional function, but instead its role as constitutive of social activity and action is stressed (Myers and Brenneis 1984:5–6). The work of Austin (1975) on performative speech acts where "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something" (pp. 6–7) is frequently used here, along with Searle (1969) on speech act theory and especially Burke's (1957) examination of the social use of metaphor (see Parkin's 1984 discussion of the influence of this work on political speech studies).

[7]The need for studies that integrate interpretive and political economy studies has been well-argued (see Brown 1978; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood 1980) and illustrated by studies in England (Willis 1981), in Italy (Sabel 1982), and in Bolivia and Columbia (Nash 1979; Taussig 1980). Unfortunately, this approach has been poorly demonstrated by research in American society. Examples of recent work by researchers on American organizations suggests two general orientations toward the interpretive study of work, organizations, and organizing. Both orientations focus on language, speech, and interactional processes in organizations. The first perspective that I call "the language of work" follows in the line of traditional anthropological concerns with discovering and presenting "the native's point of view," in this case the "native" view of work and specifically the language of work and occupations. In addition, concern is focused on unraveling the complex linkages between cognition and the work experience in contemporary American society (e.g., Kemnitzer 1973, 1977; Spradley and Mann 1975; Tway 1975, 1976, 1977). The second perspective that I call "the work of language" (e.g., Bailey 1983; Buckholdt and Gubrium 1979; Gregory 1984; Wolcott 1973) utilizes this "native perspective" to present a more radical challenge to cultural dichotomies and givens. I have used this second perspective in developing my approach to the study of meetings.

straints are, in fact, observable at the interactional level where these forces have meaning for individuals in their everyday lives:

> This way of proceeding offers us the most empirical documentation of how the social world is ordered; as such it tells us a great deal about what traditionally has been called the social order, namely, the organization of interactional—communicative, institutional, and material—resources people have available for ordering their behavior with each other. With this approach there are no macro and micro constraints, no macro or micro behaviors, but people leaning on each other in specifiable contexts. (pp. 323–324)

In the area of political anthropology, where as Bloch (1975:2) suggests, the tendency has been to focus on the extraordinary and/or rare signs of power and politics (leaders or their absence, rituals and their performance, pagents, warfare, political associations, fighting, dispute processes), a concern with examining the significance of political speech events has now developed into the subfield of "political language" studies (see Parkin, 1984, for a review of this area). What is significant for my purposes here is that this turn toward speech, and specifically political speech in everyday settings, has begun to turn researchers' attention directly to the phenomenon of meetings.[8] This transformation has occurred over a relatively short span of time, beginning with Bailey's (1965) work on decision making in councils and committees and continuing with Bloch's (1975) analysis of political speech and oratory in traditional societies and most recently with Myers's (1986) analysis of the significance of meetings in Pintupi society as well as Howe's (1986) ethnography of Kuna village politics as examined through the town meetings that are the central events of this group's political activity. It is important to recognize here that this transformation has occurred at the same time that researchers have begun to turn their attention to practice. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that encompassed in this brief history are many of the major theoretical points that have been articulated by and continue to animate the discussions of these theorists. It is also not surprising to find that meetings should become an object of research attention because of their recursiveness in daily life and their

[8]The development of ethnography of speaking and ethnography of communication studies, which began in the 1960s with the publication of Hymes's (1962; also see Gumperz and Hymes 1972) articles, has continued through the 1970s and 1980s producing a wide variety of studies that examine the interrelationships between language, culture and society. This field has also developed several models for the examination of these relationships that I use in Chapter 3 in presenting my approach for producing ethnographies of meetings. This field, however, was not the major impetus for the research on political speech discussed in this section, as Parkin has recently suggested: "In fact, the interest in oratory arises out of recent changes in ideas of the political itself, rather than of the uses of language" (1984:346).

central position, in my view, as a place for "the practice of structure and the structure of practice" (to borrow Sahlins's 1981:72 reversal here).

Political Speech and Meetings: A Place for Practice

With the publication in 1965 of F. G. Bailey's article "Decisions by Consensus in Councils and Committees," the field that has become known as political language was inaugurated in anthropology. The major impetus for the development of this field was the recognition "that the ways in which people talk about politics and the way their talk could influence an audience" were in and of themselves legitimate topics of research attention (Parkin 1984:346). Bailey's study initiated this approach by asking the question, "why do some councils or committees incline toward making their decisions by the method of consensus, while others use majority voting?" (p. 2). Using information from a variety of sources, including decision processes in Indian village *panchayats,* his experience in university committees, Frankenberg's (1957) study of committees and decisions in Pentrediwaith in North Wales, and committees in the British House of Commons, Bailey developed a classification between elite and arena councils. *Elite councils* are a form of ruling oligarchy where the major divisions exist between this group and a public; an *arena council,* in contrast, exists in groups with predominantly vertical divisions where members represent others to whom they are answerable (p. 10). By examining the task (e.g., policymaking, administration) of a council, its relationship to its public (elite or arena), and concern with internal or external political relations, Bailey argued that he could explain the type of decision-making process and discussion mechanisms that the group would employ:

A	B
Councils lean towards consensus when they have one of the following characteristics:	Councils proceed readily to majority voting when they are:
1. an administrative function, especially when they lack sanctions, or	1. policy-making, or
2. an elite position in opposition to their public, or	2. arena councils, or
3. concern with external relationships.	3. concerned with internal relationships. (Bailey 1965:13)

This interest in decision-making groups and mechanisms was continued and expanded in a volume edited by Audrey Richards and Adam Kuper, *Councils in Action* (1971). Bailey's focus and framework are particularly apparent here, even when his model is being refuted (e.g., Bloch

1971). The problem of neatly opposing consensus with majority voting, however, is questioned, and even more important, Bailey's failure to more broadly define the nature and types of decisions is examined, for example, the significance of *not* making a decision, ambiguous and unauthoritative decisions, ceremonial decisions (see Kuper 1971). This book is significant for focusing attention away from the dominance and concern with leadership and toward the study of the "widespread institutions of government by discussion" and in conjunction with this developing the idea that institutions such as councils and committees are more than just decision-making bodies (Kuper 1971:28).

Formalization and Reproduction

In *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society* (1975), Maurice Bloch moved this developing field further in the direction of analyzing the significance of speech, rhetoric, and discussion. Bloch sets his approach in direct contrast to the traditional concerns of political anthropology where the political was only realized in extraordinary and/or relatively rare occasions such as fighting or succession disputes, or where the political is identified as a fuzzy and unclear area of hidden conflicts, intentions, struggles, and alliances most of which are not observable (p. 2).[9] Instead, Bloch focuses attention on "clearly occurring events, that is, people speaking to each other" (p. 2). In this framework, words and speaking come to the forefront of analysis as do the forms and contexts that structure this speech, and so in this way Bloch and the contributors to his book bring meetings, at least indirectly, to the attention of researchers (e.g., see Firth's examination of speech-making in Tikopian public assemblies or *fono;* Hobart's analysis of speech in Balinese council meetings; Parkin's discussion of speeches made by bureaucrats in meetings with Giriama farmers in Kenya; Comaroff's examination of speech in Tshidi public meetings in South Africa; and Turton's discussion of oratory and the exercise of influence in meetings or *methe* of the Mursi of South West Ethiopia).

What is probably the most controversial aspect of this book is Bloch's analysis of political language and oratory as formalized language

[9]In a recent analysis of Kuna gatherings and village politics in Panama (which I discuss in more detail in a later section of this chapter), James Howe argues in support of Bloch that most political anthropology studies still continue to focus on what are essentially unobservable phenomena: "Most political anthropologists, despite protestations of concern with process, begin with social structure . . . and treat behavior as a manifestation of group relations, structural principles, or individual machinations" (1986:5).

that, in his view, is a frozen and essentially noncreative form of communication, capable only of reproducing social structure and the social order. He suggests the following:

> The process whereby one is caught by the formalization of oratory into accepting without the possibility of question what is proposed is an everyday occurrence experienced whenever people stop and consider what they are doing. The village Councils are nothing more then than particularly important examples of a much wider general kind of formalized oratorical occasions whose structure is the same and where social control is handled by the same procedures. On these occasions if you have allowed somebody to speak in an oratorical manner you have practically accepted his proposal. (p. 9)

There are several problems with this approach. One important issue that his critics have been quick to point out is that Bloch gives primacy to traditional authority and social structure (e.g., "the power of formalized oratory does not simply spring from its form, it springs from the forces of social power. . . . It implies the acceptance of who is top, it does not produce it" p. 24), and he sees only the reproduction of social relationships (exercise of power/control). This view (1) excludes the role of creativity, improvization, spontaneity, and change in the performance/execution of events, and (2) gives speech only an epiphenomenal role to play in politics when this seems to be the opposite of what Bloch originally set out to do (Paine 1981:3). In addition, the concept of formality is itself flawed as Bloch uses it. In an illuminating comparison of political meetings among the Wolof (Senegal), Mursi (Ethiopia), and Ilongots (Philippines), Irvine (1979) analyzes the multiple and variable meanings of the concept formality, and she assesses its analytical utility. Arguing against Bloch's approach, she suggests that "formality in communicative events can serve not only the forces of tradition or the coercive power of a political establishment, but also creativity and change" (p. 773).

Creativity and Calculation

Robert Paine has been one of the most vocal critics of Bloch's exclusion of the role of creativity and persuasion in oratory. In *Politically Speaking* (1981), he sets himself clearly in opposition to this approach, "Contrary to Bloch, we see political rhetoric not as based upon an *a priori* acceptance of who is top, but as directed to the attainment of that acceptance" (p. 3). Where Bloch sees coercion and the "giveness" of the social world, Paine sees persuasion and negotiation (p. 2). Using concepts such as strategy, performance, persuasion, and context, Paine suggests an approach for connecting rhetoric and politics that is focused on the

view that "saying is doing." This view requires the analysis of speaker and audience expectations and negotiations and manipulations. The chapters illustrate this approach utilizing research on political language, and rhetoric taken mostly from Western case studies (e.g., speech making at the Durham Miners' Gala, the speeches of Enoch Powell, and campaign rhetoric in Bermuda).

F. G. Bailey is a key figure in this field as he has provided political anthropologists who seek to use an action or strategist model with a variety of conceptual tools for conducting their analyses. *Strategems and Spoils* (1969) is a central work as he focuses on how leaders create support for their actions, and he presents his analysis by bringing together concerns with research on the face-to-face encounters of individuals as well as interest in the particular settings of these interactions (Vincent 1978:176). Bailey is also a contributor to the Paine book with an article on the uses of rhetoric to inhibit free exchange and the way that individuals adjust their rhetorical strategies depending on situational characteristics (e.g., situations of uncertainty vs. situations of certainty) (see 1981). Bailey is also well-known for bringing his approach home, and using it to examine university folklore and folklife and particularly committee behavior and politics (see *Morality and Expediency: The Folklore of Academic Politics,* 1977) (also discussed in Chapter 3). More recently (see 1983), he analyzes how individuals use displays of passion to achieve political ends, and he utilizes examples from a number of different meeting groups including university committees, government task forces, and the like. In these works, speech and rhetoric are viewed as an active part of individuals' attempts to persuade, control, strategize, and negotiate desires and interests.

There are problems with this approach as well, most specifically as it is tied to Western and American concepts of individualism and rationalism, where individuals appear to have great latitude to strategize and negotiate in their attempts to realize intentions.[10] It is perhaps no

[10]Of course, there has been criticism of these concepts from any number of researchers with varying disciplinary orientations. In the area of decision making, critiques of rational models almost always start with Simon (see 1957) and his "satisficing" model and notion of bounded rationality, but the array of alternatives to "truly" rational models is quite dazzling. The work of Steinbruner (1974) is particularly useful in identifying and contrasting features of the "analytic paradigm" (basically an assemblege of rational decision models) with what he refers to as the "cybernetic paradigm" for decision processes "organized around notions of short-cycle information feedback and the elimination of uncertainty" (p. 51). Most useful for the purposes of this book is March and Olsen's (1976) artifactual model and specifically their "garbage-can model" that has already been discussed in this chapter and that I use in Part II (especially Chapter 8). In anthropology, an excellent critique of natural and unnatural models of decision making is presented by Fjellman (1976); also see Kapferer's (1976) discussion of the indi-

surprise that Bloch's collection emphasizes research on traditional societies, whereas Paine's work examines speech in Western societies (Parkin, 1984: 352–354). Although sometimes appearing to examine the cultural construct of rationalism, many of these researchers seem to uncritically accept and utilize this construct in their analyses. For example, Bailey's (e.g., see 1983) work may in one sense be seen as a critique of the cultural construct of rationalism. However, in many ways, his approach seems situated uncritically within this very construct, as he seems to be using it both as a resource and a topic for study.

This approach is important for putting the actor and activity into the center of the picture, but it assumes a connection between the actor's intentions and outcomes and results that observations of individual and especially group behavior often contradict. It is comforting to think that individuals control and create situations, but it is important to remember that this is a cultural construct that also requires questioning.

Production and Reproduction

Surely, this contrast between reproduction and production is not an either/or situation because in *practice* it must be both. This is a central point of theorists such as Giddens and Bourdieu. In the field of political speech, this idea is well-argued by Fred Myers and Donald Brenneis in their introduction to *Dangerous Words* (1984) where the relationship of language to politics in both egalitarian and hierarchical societies in the Pacific is examined in detail. Although using Bloch to examine both the reproduction and constitutive functions of language, they also suggest that "what he [Bloch] has shown is not speech as coercive . . . but

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vidualistic priorities of transactional models and Evens (1977, 1958). The latter is an interesting example of the use of game theory to describe features of the Nuer feud with the ultimate aim of refuting rational choice theory as applied in this context. Garbett (citing Schutz 1964:85) argues that the conception of actors that comes from axiomatic theories such as game theory and exchange theory "is an artificially constructed type given only the degree of rationality, foresight, information, history, motives, choices and strategies which the particular theory permits" (1970:223).

It is significant that most critiques do not pay attention to how actors constitute ideas of intention, strategy, and rationality in their day-to-day practices, and this is where the work of Garfinkel (1967) and other ethnomethodologists is crucial. In effect, what Garfinkel suggests, for example in his study of juror decision-making processes, is that

> rationality neither instructs us as to what action to take, nor is it a property inherent in conduct or in the social system as such. Instead, rationality emerges in interaction, and then is used retrospectively to legitimize what has already taken place or is being enacted. (Brown 1978:369)

rather that such speech is accomplishing something else" (p. 9). In contrast to Bloch's "negative" assessment of formalization as ruling out contradictions or alternatives (see Bloch, 1975), Myers and Brenneis suggest that this can, in fact, be seen as a "constructive characteristic of language, a mechanism to create a universe of discourse, a context or polity within which certain meanings are taken as axiomatic" (p. 10). Speech, in their view, is crucial for constituting such a context or "rubric of understanding" as well as for validating and sustaining social relationships in already established "polities." Although critical of individual "strategy" approaches because they have not "resolved how the contexts in which [strategy] . . . is elicited are themselves generated" (p. 7), the articles in this book seek to examine the relationship of speakers and the accomplishments of their speech to particular types of sociocultural systems. In this way, the role of speech in constituting a polity in egalitarian societies (e.g., Fiji Indians, the Wana of Indonesia, the Mendi of Papua New Guinea, and Ilongots of the Philippines) is contrasted with the functions of speech in more hierarchical political systems (e.g., Samoa, Tonga). In the latter case, Myers and Brenneis note that researchers who examined the significance of speech "in societies with centralized, formal political authority took the 'polity' for granted, apparently following the focus of their informants" (p. 23). This does not mean that speech has no role to play in creating and maintaining a political context in these societies, but it is "not everyone's concern" or "a mandatory part of every performance" (p. 23). What is more evident here is the role of speech in reproducing and justifying relations of domination as well as the relationship between private negotiations and public events/performance (p. 27).

This interest in integrating processes of production and reproduction, validation and justification may be usefully related to recent work in organizational theory (see especially Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood 1980 and also Brown 1978) that is centered on examining how actors as agents constitute structures as "provinces of meaning" that themselves become constituting (Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood 1980:4). It is in this way that structures both constitute and reproduce relations of power and domination, as "groups struggle to constitute structures in order that they may become constituting" (p. 8). Drawing on the work of Giddens, Bourdieu, and others, researchers such as Ranson in organizational research as well as Myers and Brenneis in anthropology seek to challenge arbitrary divisions between micro- and macrolevel processes by linking studies of interactive processes and practices (which are frequently language-centered) with structures that appear, or become, constraining outside the specific actions of particular

actors (e.g., in Ranson's terms constraints such as *size, technology, environment, history*).

The theoretical issues that have been identified here such as contrasts between formalization and creativity, reproduction and production, talk as reflection or constitution, and the intended and unintended consequences of action also have great relevance for the study of meetings. These issues have recently been brought into clearer focus in studies that focus specifically on meetings.

From Decisions to Meetings

When you are concerned with decisions or speech and persuasion in politics you are concerned, inevitably, with meetings (like it or not). However, until recently, political speech researchers have not typically seen meetings as "their" topic of research, although all of these investigations present important information about meeting forms and functions across cultures (this will be discussed and reviewed in more detail in Chapter 10). The work of Fred R. Myers illustrates an important theoretical shift in attention in this field as it recognizes the meeting as an object of study. This is evident in the title of his most recent article, "Reflections on a Meeting: Structure, Language and the Polity in a Small-Scale Society" (1986). In this article, Myers brings language to the foreground by showing how it is a constitutive part of the social life of Pintupi-speaking Aborigines of Australia's Western Desert. In doing this, Myers also brings the meeting to the foreground as a communicative event and he focuses specifically on the "organizational work of speech in meetings" and the relationship between this work and traditional Pintupi conceptions of the polity (p. 431). Myers begins with an analysis of a specific meeting, and he uses this, as well as many other meeting events, throughout this article to analyze and illustrate his major points. As it happens, Myers's interpretation of meetings reiterates many of the theoretical points that seem to be organizing discussion and debate in the political speech literature. Here the relationship between autonomy, a value of the Pintupi as well as many other traditional societies, is related to the need to develop shared identity and to sustain relationships (p. 431). The dilemma that his Pintupi informants experienced is not unlike the dilemma of practice theorists:

> For the Pintupi, personal autonomy lies in the capacity to choose which social relations to sustain. Such relations are, it would seem, fragile—the cost of freedom. On the other hand, personal autonomy depends paradoxically

> on sustaining relations—shared identity—with others. Herein lies the problem of the polity, and the internal contradiction of many societies. (p. 431)

In reconceptualizing his understanding of the significance of meetings for the Pintupi, Myers comes to realize the significant role these events play in mediating between the values of autonomy and relatedness for the Pintupi. I quote the following statement at length because it documents Myers's shift away from a focus on the tasks of meetings (e.g., such as decisions or problem solving) and toward a focus on the form and force of meetings as speech events and their relationship to specific sociocultural systems:

> My attention to the relationship between speech and . . . [the construction of a] temporary polity is based in part on observations of the limitation on the authority of collective decision making in Pintupi meetings. Despite urging by white authorities to do so, talk at Pintupi meetings does not press on toward a topic, relentlessly to solve a problem. *At first this puzzled me as much as it frustrated well-intentioned advisors interested in Pintupi self-determination. Gradually, I came to understand the nature of talk at meetings differently.* For Pintupi, the meeting must first sustain the very occasion of its performance. This is so because there is no preexisting, assured organizational framework of political action within which people live, yet they are in need of each other. Thus, the force of their speaking is concerned mainly to sustain relations among the participants under a rubric of being related to each other—but always maintaining the identity as autonomous equals that is so marked a feature in Pintupi life more generally. My argument is that speech in meetings mediates between two dialectically related values that are central to any political identity for Pintupi: relatedness and autonomy. (emphasis added, p. 432)

With these observations, Myers moves the study of political speech toward the study of meetings as the place where relationships between a form of speaking (e.g., a meeting), language, and the larger social contexts can be examined. Meetings become an important place for such an analysis because they are themselves a crucial form (especially in societies like the Pintupi) for generating and displaying/visualizing these relationships for participants. As they accomplish this for participants, they become central to researchers (only it has taken researchers longer to realize their significance in this regard), especially those with an interest in a practice-focused approach to the study of social life, where it becomes important to understand what and how these accomplishments are produced and reproduced.

Myers analyzes the meeting organization of discourse in terms of how a sense of the meeting is created as a set of "discrete bits from which speakers' egotism, will, and responsibility are detached. It is as if the outcome—the consensus no one opposes—is 'found' rather than created, and the group reflexively derives from it" (p. 438). In this way,

although meetings rarely produce decisions or plans for concerted action, these are events that in Myer's terms are "delicate achievements" moving back and forth between centralization and peripheralization—maintaining a central focus is always attempted in the meeting, but it may break down (p. 438). One of the most crucial points that Myers makes in this paper is that the meeting "does not stand for but *is* the polity for Western Desert Aborigines" (p. 438). And again, "the very process of meeting *is* the polity and defines it, however momentarily. Because it exists only as long as people view themselves as related, the polity is not a structure, an outside referent that is simply to be taken for granted and not an enduring accomplishment" (pp. 438–439). In order for meetings to accomplish this in a society like the Pintupi, the appearance of conflict is "uncomfortable," and in this way meetings become "collaborations for the production of congeniality" (Liberman, quoted in Myers 1986:439). That this is not always the case, as will be amply demonstrated in this book, points up once again the importance of placing the analysis of meetings within specific sociocultural settings.

The appearance of James Howe's book, *The Kuna Gathering: Contemporary Village Politics in Panama* (1986) confirms my belief that meetings (finally) are beginning to emerge as an important topic of anthropological analysis. This study which is one of the few full-scale ethnographies of a society examined from the standpoint of its meetings (in this case both sacred and especially secular town meetings) (see also Salmond 1975). Howe sets his study in the tradition of Bloch and also Richards and Kuper and Bailey as he argues forcefully for the necessity of giving priority to the study of events:

> Although political events in other societies may not always be so open and frequent as the Kuna gatherings, the literature of the field might look quite different if we knew more about what went on in Swat Pathan men's houses (Barth 1959:52–56, 120, 124) and landowners' assemblies (ibid.: 67–83, 115–119), dolodolai (Bailey 1969:88–91), Kwakiutl potlatches, Shavante men's councils (Maybury-Lewis 1967:199–201), and the mediating efforts of Nuer Leopard-Skin Chiefs (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Greuel 1971; Haight 1972). (Howe 1986:5)

His emphasis, like Myers as discussed before and Myers and Brenneis, is in the study of action as well as the "controls which are embedded in structure," but his primary concern is on rhetoric and persuasion because this is what can be observed and recorded (p. 5). He uses his detailed observations and recordings of speeches and chants to describe and analyze two varieties of meetings: "the singing gathering," or sacred convocation where chiefs sing to their followers about religious traditions and "the talking gathering," a secular council in which participants deal with the business of the village (e.g., disputes, collective

labor, etc.). In this way he presents a discourse and event-centered analysis and account of the Kuna polity and their practice of everyday politics, which also questions accepted models of action, leadership, faction, interest, consensus, and alignment. Although attempting to analyze politics within the context of what he refers to as the "wider environment," the locus of description "is the event and institution to which the Kuna devote their evenings, day-in, day-out"—the village gathering (p. 30). This is an important study because it provides us with the best example yet of what we can learn when we approach a cultural and social system through the events that participants use to both constitute and act within it.

In the following section, I summarize what I see as the general features of a theoretical framework for the study of meetings that the previously mentioned research suggests.

Toward a Theory of Meetings

First, and what is most important, an anthropology of meetings conceptualizes meetings as communicative events (Hymes 1974) that must be examined as they are embedded within a sociocultural setting (an organization, a community, a society) as both a constituting and constitutive social form. An appreciation of the idea that the world does not appear to us as formalized concepts (concepts such as structure or culture or hierarchy and value) but only in specific contexts, situations, occasions, and gatherings composed of specific actors (or agents) interacting with each other motivates all of the research that has been reviewed here.[11] Structure and culture, insofar as they have any mean-

[11]The work of Georg Simmel (1950) has been very influential in the development of a variety of interactional approaches, and it may be used here to represent this point. I would also add that along with providing a foundation for traditional approaches, Simmel's work would seem to be an important resource for the developing practice approach, and so I quote at length.

> The large systems and the superindividual organizations that customarily come to mind when we think of society are nothing but immediate interactions that occur among men constantly, every minute, but that have become crystallized as permanent fields, as autonomous phenomena. As they crystallize, they attain their own existence and their own laws, and may even confront or oppose spontaneous interaction itself. At the same time, society as its life is constantly being realized, always signifies that individuals are connected by mutual influence and determination. It is, hence, something functional, something individuals do and suffer. To be true to this fundamental character of it, one should properly speak, not of society, but of sociation. Society merely is the name for a number of individuals, connected by interaction. (p. 10)
>
> But in addition to these [crystallizations], there exists an immeasurable number of less conspicuous forms of relationship and kinds of interaction. Taken singly, they may

ing at all as theoretical concepts, are only realized within these occasions, and so it is in the occasion that we must locate our analyses. Another way of making this point is to say that, whereas no one has ever seen a "hierarchy" or a "value," everyone (almost) has been to a meeting. This means that research on meetings as occasions will necessarily be focused on speech and communication as both constituting and constituted activity in these settings.

In conjunction with this view, however, it is necessary to recognize that situations, occasions, and gatherings are themselves "practical accomplishments" as the ethnomethodologists have demonstrated repeatedly. These events are constructed by actors and researchers out of what is frequently "a blooming, buzzing confusion," and whatever order is achieved is always precarious and tentative.[12] Meetings, for the Pintupi,

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> appear negliable. But since in actuality they are inserted into the comprehensive and, as it were, official social formation, they alone produce society as we know it . . . Without the interspersed effects of countless minor syntheses, society would break up into a multitude of discontinuous systems. Sociation continuously emerges and ceases and emerges again. Even where its eternal flux and pulsation are not sufficiently strong to form organizations proper, they link individuals together. That people look at one another and are jealous of one another; that they exchange letters or dine together; that irrespective of all tangible interests they strike one another as pleasant or unpleasant; that gratitude for altruistic acts makes for inseparable union; that one asks another man after a certain street, and that people dress and adorn themselves for one another—the whole gamut of relations that play from one person to another and that may be momentary or permanent, conscious or unconscious, ephermal or of grave consequence (and from which these illustrations are quite casually chosen), all these incessantly tie men together. Here are the interactions among the atoms of society. They account for all the toughness and elasticity, all the color and consistency of social life, that is so striking and yet so mysterious. (pp. 9–10)

[12]Sally Falk Moore (1975) suggests that, in our studies of social life, we would do best to assume a basic postulate of "theoretically absolute cultural and social indeterminacy."

> To put it simply, in this model social life is presumed to be indeterminate except insofar as culture and organized or patterned social relationships make it determinate. The assumption is that it is useful to conceive an underlying, theoretically absolute cultural and social indeterminancy, which is only partially done away with by culture and organized social life, the patterned aspects of which are temporary, incomplete, and contain elements of inconsistency, ambiguity, discontinuity, contradiction, paradox and conflict. (p. 232)

Garfinkel (1967) illustrates this view by describing the "attainment" of rationality in members' concerted activities.

> The *recognizedly* rational properties of their common sense inquiries—their recognizedly consistent, or methodic, or uniform, or planful, etc. character—are *somehow* attainments of members' concerted activities. For Suicide Prevention Center staff, for coders, for jurors the rational properties of their practical inquiries somehow consist in the concerted work of making evident from fragments, from proverbs, from passing remarks, from rumors, from partial descriptions, from "codified" but essentially vague categories of experience and the like how a person died in society, or by what criteria patients were selected for psychiatric treatment, or which among the alternative verdicts was correct. *Somehow* is the problematic crux of the matter. (p. 10)

are "delicate achievements," but they are "achievements" in every society. In Chapter 3, I develop a framework for the definition and analysis of meetings as accomplished communication that draws on the work of ethnomethodologists, ethnography of speaking research as well as the ethnoscientists' concern with native knowledge and the distinguishing features of events. Meetings are involved in the construction and imposition of order in individuals' lives in ways that, I believe, have been generally unappreciated by participants and researchers. However, I suggest that meetings are responsible for both the construction of order and disorder in social systems, and so they must be conceptualized as occasions with both conservative and transformative capacities.

When participants engage in the construction of communicative events such as focused gatherings, they are also involved simultaneously in their interpretation and evaluation as cultural texts. This is how meetings may be seen to generate "provinces of meaning," "rubrics of understanding," "interpretive schemes" (cf. Schutz in Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood 1980:4–5), or cultural patterns that come to serve as models of and models for (Geertz 1973) activities and beliefs. As texts, meetings are like Geertz's Balinese cockfights where actors act as both the subjects and objects of their jointly created event. In the process (or practice) of producing and reading meetings as texts, before, during, and after their occurrence, participants generate and affirm cultural values and beliefs or systems of meaning. Successive interpretations of meetings may serve to legitimate or delegitimate meeting content, social relations, or cultural systems.

An emphasis on the relations of domination and the role of practice in the production and reproduction of these relationships is also a major focus of the research reviewed here. As Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood (1980) suggest:

> The interpenetration of power and provinces of meaning is of the greatest consequence for organizational structuring, embedded not merely in the structural scaffolding of an organization but bred into the routine constituting and recreating of interactive relations. This interdependence of power and meaning is perhaps better conceptualized as an "order of domination" (cf. Weber 1947). (1980:8–9)

Although this view is still actor-focused, it also recognizes that actors do not exist within a vacuum. The relationship of participants to organizational or environmental constraints that are (or become) limiting and constraining is an important part of this approach. Weick (1979) utilizes his concept of enactment to examine this relationship, whereas Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood (1980) suggest that these constraints "provide the milieu of problems and obstacles within which social life is carried out" (p. 9). What it is important to emphasize for my purposes is

that individuals do not and cannot act outside of forms such as communicative events like meetings that they use to generate interaction as well as to interpret what it means (we are chatting, we are playing, we are meeting). It is in these forms, and only in these forms, that individuals are able to transact, negotiate, strategize, and attempt to realize their specific aims, but cultural systems and social structures are "bred into" these forms as Ranson *et al.* suggest.[13] This is how I understand what it means to talk about the "practice in the structure and the structure in the practice" (see Sahlins 1981:72). Although focusing on the relationship between practice and structure, however, researchers have not generally focused on *how practice generates and constrains practice.* In some ways it seems unnecessary to move from practice to structure, or culture, or vice versa, because *on the ground* individuals move from practice to practice, event to event, occasion to occasion. Meetings may be examined as individual or as related events because what is clear from the cross-cultural literature reviewed so far is that meetings almost always produce more meetings. This is not a trivial observation as this book will attempt to explicate. This is also the characteristic of meetings that frequently makes them the link between individuals and the entities we designate as groups, communities, regions, states, nations, and supranational organizations.[14] This is why I believe that meetings should assume a prominent role in studies attempting to challenge the division between micro- and macrolevel studies.

The linkage of intention with constraint as discussed before requires addressing the difficult issue of intended and unintended conse-

[13]Jean Comaroff (1985) offers a useful perspective on this issue, in her examination of the interplay of human action and structural constraint for the Tshidi of the South Africa-Botswana borderland (p. 1)

> It is in practice that the principles governing objective orders of power relations take cultural form, playing upon the capacity of signs—their polysemic quality, for instance, and the meaning they acquire through their positioning in relation to each other in sequences or texts. But this process of construction is never totally witting or unwitting. It involves the reciprocal interaction of subjects and their objective context; and it may serve both to consolidate existing hegemonies (ruling definitions of the "natural" world) and to give shape to resistance or reform. (pp. 5–6)

[14]In her study of Chagga political meetings, Moore (1977) suggests this view. "The local political meeting [of TANU the Tanzanian African National Union and the one political party of Tanzania] is in its way (and due in part to its form) more than a local event, and more than a momentary incident. It is one of a long series of parallel occurrences that constitute the base of the national political edifice" (p. 154). But it is important to stress that in Moore's terms, because these meetings are performatives (in the sense that Austin 1975 uses this term), to say that the Kilimanjaro ward meeting that she describes in detail "was a dramatization of government is merely to make an analogy. It *was* local government" (p. 167) (compare Myers's discussion of Pintupi meetings, "the meeting does not stand for but *is* the polity for Western Desert Aborigines" 1986:438).

quences. In this regard Ortner (1984) points to what she sees as the irony at the center of the practice model:

> The irony is . . . this: that although actor's intentions are accorded central place in the model, yet major social change does not for the most part come about as an *intended* consequence of action. Change is largely a by-product, an *un*intended consequence of action, however rational action may have been. . . . To say that society and history are products of human action is true, but only in a certain ironic sense. They are rarely the products the actors themselves set out to make. (p. 157)

The work of March and Olsen (1976) is relevant here because their specific interest is in examining what they see as the "loose" connection between action and intention in organizational systems such as organized anarchies. Problems, issues, feelings, solutions, participants, and goals are not tightly connected in this model, although after the fact, participants often describe them *as if* they were. It is these descriptions and interpretations that provide some stability in such systems as "consensual anticipations, retrospectations, and understandings" develop as "interpretive schemes" (Weick in Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood 1980:5). But it is forms, such as meetings in these contexts, which provide individuals with opportunities for sense making (see Weick 1979), whereas, at the same time producing, reproducing, and sometimes transforming the social and cultural system. This is not to say, however, that individuals and their intentions control what happens on these occasions. In fact, the accomplishments of meetings as a form and the intentions of individuals in meetings frequently do not mesh, as they are *mixed* or *mixed up* by this form. In Giddens's (1984) view, social forces "are always nothing more and nothing less than mixes of intended and unintended consequences of action undertaken in specifiable contexts" (p. 220). This is where the model of March and Olsen is particularly relevant to this issue, and it is also why meetings as a recurring place for this "mix" in many types of sociocultural systems should, in my view, become a central topic for researchers. I shall begin to specify next the relationship between meetings and these functions.

Images of Meetings

There are currently two dominant and related images of meetings in the research literature. These images are connected in such a way so as to present what is essentially a nonimage of these events, as they suggest that meetings are *blank slates* that individuals can use as a *tool* to facilitate culturally defined "business" or "work," but a tool that in itself has no effect on organizations, communities, or societies. It is only when

we encounter meetings in unusual contexts (such as in non-Western societies or in alternative organizations as will be demonstrated in this book) that we begin to see the meeting as a topic and not a tool for research. This is the value of anthropology as it causes us to question familiar and taken-for-granted assumptions in our own society.

In order to move meetings into the foreground for attention, I propose two related images here as a way of summing up the issues discussed in this chapter. I present these images briefly noting that I will expand and develop them further in Chapter 3 and the remaining sections of this book. The activities that each image stresses illustrate how, in Duranti's terms (see 1984:217; also Bateson 1972), a communicative event such as a meeting may constitute a frame for verbal and nonverbal behavior with multiple functions for organizations and communities. Even though the activities discussed here are interconnected in daily life, they are described separately in this section as they suggest ways to view the form and function of meetings that directly challenges the images that up to now have been so influential in directing our thinking about this topic.

Meetings as Sense Makers[15]

Meetings are an important sense-making form for organizations and communities because they may define, represent, and also reproduce social entities and relationships. In this way, individuals may both use and be used by this form. As a sense-making form, meetings are significant because they are the organization or community *writ small*. There may be other competing symbols for an organization or community, such as individual leaders, a building or territory, an organizational chart or logo. However, a meeting is a powerful and ongoing social symbol because it assembles a variety of individuals and groups together and labels the assembly as organizational or community action. As Silverman (1977) reminds us, in his analysis of a Banaban meeting, "actions as well as words and objects can be symbols" (p. 473). In this way, a meeting provides individuals with a way to create and then discover the meaning of what it is they are doing and saying (see Weick 1977:195; and also March and Olsen 1976; Moore 1977; Myers and Brenneis 1984), whereas it also is a means for generating the appearance of organization or "polity," even if it is only within the brief confines of the meeting event itself (Myers and Brenneis 1984).

[15]This image was suggested by Weick's (1979) provocative analysis of sense making in organizations and also by Silverman's (1977) discussion of "making sense" in a Banaban meeting.

In social systems characterized by egalitarian relations and/or extreme ambiguity in organizational goals, technology, or authority relationships (such as organized anarchies), meetings may become one–if not the—major social form that constitutes and reconstitutes the organization or community over time (see case studies in March and Olsen 1976). The importance of meetings in this regard is suggested as well by work on political language in egalitarian societies (e.g., Brenneis 1984b on Figi Indians; Lederman 1984 on Mendi community meetings; and Rosaldo 1973, 1984 on Ilongot political meetings).

Meetings, and meeting talk as objectified in minutes, reports, and the like may also become the major evidence of organizational action. Political language and rhetoric studies that consider language as action (see Brenneis and Myers 1984) and that argue that "saying is doing" (Paine 1981) also support this view for a variety of societies. In her study of the Wana, Atkinson (1984) reports the researcher's frustration with political speech in egalitarian societies because it often seems to be "all talk and no action."

> Time and again in my fieldwork among the Wana, I was personally distressed as well as analytically perplexed when after engaging in weighty discussions of vexing problems, my companions would later "fail" to act on what I took to be their resolve. But then talk *is* action, and the accomplishment of these discussions had more to do with creating and sustaining relationships among participants than with taking direct and concerted action regarding the ostensible topic of the talk. (pp. 35–36)

The idea that meeting talk may be synonymous with organizational action requires questioning the standard view that meetings exist as a facilitating form for making a decision, formulating a policy, solving a problem, or resolving a crisis.[16] Drawing on the ethnography of meetings presented in this book, as well as the recent research on political speech and meeting behavior discussed before (especially Bloch 1971, 1975; studies in Brenneis and Myers 1984; March and Olsen 1976; Moore 1977; Silverman 1977; Turton 1975), it is possible to suggest that decisions, policies, problem solving, and so forth are *not* what meetings are *about*. Instead, we need to reverse this view and examine the possibility that meetings are what decisions, policies, problems, and crises are about. From this vantage point, decisions, policies, problems, and crises occur *because* they produce meetings and, as has been argued before, in

[16]An early example of this type of questioning is presented by Olsen (1970) in his analysis of the "rituallike" aspects of budgetary decisions and discussions in a Norwegian commune. He argues that all studies of budgeting assume that the allocation of resources is the most interesting aspect of budgeting. "No one has asked whether we can better understand budgetary behavior if we do *not* take it as given that the most important things taking place are policy-making and resource allocation" (p. 86).

certain social systems it is meetings that produce "organization," although it is much more common to assume the opposite. This approach sets meetings at the center of our understanding of organizational and community social systems and is directly related to the second image of meetings to be suggested next.

Meetings as Social and Cultural Validators

At the same time that meetings may be a major form for the creation of community or organizational identity (however tentative), once a meeting has been constructed, the event becomes a vehicle for the reading as well as validation of social relations within a cultural system. Meetings are very important as such a vehicle in organizations such as Midwest, where there were few other ways to negotiate and/or determine one's status and social ranking. However, this characteristic of meetings is also particularly important in more hierarchical societies where meetings become a primary context for proclaiming and reinforcing one's social status and position in a community (see Bloch 1971 on Merina council meetings; Duranti 1984 on the Samoan *fono;* Hanson Berman 1988 on task force meetings in an American city government; March and Olsen 1976 on American and Scandinavian university settings; Salmond 1975, 1976 on the Maori *hui;* and Wolcott 1973 on the uses of meetings by administrators in an American elementary school).

Meetings are a successful social validating mechanism because acceptance of the form requires, at least in part, acceptance of the current social and cultural order (see Bloch 1975).[17] A formal meeting requires the negotiation and ultimately the acceptance of a set of social relationships that define someone's right to call and arrange a meeting, to specify time and location, someone(s) or some way to start and end a meeting, a series of rules and conventions for ordering and regulating talk, and recognition of this as talk that may be legitimated by the meeting frame.

In the process of negotiating and accepting the frame of a meeting, individuals are able to (1) create a series of social relationships (which may or may not last beyond the confines of the meeting boundary, and (2) mark and reinforce their social relationships with each other. In this case, the meeting form provides individuals with a structure to use to metaphorically mix their formal and informal relationships and feelings with community or organizational issues, problems, and solutions. Sil-

[17]Bloch's (1971, also 1975:9) work on Merina councils illustrates the importance of this aspect of meetings, although he views this as the ability of formalized oratory to reproduce traditional authority and hierarchical relationships.

verman's 1977 ethnography of a 10-hour Banaban community meeting or *maungatabu* specifically illustrates this aspect of meetings. March and Olsen (1976) refer to this process as the "garbage can" quality of choice situations, and they suggest that a choice process provides an occasion for a number of things, including fulfilling role expectations, defining virtue and truth, interpreting what is happening, challenging or reaffirming friendships, power, and status, socialization of members, and having a good time (pp. 11–12). However, in my view, it is the nature of the meeting form, and not the choice, that provides the best structure for this mix. Meetings are able to do this because they are a context where one thing can always be talked about in terms of something else. This may be one reason why indirect speech (discussed variously as veiled speech, curving speech, winding speech, crooked speech, wrapped words, sweet talk, etc.) occurs so frequently in the meeting context as reported in the literature. In Ilongot society, for example, it is interesting to note that the word for oratory, *purung*, "describes at once a public meeting and an elaborate public style of speech; in *purung*, art and politics are combined" (Rosaldo 1948:138–139). In this way, meetings and the indirect speech that this form facilitates, allow individuals to negotiate and/or comment on their formal and informal social relationships *while they appear* to be making a decision, solving a problem, formulating policy, and so forth. Because this process takes place in the public arena of the meeting, it will always be framed as "the business" of the organization or community.

Meetings are also an important context for the display and validation of cultural beliefs. In American society, meetings assume great significance because they are a major setting for displaying the cultural value on the use of reason and logic in the development of decisions and policies. In his recent review of political language studies, Parkin (1984) suggests that in the Western world "we aspire to decision making through what we perceive to be calculated reason because it seems to us to be the best way to control our destinies" (p. 356; see also Bailey 1981). The fact that many meetings do not accomplish this end, as recognized by many organizational participants has not diminished most individuals' belief in the value of meetings for reasoned discussion. Meetings, however, may be most important in American society because they generate the *appearance* that reason and logical processes are guiding discussions and decisions, whereas they facilitate (as discussed before) relationship negotiations, struggles, and commentary. It is this process that can make meetings such frustrating occasions because they appear to be doing one thing whereas, in many ways, they are accomplishing something entirely different. When viewed from this perspective, it is possible to see why meetings are so common as well as so maligned in

American society. As a social form, in these contexts, the meeting continually negates itself and its perceived cultural function. In most organizations and communities, this negation is not as apparent as it was at Midwest as will be illustrated in Part II.

Meetings and Change

Meetings may transform as well as reproduce cultural conventions, but the transformative capacity of meetings has been less readily recognized. Both characteristics of meetings that have been discussed in this chapter contribute to this role of meetings and change. As sense makers and social and cultural validators, meetings play an important role in reconciling the practices of tradition and change, as they may be a place for maintaining tradition, whereas at the same time learning new practices. Pinsker (1984) notes that in many places in the Pacific "meetings may have achieved more importance in recent times because of the prohibition of warfare; no longer able to demonstrate their prowess on the battlefield, factions compete in demonstrations of formal oratory" (p. 28). Myers (1986) suggests that the ability of the Pintupi "to sustain their political autonomy and identity depends on adopting forms of sociality somewhat alien to them" (p. 430). This includes participating, with increasing frequency, in meetings that are at least partly the creation of the Australian government in an attempt to establish self-governing Aboriginal community structures with whom they could relate (p. 433). But this imposition has led to a reemergence of Aboriginal conceptions of the polity:

> The fragile polities are the forms of sociopolitical organization that are reasserting themselves in the contemporary situation. Regardless of external form, meetings are a clear expression of Pintupi values and understandings of the polity, which are often at odds with those being imposed from outside. (p. 433)

In this case, a new practice revives traditional practices and values, but of course traditional practices may also be transformed by modern practices and values. For example, Rosaldo (1973) illustrates how, for the Ilongots, the meeting form may both embody and produce cultural change and transformation. She discusses this by documenting changing speech patterns and practices in political meetings of more modern as well as traditional Ilongot communities:

> Elaborate, "crooked" language belongs to a world in which none can offend, command, or give orders, and speakers must negotiate the agreement and understanding of their opposites, through an aesthetically attractive and politically non-directive style. "Straight" oratory, by contrast, is direct and

> explicit, and it is associated with new sources of, and claims to authority. (p. 221)

This is where meetings become an important place for observing the processes and effects of macrolevel changes on the ground in the occasions and practices where cultures and practices *meet*. Pinsker (1984) is currently examining meetings as a place for the constitution and expression of change in Micronesian politics in a study of relationships between local-level political meetings and the meeting practices of the Federated States of Micronesia Congress at the national level. What it is important to recognize here is not the cliche acknowledgment that change is produced when cultures meet but that change is frequently the result of *specific meetings* (individuals meeting on particular occasions for a specific time period, etc.) and the mix of intended and unintended consequences that these occasions produce.[18]

As sense makers and social and cultural validators, meetings are also the place where individuals in a changing context are able to reconstitute themselves to themselves as a social and cultural group. In this way a group faced with a need to change may turn to meetings to "unscramble" (Silverman 1977) the things that are happening to them and in the process to remake and transform themselves and their society. Silverman's (1977) ethnography of a 10-hour Banaban community meeting specifically illustrates the process whereby participants who were forced to resettle on Rambi Island, Fiji, when their original home became a large mine, reified the event of the meeting "as a form through which Banaban identity could be invoked and understood" (p. 451).

Summary

In this chapter I have suggested that meetings are valuable because they are not what they appear to be. They seem to be a sort of "blank slate" useful as a "tool" for individuals to conduct culturally defined

[18] Bengt-Erik Borgstrom's (1982) analysis of power structure and political speech in Nepal illustrates this process. He analyzes speeches made by the King of Nepal who found it increasingly necessary because of the political context to

> include notions of democracy and development in his speeches. He does this by defining them in a manner that anchors them to the panchayat system and to his own person. In this way they are tamed and made to play a role in his continued exercise of power. However, words and phrases such as "democracy," "equity," "development," "education" or "a society free of exploitation," also carry information that make it possible for people to judge whether their environment is changing in the direction so posited. In other words, the king's illocutionary acts have some consequences that must be negative from his point of view. (p. 325)

business as well as a place to realize specific aims and interests. These images are part of commonsense currency in American and Western society and in Chapter 3 I document the existence and consequences of these views using the social science literature as the source for my analysis. The alternative images of meetings that have been presented in this chapter suggest that the meeting event itself may have important consequences for individuals, communities, and cultures. An approach for producing ethnographies of meetings that is built on this assumption and these images is also presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Meetings as Tools/Meetings as Topics

Gibbon observes that in the Arabian book par excellence, *in the Koran, there are no camels; I believe that if there were any doubt as to the authenticity of the Koran, this absence of camels would be sufficient to prove it is an Arabian work. It was written by Mohammed, and Mohammed, as an Arab, had no reason to know that camels were especially Arabian; for him they were a part of reality, he had no reason to emphasize them; on the other hand, the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would do is have a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on every page; but Mohammed, as an Arab, was unconcerned; he knew he could be an Arab without camels.*

Jorge Luis Borges
Labyrinths (1962:181)

A camel is a horse assembled by a committee.

William T. Carnes
Effective Meetings for Busy People (1980:65)

Historically, face-to-face meetings have played an important role in the social, and especially the political, life of Western and non-Western societies. Jane Mansbridge (1983) argues that the concept of unitary democracy is the oldest and longest-lived form of human organization and face-to-face meetings and unitary democracy go hand in hand because it is this context that makes it possible to formalize and extend to the level of a polity the relations of friendship (p. 8):

> The Greeks were aware of this connection. With the phrase, "Friendship [*philia*] appears to hold city-states together" Aristotle illuminates the bond between citizens in a unitary polity. . . . Drawing from the experience of friendship, a democrat could easily believe that relations between citizens ought to be like relations between friends. Friends are equals. They choose to spend time together. They share common values. They expand in each other's company. So, too, in a democracy based on friendship, participants

> are equal in status; the costs of participation, of which some make so much, do not feel heavy. Citizens "fly to the assemblies" as if to meet their friends. They value the time they spend on their common affairs. They share a common good, and are able, as a consequence, to make their decisions unanimously. The characteristics of unitary democracy—equal respect, face-to-face contact, common interest, and consensus—are from this perspective nothing but the natural conditions that prevail among friends. (pp. 8–9)

The development and practice of democratic government in American society has historically been symbolized and invoked by reference to the town meeting. Michael Zuckerman (1970) documents the values and behavior that ordered the lives of "ordinary, otherwise nameless men" in Massachusetts towns in the eighteenth century, and here he specifically examines how the aspirations of harmony and homogeneity of these villagers had to be "hammered out" in terms of "thousands of agreements" in the arena of the town meeting:

> In town meetings from Cape Cod to the Connecticut Valley men gathered to discuss the firewood that the minister said they had promised him, to consider conditions to be attached to the new town mill that was going to make a rich man richer, to haggle over the seating of the meetinghouse; and in the accords they achieved, even out of initial difference, they deepened their solidarity and their assurance of union. Each agreement was a real reconsecration of the community, and so the town meeting served not only as an instrument of social decision but also as the institutional site of the translation of larger values into local behavior. (p. 154)

In the early 1970s, however, when Jane Mansbridge undertook a study of American participatory democracies, she was surprised to find that "no one had ever analyzed a town meeting's operation in detail" even though it has been "an inspirational symbol of American democracy since before the revolution" (1983:vii–viii).[1] It is this neglect of analysis of the variety of American meeting forms, and especially the significance of meetings in American organizational systems, that is the subject of this chapter.

Meetings and American Society: Cultural Assumptions and Research

At first glance, it would seem that meetings are one of the most well-understood phenomena in American society; they are certainly one of its most common events. This chapter takes a second glance and finds that, whereas meetings are much maligned, we really know very little

[1]Mansbridge (1983) notes several studies in the 1970s attempting to examine, among other things, correlates of town meeting participation (Bryan 1975); differences such as the amount of information that citizens have about their town's political life, between a town meeting government and a city council government (Hixon 1971); changes in town meet-

about them. I argue that this is so because meetings are so basic and pervasive a part of social life, and so prevalent as well as ordinary in American society, that their significance as a gathering in these settings has not been recognized. Cultural attitudes about meetings that have influenced our understanding of these events will be specifically examined here by using the research literature in the social sciences and in management science to document three general orientations that have been taken toward this subject. Following this analysis, an approach for making meetings the topic of research is presented as it draws on the framework for research on occasions and gatherings discussed in Chapter 2. An outline for the production of ethnographies of meetings is specifically presented here.

It will be argued that meetings are so pervasive and taken-for-granted in organizations that they have often been overlooked by researchers. The indexes of management textbooks provide one window on the topics of concern to investigators. Therefore it is interesting to discover that "meetings" (or "conferences," "boards," "councils," "committees") rarely appear in the subject indexes of several frequently used textbooks on organizational behavior (e.g., Kerr 1979; March and Simon 1958; Nadler, Hackman, and Lawler 1979; Schein 1980; Szilagyi 1980). The exclusion of such an obvious topic suggests that the authors consider meetings to be either too general or too familiar a subject to merit inclusion in the index. Meetings do, however, make their appearance in various ways in the research literature. For the most part, meetings appear as *they have been used* by researchers, consultants, and others for the examination or investigation of other topics. Following Bittner's (1974) insight about organizational structure, it can be said that researchers have made meetings a *tool* of analysis, when they should have been the *topic* of investigation (see also Zimmerman and Pollner 1970). Parkinson (1957) suggested this some time ago by noting that researchers have paid scant attention to committees, which led him to playfully call for the development of a science of "comitology." Only a few researchers have taken this call seriously, as will be evident in the following review.

The studies of anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, business administrators, and others illustrate three general orientations that have been taken toward meetings: (1) meetings are viewed as tools for tasks; (2) meetings are evaluated as ineffective tools; and (3) researchers and others have attempted to improve the functioning of meetings.

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ing government orientation (Kotler 1974), but she also notes that "none of these studies . . . includes data appropriate to a detailed analysis of the political dynamics of the meeting itself or many of the variables affecting attendance" (p. 333).

Meetings as Tools for Tasks: Using Meetings

Researchers have used the meetings of boards, conferences, councils, committees, and staffings to investigate a variety of topics. For example, during the last 30 years of its existence, the small-group field has focused on approximately 12 major topics according to a review by Zander (1979). Researchers in each of these topical areas have used meetings in one way or another to pursue their specific interests. These areas include (1) interest in the power of groups and group norms to determine the behavior of members (e.g., Janis's 1972 analysis of the effect of "groupthink" on committees in the federal government; see also Flowers's 1977 experimental investigation of this phenomenon); (2) a long-standing concern with the study of leadership style and effects on group productivity and/or member satisfaction (e.g., both leader style and situational studies have used meeting groups, especially discussion groups, to assess leadership traits and processes, see Hollander and Julian 1969); (3) sources and effects of interpersonal power and the effect of social networks on communication within groups (e.g., Blau and Scott's 1962 analysis of formal status and interaction in weekly meetings in a county welfare bureau, or Caudill's 1958 study of interaction processes in administrative conferences in a mental hospital); (4) the study of cooperation and conflict in groups (e.g., Levit and Benjamin's 1976 use of a conference between Jews and Arabs to examine ways to resolve conflict in groups, or Fenno's 1962 study of integrative mechanisms operative in the United States Congress House Appropriations Committee); and (5) structural effects (such as group size) on group performance and productivity (e.g., Paulus *et al.* 1976 study of group size, room size, interpersonal proximity and their effects on group performance).

Meetings also have been used as a "testing ground" for a variety of theoretical models developed by small-group researchers. Fiedler, Godfrey, and Hall's (1957) study of boards of farm cooperatives, in order to validate a contingency model of leadership effectiveness, illustrates this approach. Similarly, meeting or meetinglike events have been utilized for the development and refinement of several small group observational methods and instruments, for example, interaction process analysis (IPA) as developed by Bales and colleagues (see 1950).

In all of these studies, the purpose of the research has been to achieve knowledge about the nature of groups as a general phenomenon or to develop more effective ways to study groups. The nature of meetings as a specific speech form or communicative event that structures a group's behavior has not been the subject of investigation.

One of the most recent interests of researchers is the process of decision making in groups and organizations. There is now an immense literature on this subject and once again meetings figure prominently as the background form for investigations of those topics of specific interest to the decision researcher. These interests include (1) studies of particular types of decision processes such as differences between consensus and majority voting for achieving decisions (e.g., Bailey's 1965 comparison of councils and committees in India and in Western universities; Olsen's 1972 examination of differences between confrontation versus "sounding out" procedures for making organizational choices); (2) analysis of the impact of the decision environment on the decision reached, for example, comparisons between decisions made under the differential conditions of certainty, risk, and uncertainty (see Bowman 1958); (3) studies and comparisons of different types of decisions, for example, budgeting decisions (Hofstede 1968), strategic/innovative decisions (Mintzberg *et al.* 1976; Pettigrew 1973) crisis decisions (Janis and Mann 1977); (4) investigations of leadership and decision making (Vroom and Yetton 1973); (5) studies of problems associated with reaching a decision, especially communication problems (see Argyris 1975) and evaluations of new decision techniques (e.g., the nominal group or the Delphi technique, see Van de Ven and Delbecq 1974; Delbecq *et al.* 1975); (6) illustrations and evaluations of specific decision models (e.g., Wallace and Schwab's 1976 use of a university committee to test five decision models and their ability to predict committee decisions, and in March and Olsen's 1976 studies illustrating the value of a "garbage can" model of decision making); and (7) case-analytic investigations that trace (or reconstruct) the natural history of momentous, as well as routine, decisions (e.g., Allison's 1969 study of decisions concerning the Cuban missile crisis, or March and Olsen's 1976 investigations of specific decisions made in organized anarchies).

Like small-group studies, many decision-making investigations suffer from the problem of artificiality because they are often conducted in laboratories with groups of individuals (generally college students) who have had no previous experience working together. One of the most extensive decision studies attempting to overcome some of these problems is also one of the most detailed investigations of the process and structure of government committees. In this study, Barber (1966) examines the nature of power and power relationships as these affect decisions made in meetings of 12 different Connecticut boards of finance observed at the Yale Interaction Laboratory in 1962. Guetzkow and colleagues (see Guetzkow *et al.* 1963) have also observed actual government officials in several controlled decision-making and role-playing experi-

ments. Field studies of actual decision-making groups invariably require the investigator to attend meetings as is the case in March and Olsen's 1976 studies. In general, however, it is decisions and not meetings that are the subject of research.

But They Are Not Effective Tools: Evaluating Meetings

A second tradition of literature recognizes the importance and prevalence of meetings as an event and treats them as either the symptoms of, or cure for, a host of organizational problems. This literature is generally not oriented toward researchers as it is written by and/or for organizational members, especially managers and administrators. In this case, meetings may be seen as symptomatic of problems such as ineffective leadership, ambiguous or conflicting goals, lack of clear job definitions, and communication problems of all sorts. For example, along with being symptomatic of "malorganization," Drucker (1974) suggests that

> meetings should be considered as a concession to organizational imperfection. The ideal is the organization which can operate without meetings—in the same sense in which the ideal of the machine designer is to have only one moving part in his contraption. In every human organization there is far too much need for cooperation, coordination, and human relations to have to provide for additional meetings. And the human dynamics of meetings are so complex as to make them very poor tools for getting any work done. (p. 548)

In contrast to this view, a number of consultants have suggested that meetings are actually useful diagnostic tools for understanding organizational activity and events. In this tradition, meetings are used to correct certain problems, and so a manager may be instructed to monitor his meeting performance in order to evaluate changes in his or her leadership style (see Argyris 1978), or the manager may be advised to use meetings to let people "get things off their chest" (see Johnson 1953; Lee 1952) or to study expressive movements and nonverbal behavior in conferences as signs of commitment to the company, interest in the meeting, the development of alliances among subordinates, and the like (see Caplow 1976). The human relations tradition employed meetings in many instances to encourage "open communication" between managers and workers (see Chapple 1953), and this is also the case for participative management techniques as well as the current enthusiasm for "quality circles" (see Greenberger 1981). In these instances, the meeting form is frequently introduced to an operating or production level of an organization that typically does not rely on the scheduled meeting as a context for gathering people together.

So Let's Do Something about Meetings: Improving Meetings

One of the dominant themes in this literature is the need to improve meetings in order to more effectively use them as a management tool. This specific interest has inspired its own genre of management literature, the "how-to-make-meetings-better" book (see Bradford 1976; Carnes 1980; Doyle and Straus 1976; Dunsing 1978; Hon 1980; Strauss and Strauss 1951; Tropman 1980; Zander 1977). These books have two basic points to make. First, it is assumed that most meetings, in most organizations, are ineffective, unproductive, inept, chaotic, incompetent, wasteful, ridiculous, boring, tedious, silly, and so forth. Second, the solution to these problems is either tighter structuring of meeting procedures (e.g., more premeeting preparation, developing a structured agenda, following a strict series of steps, adhering to time frames, setting meeting priorities and goals) or more attention to group dynamics (e.g., recognizing the importance of involving all members, developing effective leadership skills, using a meeting "facilitator" and "recorder," developing trust and shared responsibility, becoming familiar with techniques for resolving conflict, and the importance of self-examination).

Recent developments in the field of telecommunications have made possible a variety of alternatives to the face-to-face meeting—the so-called electronic meeting. In order to enhance and expedite the relay of information, as well as to avoid the problems and burdens of travel, a variety of teleconferencing techniques now exist, including audioteleconferences (the most well-known approach), computer-based teleconferences, and video teleconferences. Over 100 studies assessing the advantages as well as disadvantages of various types of electronic meetings currently exist, and this literature has been reviewed by Johansen, Vallee, and Spangler (1979). Changing the medium of group communications by using the electronic meeting is seen as a way to improve communication and at the same time avoid unnecessary travel and expense. In this case, the *medium* of the meeting is used as a way to *improve* organizational functioning.

This literature illustrates and reinforces the dominant image of meetings as tools for tasks. It is built on the premise that meetings are currently ineffective tools and therefore must be improved in order to improve task performance and productivity. Unfortunately, even though this approach focuses on the meeting form directly, it also takes this form for granted by assuming either that meetings transparently reveal the problems in an organization or that meetings are naturally ineffective and unproductive, and the like and therefore are in dire need of improve-

ment. This tells us something about what managers/consultants think about meetings, but it does not constitute a study of the meeting form itself.

Meetings as Topics not Tools

So far in this chapter, it has been suggested that those areas of research that would most be expected to have examined meetings (small-group and decision-making studies) have instead overlooked them. This has happened, it has been argued, because researchers and others have taken meetings for granted and have used them as a convenient form for the study or examination of other topics. This analysis is not meant as a critique of the substantive issues researchers have chosen to study (decision making is indeed a central issue for investigators to consider). The argument here is that instead of ignoring meetings, researchers should give them equal time as a topic worthy of investigation. Fortunately, there are some researchers who have already done this.

Meetings, conferences, committees, boards, and councils have been the subject of some researchers' attention in several disciplines. A number of specific issues come into focus here that are not emphasized (or sometimes even considered) in other studies. The change that is most evident is a switch from using meetings as a tool for researching other topics to that of researching the uses of meetings, as well as examining the reasons for and processes of constructing a "meeting" event in organizations. Questions of concern include: How do meetings impact on individuals in an organization? How do individuals use meetings in organizations, and what do they get out of them? What do meetings mean to organizational members? How do meetings function in specific organizational settings?

Credit for recognizing the significance of meetings in organizations must certainly go, in part, to researchers such as Guetzkow and Kriesberg (1950, also see Collins and Guetzkow 1964; Kriesberg and Guetzkow 1950; Marquis, Guetzkow, and Heyns 1951; and Berkowitz 1953) who were involved with the "Conference Research" project at the University of Michigan between 1947–1951. Although the emphasis of this research was on the conference as a context for the investigation of group problem solving and decision making, the researchers also chose to make conferences the subject of research in their own right (see especially Guetzkow and Kriesberg 1950; Kriesberg and Guetzkow 1950). The ultimate purpose of these studies was to make conferences more satisfactory to their users, but in order to do this the researchers sought to collect

empirical information about managers' and administrators' use (as well as evaluation) of the conference event. The researchers studied actual meeting events and also interviewed a wide range of administrators to see how conferences were used day to day. They found that most administrators thought conferences were a waste of time, but they kept using them. Guetzkow and Kriesberg asked the obvious question, "What other purposes do conferences serve"? Based on their studies, Guetzkow and Kriesberg (1950) outlined five major purposes of conferences: (1) conferences aid in problem discovery; (2) conferences are useful for problem solving; (3) conferences increase acceptance of decisions by assuring colleagues' acceptance, assuring superiors' approval (and providing a "cover" for individual decision makers), and securing subordinates' motivation; (4) conferences improve the ability and motivation to execute decisions; and (5) conferences are useful devices for integrating the operations of different divisions in an organization (pp. 319–322).

Bales (1954) also gives early attention to the study of meetings and conferences in his frequently reprinted article, "In Conference." Here he attempts to apply the results of small-group research as it was currently being conducted at the Laboratory of Social Relations at Harvard University to the process of actual conferences and committees. For example, he discusses the importance of dual leadership, the task leader, and the social leader (later observations of the workings of natural groups suggest that they do not necessarily handle leadership in this way; see Barber 1966). Bales also noted the lack of information about meetings that was available to researchers in 1954:

> Most decisions are made "in conference." They then normally require a long series of further conferences for their implementation. Probably no serious estimate has even ever been made of the total number of hours American businessmen spend per year "in conference." But the number must be astronomical. . . .[2] Yet think how little we know about the actual operation of a committee, and how little we are able to predict or control its success or failure. (p. 44)

More recent studies of managerial behavior (e.g., Mintzberg 1973; Sayles 1964) have filled in some of these gaps in knowledge pointed out by Bales, but the fact that meeting groups such as committees, conferences, boards, and their use by as well as impact on organizational members is an understudied topic was still apparent to researchers such

[2]In a recent pamphlet, prepared by Xerox Learning Systems, it is suggested that the average corporate executive officer "logs six hours plus in the meeting venue" every day (p. 1). The work of Mintzberg (1973), discussed later in this chapter, would seem to corroborate such estimates, which means that high management in American organizations is likely to spend over 1,560 hours a year in meetings.

as Brinkerhoff (1972) and Pfeffer (1972) writing in the 1970s. For example, Brinkerhoff (1972) states that

> In most formal organizations a great deal of time is taken up with meetings and conferences . . . ; however, there is a paucity of research which identifies the occasion for conferences, their frequency, duration, or function. (p. 395)

Mintzberg's (1973) comprehensive survey of research on what managers do, as well as his own study of the work of five chief executive officers in large organizations, contains detailed discussions of managers' participation in meetings (scheduled and unscheduled). Of particular interest is his discussion of the preference managers show for live action and their attraction to the verbal media. Mintzberg found, in his specific study, that 59% of a manager's time was spent in scheduled meetings, and another 10% was spent in unscheduled meetings. Other studies estimating the time managers spend in meetings repeat this pattern, as reported in a review of studies of managerial work by McCall, Morrison, and Hannan (1978). The authors note here that "meetings generally consume more of a manager's time than any other activity. Unscheduled meetings, or informal contacts, represent the largest time-consuming activity at middle to lower management levels" (p. 9). It is interesting to note that managers, according to McCall *et al.* (1978), consistently *underestimate* the time they spend in meetings (in Dahl and Lewis 1975, managers estimated they spent 59% of their time in meetings, but according to observations they actually spend 69% of their time in this activity), whereas managers consistently *overestimate* the time they spend reading and writing (Hanika 1963 reports that they estimate 32% and actually spend 25%) or thinking (Hanika 1963 reports an estimate of 19% versus 5% observed). In contrast to meetings, the mail is given very cursory treatment by the manager. In Mintzberg's study, processing rates frequently "exceeded 30 pieces per hour, and one man came in on Saturday to read 97 pieces of mail and reacted to 45 in a period of just under three hours" (1973:39). Reports are treated in a similar fashion. In his study, "one manager looked at the first piece of 'hard' mail he had received all week—a standard cost report—and quickly put it aside with the comment, 'I never look at this'" (pp. 39–40).

Mintzberg (1973) suggests that three types of activities take place in scheduled meetings—ceremony, strategy making, and negotiation (p. 42). All of these activities require that people be brought together in some form for them to occur. The manager seeks current information (gossip, hearsay, speculation); "getting information *rapidly* appears to be more important to the manager than getting it absolutely right" (p. 149). The manager also wants "trigger" information and concrete

stimuli, not general aggregations; he or she wants to hear about specific events, ideas, and problems, not abstract formulations. These interests conflict with most formal information systems (p. 149) and lead to further reliance on meetings as the preferred place of information exchange and transfer.

The issue of who uses meetings or conferences in organizations, and for what purpose, has been explored by Brinkerhoff (1972), who examined the use of administrative staff conferences by 680 supervisors and managers. He found that hierarchical status was strongly related to staff conference utilization. Top-level managers employed the conference in order to coordinate their activities, and first-line supervisors employed more spontaneous contacts and meetings. A number of studies report that as one moves up the organizational hierarchy, the time spent in meetings increases (Cohen and March 1974; Horne and Lupton 1965; McCall *et al.* 1978; Mintzberg 1973; Stewart 1967). It has been humorously suggested that this may be punishment for advancement in the system, but this association of level of hierarchy and participation in meetings is something that needs to be understood.

One of the most intriguing discussions of the function of meetings in organizations is offered by Melville Dalton in his well-known book *Men Who Manage* (1959). He suggests that, in meetings, one sees the interplay of formal and informal systems in organizations. In those settings where there is a great gap between formal and informal activities, Dalton argues that officers are more likely to be called into meetings to solve problems created by their own informal activities, or they may need to use meetings to collect information about (or try to influence) the informal system, or to settle issues without having to make written statements. According to Dalton:

> Right down the hierarchy one finds meetings a stage for exploratory skirmishes; for making authoritative hints to those moving too far in some direction; for study of faces and inflections; for catching slips and checking on premeeting tips, etc. The formal meeting is a gallery of fronts where aimless, deviant, and central currents of action merge for a moment, perfunctorily for some, emotionally for others. All depart with new knowledge to pursue variously altered, but rarely the agreed courses. (p. 227)

A comparison of structural and functional characteristics of traditional and modern councils is offered by Smith (1979). Smith notes that there is a lack of literature in this area (in anthropology), whereas, at the same time, it is recognized that such groups display an interesting uniformity of structure and function at all levels of sociocultural complexity. In order to illustrate this point, she compares characteristics of traditional councils in Taos Pueblo with activities of a New England regional fisheries management council. Smith notes that both groups are made

up of senior males (senior in age and/or experience) focused on the subsistence system, whereas junior males are in a minority. Both groups also select members by expertise and not public election, but factors such as clout with the actual group, verbal skills in public discussion, information networks within the system, and support service from real or fictive "kindred" are also important (p. 9). Members of these groups are expected to demonstrate proficiencies in handling ritual elements symbolic of the natural order recognized by the community. In Taos it is necessary to understand the pattern of human/nature harmony and to know how to act in accordance with this. In the fisheries council, it is necessary to understand the natural forces of the market as well as natural environmental resources.

The rituallike quality of meetings has been described by other researchers such as Starker (1978), who analyzed the workings of case conferences in mental health organizations. It is suggested that case conferences serve several ritual functions for the "tribal" culture of mental health professionals ("MHPs"). The case conference is described as a rite of passage for new members and also as a ritual of status change and challenge. Similarly, Olsen (1970) describes ritual features of the process of "budgeting," using data from a study of Norwegian communes. He believes that these features have been neglected by traditional models of decision making. Olsen's study is particularly important because he argues that we should entertain models that assume that the allocation of resources is *not* the most interesting aspect of the budgeting process.

F. G. Bailey presents an anthropological perspective on university micropolitics in *Morality and Expediency: The Folklore of Academic Politics* (1977). He specifically examines the functioning of seven different committees in order to compare and contrast their actions. Here he explores the issues of how and why committees adopt a public or private approach, how differences are resolved in such groups, reasons for pretense and secrecy in the committee, and the university as a community and as an organization. Bailey's considerable work in the area of meetings and committees has been discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 and is also discussed later.

In Mansbridge's (1983) study of an American town meeting government as well as an urban crisis center, face-to-face meetings of these groups are given considerable attention. Although this project was not designed as an analysis of the form of meetings, Mansbridge's interest in the study of unitary democracy necessitated an examination of the significance of meetings in achieving the ideals of consensual decision making and equal respect and status that were the focus of her study.

Finally, in *The Man in the Principal's Office* (1973), Wolcott presents a detailed ethnography of what a school principal (Ed Bell) actually does

in his daily work life. He discovered that close to three-quarters of the principal's day was spent talking and/or listening to others and 51% of his time in school was spent in planned or unplanned meetings. Unlike many "time–motion" studies of managers and administrators, Wolcott analyzes the significance of this talking behavior and particularly "the meeting pattern" that seemed to structure the behavior of the principal, in great detail:

> An examination of the time and place distribution of the meetings which the principal attends reveals a remarkable degree of patterning. Given the information that Ed was on his way to a meeting and knowing the hour and day one could almost predict who would be at the meeting and perhaps even make a reasonable guess about the general tenor of business. (pp. 92–93)

Excerpts from four different meetings are presented in detail (an in-district meeting of the elementary-school principals, faculty meeting, a meeting of the PTA executive board and a meeting for new parents). Along with this, Wolcott describes the principal's evaluation of meetings (he was surprised to find that Ed did not particularly like meetings) and his ability to endure and tolerate this activity with good humor:

> Only rarely did he comment specifically about having to sit too long or attend too many meetings. On one occasion he joked with me, "I sure had TB [tired butt] this morning—we met at 8:15 for that committee on data processing and then we stayed for an elementary principals' meeting that lasted until 12:15 p.m. (p. 95)

In concluding his discussion of meetings and their significance in an educational context, Wolcott focuses on "what functions are performed by this seemingly endless pattern of gathering and conferring by which schoolmen appear to conduct so substantial a part of their affairs" (p. 121). He suggests that the assumed function of meetings "was to facilitate communication and to make collective decisions" but these functions were generally not accomplished (p. 121). What was accomplished, in Wolcott's terms, was evidence of working on problems and issues and validation of status hierarchies. For example, Ed Bell insisted that his faculty attend PTA meetings but here:

> he seemed to be operating at, or perhaps exceeding, the limits of his power by making demands affecting the after-school hours of his teachers. The real issue was not whether PTA meetings accomplished anything but whether Ed's position carried the authority to insist that teachers attend. (p. 122)

As Gronn (1983) demonstrates, in his more recent analysis of the importance of talking occasions such as meetings, talk is one of the major resources that school administrators use to get others to act and to achieve control (pp. 1–2). In concluding his analysis of the significance

of meetings, Wolcott suggests that their status-validating function is "independent of and rather far afield from the content of them," and this helps to explain "why educators complain chronically of the great number and little purpose that characterizes meetings they are called upon to attend yet faithfully attend nonetheless" (p. 122).

The preceding studies merge an interest in meetings and meeting groups with other concerns, although in the case of most of the studies considered in this section, it was decided that the research provided useful information about meetings themselves as well as sometimes continuing the tradition of using meetings to study something else. One of the most specific studies of the meeting event itself adopts an anthropological and ethnomethodological concern with the taken-for-granted features of social life by examining specific features of meetings as setting for multiparty talk. In this study, Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee (1978) examine "how people talk in a meeting to achieve and sustain the meeting as a social setting" (p. 133). This issue is specifically considered by investigating how participants in a meeting of a local radio station transition from a "coffee break" back to a "meeting." The researchers are concerned with the recommencement of the meeting. It is suggested that participants in a meeting orient to the following three taken-for-granted features of the structuring of interaction in order to achieve and constitute an event as a meeting. The researchers argue that meeting talk can be examined for the ways in which this orientation is displayed and secured:

1. Those present orient to meetings and to the course of events and activities in meetings as episodic.
2. Those present orient to the scheduling and controlling of these episodes and the talk within them.
3. Those present orient to meetings as having purposes which can be used to frame the business, and the episodic organization of the business. (p. 149)

In this section, the studies of a variety of researchers have been surveyed. It has been argued that meetings have been *used* by researchers to study other topics, but for the most part they have not been viewed as a legitimate topic of investigation in their own right. In order to move meetings out of the background and into the foreground of research, the next section presents a definition and typology of meetings and outlines a framework for producing ethnographies of meetings and their relationship to social systems.

The Ethnography of Meetings

> The life cycle of the committee is so basic to our knowledge of current affairs that it is surprising more attention has not been paid to the science of comitology. (C. Northcote Parkinson 1957:33)

Parkinson was right to call attention to the need for a science of "comitology" in 1957, but he was wrong to restrict this science to committees. Committees are a type of meeting group, but it is the more general meeting form and phenomenon that needs to be examined and understood. In this section, an ethnographic approach to the study of meetings is presented, as it draws on the work of researchers in the ethnography of speaking and communication tradition to specify the components of meetings as speaking and communicative events. The relationship of these components to each other in the production of meetings as cultural events and the functions that these events serve in specific sociocultural contexts is also presented here.

Definitions and a Typology

Although there may be a lack of research on meetings in the literature, there is no lack of definitions for meeting(s) in the dictionary. According to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1976), a meeting is "an act or process of coming together" that may be "a chance or a planned encounter." A meeting may also be "an assembly for religious worship," "a congregation of religious dissenters or their house of worship," "the permanent governing organization of a congregation of the Society of Friends or that of a regional group of congregations," "a gathering for business, social, or other purposes," "a horse or dog-racing session extending for a stated term of days at one track," "a joint in carpentry or masonry," or a meeting may be "a place of meeting." A meeting in these terms seems to involve a confluence, intersection, or joining of people and/or things (p. 1404). The implication is that this is a face-to-face joining.

A meeting is understood here to be a type of gathering or encounter in Goffman's (1961) terms that is characterized by *focused interaction:*

> Focused interaction occurs when people effectively agree to sustain for a time a single focus of cognitive and visual attention, as in a conversation, a board game, or a joint task sustained by a close face-to-face circle of contributors. (p. 7)

A meeting may be defined more explicitly as a communicative event that organizes interaction in distinctive ways. Most specifically a meeting is a gathering of three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group, for example, to exchange ideas or opinions, to develop policy and procedures, to solve a problem, to make a decision, to formulate recommendations, and the like. A meeting is characterized by multiparty talk that is episodic in nature, and participants develop or use specific

conventions for regulating this talk (Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee 1978). The meeting form frames the behavior that occurs within it as concerning the "business" or "work" of the group, or organization, or society (149).

Another way to describe the meeting as defined here is to say that it is a form that falls between a "chat" and a "lecture."[3] A meeting is more formal than a chat that may also be characterized by multiparty talk but does not necessarily involve a discussion of the business of a group or organization. A meeting, however, is less formal than a lecture that is characterized by single-party talk directed to an audience.

Meetings are found in all societies, and frequently they occur to provide direction, govern, or regulate activity in some way. (They may, of course, do many other things as well.) In the United States, meetings are used by all types of groups—business, community, religious, political, professional—as a form for conducting what they define as their business. These groups have in turn developed a number of specific types of "meeting groups" (e.g., committees, boards, councils, staffings, etc.) that vary in the degree to which they formalize and schedule the meeting event, structure and control the meeting talk, and represent or are responsible to other groups. It is important to emphasize here that meetings and groups are not synonymous terms. A group is a gathering of individuals involved in a particular form of activity. A meeting is one form of activity in which a group may be engaged, and, as a communicative event, it would structure and effect the behavior of the individuals in a particular way. A group, however, might be involved in a variety of activities which are not meetings, for example, an experiment, a lecture, a game.

Two very general types of meeting events, as they appear to occur in Western organizational settings, may be identified by classifying meetings along a series of three continua—time, formality, and representation (see Table 3.1):

1. *Unscheduled meetings* are those in which the gathering of individuals has not been planned in advance and the meeting talk is generally loosely regulated. A group that holds an unscheduled meeting generally does not have a clear-cut responsibility to represent or report back to a larger group. Groups engaged in unscheduled meetings are generally smaller in size than those involved in scheduled meetings (although

[3]This distinction between meetings and chats appears to be quite common in a number of societies and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10. For example, Turton (1975) notes the distinction that the Mursi of South West Ethiopia make between a meeting discussion (*methe*) and chatting or gossip (*tirain*). According to Turton, "the Mursi word *methe* refers to a meeting at which a number of members discuss some issue which is public in the sense that it may be assumed to affect all members of the community equally" (p. 170).

Table 3.1. Scheduled and Unscheduled Meetings

	Unscheduled meetings	Scheduled meetings
Time	No set time	Set time
Formality	Low	High
Representation	Not formally responsible to another group	Formally responsible or sovereign

this is not always the case). An unscheduled meeting may be called because of a need to exchange information or to make decisions quickly as in a crisis situation; however, these events also may occur quite spontaneously to consider routine matters as when a "lunch" is transformed into a "quick meeting" because several individuals with common interests happen to be together. Groups engaged in unscheduled meetings generally do not have specific names attached to them.

2. *Scheduled meetings* are those events in which a group's gathering has been scheduled in advance and also often recurs over time. Scheduled meetings differ greatly in the degree to which the meeting talk is itself scheduled and regulated. For example, a discussion or study group may hold numerous "working meetings" to exchange ideas or opinions about a specific subject, to draft policy or procedures, and so forth. Talk in these meetings is likely to be moderately scheduled, but there is not a clear expectation that the group will produce tangible results or reports (sometimes a "good discussion" will be counted as a result, see Hon 1980). Meetings that are routinely called in an attempt to coordinate intra- or intergroup activities, or to relay information of some sort (such as staff meetings, division director meetings, professional society meetings) also share the previously mentioned characteristics (although in the case of professional society "meetings," the talk is generally structured in a lecture mode, except for the business meetings that also take place during these events). Committees are more formalized meeting groups that may be defined, following Wheare (1955):

> The essence of a committee is . . . that it is a body to which some task has been referred or committed by some other person or body. It may be asked or required or permitted to carry out this task. . . . The notion of a committee carries with it the idea of a body being in some manner or degree responsible or subordinate or answerable in the last resort to the body or person who set it up or committed a power or duty to it.[4] . . . There is inherent in the notion

[4]Bailey (1977) notes "that a committee bears a strangely ambivalent relationship toward its parent body. It reports back, and etiquette usually demands that the committee indicate a

> of a committee some idea of a derived or secondary or dependent status, in form at least; it lacks original jurisdiction. It acts on behalf of or with responsibility to another body. (pp. 5–6)[5]

As committees use them, meetings tend to be somewhat more formal than those held as unscheduled events. Talk in these meetings is moderately to very heavily scheduled, and there is the definite expectation that something should be produced by the committee to be brought back to the group that established it.

Councils, cabinets, parliaments, and conventions are all examples of meeting groups that are sovereign instead of responsible to a parent body (Bailey 1977:83). Meetings of these groups are generally formal (sometimes very formal) occasions, and meeting talk is almost always scheduled and controlled, sometimes to a very great degree (as when *Robert's Rules of Order* are meticulously invoked).

Questions of Form and Function

There are several research questions that a focus on meetings as defined before suggests. First are questions concerning *what* a meeting is and how a meeting is constructed by participants in an organization. This requires developing an understanding of what local knowledge participants use to produce and recognize a meeting as a significant event and what the meaning of meetings is to actors in specific settings. These questions focus on the form of the meeting as a social event and the actions and processes that must occur for participants to produce an activity that is recognized as "a meeting." Because most researchers (with some important exceptions, such as Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee 1978) have taken the construction of a meeting for granted, there is very little information available about the processes, knowledge, stages, meaning, and uses of meetings in specific organizational or community settings.

The definition of meetings presented here also suggests a series of research questions concerned with the prevalence of meetings in Ameri-

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subordinate position by referring to itself as 'your committee . . .' and ending the document with the phrase 'respectfully submitted.' Parent bodies may debate the report and accept or reject its recommendations, but when they choose to reject it there certainly is a feeling that matters are not as they should be" (p. 64).

[5]Self-constituted organizations created for the promotion of some common objective may sometimes call themselves committees (e.g., the Wildlife Preservation Committee), in which case the committee is the organization—this is the case as well with "committees of the whole" (i.e., a committee consisting of the whole membership of a legislative house).

can as well as other societies and also questions concerned with *why* meetings exist and persist in specific organizational and cultural contexts. Studies that examine what naturally occurring meetings do for individuals and organizations, how individuals use meetings in their day-to-day life, and how meetings affect individuals in specific settings are particularly important to pursue here.

Communities, Gatherings, and Events

In this section, I draw on what is now a considerable body of research and discussion in the ethnography of speaking and communication area in order to develop an approach for describing and analyzing the form and features of meetings as communicative events. In order to produce an ethnography of meetings, it is first essential to begin with an analysis of "the communicative conduct of a community" as Hymes suggests for the development of all ethnographies of communication (1974:9). In order to do this, "one must determine what can count as a communicative event" (p. 9), and, I would add, which communicative events occur and recur in which contexts. One way to begin this task is to ascertain the types of participants or parties whose interactions create and/or compose the community that is being studied (e.g., in a school, the relevant participants might be "teachers," "students," "parents," and "administrators"). This, of course, is easiest to do in small communities where there are few participants, but most ethnographies, even when they are presented as a study of "the Dinka," are actually a study of specific Dinka, interacting in specific contexts over a particular time period (e.g., all males in a particular community). (In this regard see Clifford's 1986:17 ff. discussion of Godfrey Lienhardt's ethnography, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* 1961.)

Once specific participants are identified, it is possible to begin to identify important communicative events by examining the range of potential, as well as actual, interaction contexts/situations in which participants engage. I have found that it is useful to use a grid such as that presented in Figure 3.1, which displays the variety of participants and interaction contexts generated by a play therapy program conducted in a day-care center and studied by the author (see Schwartzman 1983). It is possible to see here how the existence of even a small-scale program creates a number of interaction contexts for participants. This approach allows one to depict the types of communicative events in a particular community as well as to see which events recur in a particular context and over time.

	PATIENT	STAFF	SPONSOR	MANAGEMENT	CLIENT	RESEARCHER
PATIENT	Children interact in classroom.	Play therapy sessions.			Teacher and child interact in classroom.	Researcher observes and interacts with children in classroom.
STAFF	Individual play therapy sessions.	Supervision meetings once a week informal discussions (e.g. coffee, lunch, driving to and from DDC.)	Meetings, informal discussions with agency director.	Supervision meetings once per week. Informal meetings, discussions, etc.	Report meetings two times per month with teachers at the day care center. Informal discussions.	Researcher attends supervision meetings, and report meetings.
SPONSOR		Meetings, informal discussions with director.		Supervisor meets with agency director, informal discussions.		
MANAGEMENT		Supervision meetings once per week. Informal meetings, coffee, lunch & driving.	Supervisor meets with superiors.		Program initiation meetings - before program introduced. Report meetings.	Researcher attends supervision meetings.
CLIENT	Child and teacher interact in classroom.	"Report" meetings twice monthly. Informal discussions.		Supervisor meets with teachers in report meetings and program initiation meetings.	Teachers interact with each other in classroom, DCC staff meeting. Informal discussions, lunch, coffee, nap time.	Researcher interacts formally and informally with teachers in classroom, lunch, coffee, nap-time, etc.
RESEARCHER	Researcher observes and interacts with children in classroom.	Researcher attends supervision meetings and report meetings.		Researcher attends supervision meetings.	Researcher interacts formally & informally with teachers at DDC.	

Figure 3.1. Communication contexts for program actors: Eastside Day Care Center.

Event Components

In the ethnography of speaking and communication literature, the event or scene, as "the point at which speakers and means come together in use" (Bauman and Sherzer 1975:109) has been central for analysis. In Frake's terms a scene "is any culturally defined bounded segment of the flow of activity and experience" (Bauman and Sherzer 1975:109). This means that these are activities that have a recognized beginning and ending. In fact, the literature has focused on a very broad interpretation of the term *event*, as it has come to designate all of the scenes analyzed by researchers working within this tradition (Bauman and Sherzer 1975:109). What is of particular interest to researchers is the identification of specific event components, as well as the analysis of relationships that exist between them. There have been numerous definitions, and also revisions of communicative event components in the literature, but I have drawn on Hymes (1974, especially pp. 45–66) and have adapted it for particular use in examining the form of meetings in this section.

As applied to the study of meeting *as* communicative events, the following components are particularly important for describing the form that a meeting may take in a particular context.

Participants

The participants who interact with one another in a meeting, as speaker or sender, hearer or receiver, and the relationships and responsibilities of these individuals to each other and also to outside "constituencies" are of interest here.

Channels and Codes

Channels for communication may include speaking, writing, drumming, singing, and so forth. The codes that may or may not be shared by participants include linguistic, paralinguistic, kinesic, musical, as well as interactive codes. In Hymes's speaking model, these components are referred to as "instrumentalities."

Frame

The process or processes whereby the beginning, and ending, as well as the continuation of the meeting as an event are signaled or marked. As a frame, the meeting also provides participants with an

interpretive context, using culturally standardized metacommunicative processes, for evaluating the significance and meaning of the event, that is, "this is serious," "this is work."

Meeting Talk

A number of components and their relationship to each other may be considered here in an attempt to describe the nature of meeting talk:

Topic and Results. The specific issue, concern, task, focus of the meeting, or what the meeting is about from the participants' perspective, for example, to make a decision about the hiring of a new executive director, to decide on new marketing strategies for a particular product, to discuss the problem of cattle theft in the community. This component also includes attention to the kinds of results that participants expect from a meeting (e.g., the belief that a meeting *should* produce a decision or some other type of obvious action).

Norms of Speaking and Interaction. An important process in meetings is the development and maintainence of a central focus of discussion, as meetings may be characterized by the way they move between central and peripheral or side-issue discussions. Speech and interaction rules that seem to be particularly important here are turn-taking rules and processes, the presence or absence of a meeting "chair," and rules and regulations available or developed for regulating debate. Included here is also the decision rule, if any, that a group uses (e.g., consensus or majority rule) and the expectation as to whether the "decision," "action" is binding on participants.

Oratorical Genres and Styles. Specific forms of speech that may occur in other events (e.g., proverbs, jokes, prayers) may also be part of the meeting. In addition, specific speech-making styles may also be associated with particular types of meetings as well as communities, for example, the use of indirect or allusive speech in formal or scheduled meetings versus the use of direct speech in informal or unscheduled meetings.

Interest and Participation. The means, sanctions, and rewards that may be used to encourage or demand participation at meetings, as well as to maintain interest or involvement in an event in progress.

Norms of Interpretation

The processes that exist or develop for interpreting what happens in meetings. This involves relating meetings to other communicative

events (e.g., such as chats and stories) that may become important for individuals to use to make sense of meetings.

Goals and Outcomes

Following Hymes (1974:57) and also Duranti (1984:222), it is useful to distinguish between the *goals* of specific individuals in a meeting, which may be various, (e.g., to have their particular candidate hired, to block the hiring of someone else's candidate), and the *outcome* of the event from the standpoint of a community, organization, or culture. The interrelationship between these issues and especially the outcome of a meeting, as defined here, is also discussed in Chapter 2. Goals and outcomes as defined and distinguished here are differentiated from topics and results as discussed before.

Meeting Cycles and Patterns

The relationship of meetings to other types of communicative events has been discussed before, but it is also important to examine the relationship of meetings to each other. These relationships are crucial for understanding the role that meetings play in the production and reproduction of social relations and cultural beliefs and values. These relationships are also important for understanding how meetings may inhibit or facilitate the accomplishment of individual goals as well.

Meeting Construction

The previously mentioned components of meetings as communicative events reveal a variety of different features of the meeting form as they also suggest a number of different functions for these events. Researchers in this tradition have also been concerned with examining the interrelationships between components in the production (or performance) of an event. In this section I suggest how the various components identified before interact with one another in the production of a meeting, and this approach also illustrates how the meeting form accomplishes its functions (Myers and Brenneis 1984:8). I suggest that there is a typical course that individuals follow in producing the meeting as a communicative event, and I briefly examine this "course" here using material from the literature on meetings in American and Western societies. In Chapter 5, I use this perspective to examine the construction of meetings at "Midwest," and in Chapter 10 the literature on meetings in traditional societies is examined using this approach.

Negotiating a Meeting (Participants, Setting, Topic)

A formal meeting requires the negotiation and/or the acceptance (even if it is only temporary) of a set of social relationships that define someone(s) right to call a meeting, to specify time and place, someone(s) or way to start and end a meeting, and a series of rules and conventions for ordering and regulating talk and recognition of this talk that may be legitimated (and sometimes delegitimated) by the meeting frame. The work of Maurice Bloch (e.g., 1971, 1975) calls specific attention to this aspect of meetings, although he views this as the ability of formalized oratory in general to reproduce traditional authority and hierarchical relationships. In many instances the time, place, participants, and topics of a meeting are set in advance (e.g., the faculty senate meeting is scheduled every month for Tuesday at 3:00 P.M.) and is not subject to negotiation. However, many meetings require negotiations in order to establish the time, place, participants, and/or topic(s) of the meeting. This may be as simple as suggesting that a "conversation" become a "quick meeting" as in the case of an unscheduled meeting. However, the seemingly inconsequential (although often annoying) process of arranging a scheduled meeting, setting the time, or deciding on the place or topic contains innumerable possibilities for displaying status, as well as finding out about one's position in the group or organization (e.g., whose time takes precedence in setting the meeting, who "needs" to be there and who does not, whose territory will be the site for the meeting, whose "topic" takes precedence, etc.). C. P. Snow, in his novel *The Search* (1934), portrays the first meetings of a committee of the Royal Society to report on "the desirability of a National Institute for Biophysical Research" that illustrates the significance of meeting negotiations. In this case, he shows himself to be an astute observer of meetings as he describes how participants negotiate "the place" for a series of committee meetings. (Bailey uses this excerpt in *The Tactical Uses of Passion* 1983:191–196 to examine the resort to rhetorical tricks and devices that the members of this group of eminently "rational" men use. An example of Bailey's analysis is included later in this chapter.)

> "I take it," said Austin, "we shall meet at regular intervals until we have thrashed out a report. And I take it that London, either here or in Burlington House or in my rooms at the College, is the obvious meeting place."
>
> "I wonder," Desmond put in, his eyes darting round us, "whether we mightn't perhaps do better. London's a long way for some of us—particularly Professor Fane."
>
> Fane smiled.
>
> "Oh, perhaps Professor Fane will say he doesn't mind leaving Manchester," said Desmond cheerfully. "That's reasonable enough: but ought

we to bring him quite so far? We could put you up at Oxford, you know. As often as you like to come. I could put two men up in B.N.C.—and the other Colleges"—he waved his hands and seemed to indicate Colleges pressing hospitality on scientific committees.

"It would be inconvenient to many of us," said Austin, "to have meetings out of London. And it would upset the centre of gravity of the Committee."

"I should like to remind Sir George," said Pritt, in a high, harsh voice, "that we're not paid travelling expenses. If we have all the meetings in London, it will come unfair on those of us who live out of town. I should like to support Professor Desmond's suggestion that we have them in Oxford—and Cambridge. And in London in vacations."

I was learning. Austin's attitude, of course, I expected. He could not imagine a meeting taking place anywhere but round himself. But he was not a mean man with money, and the question of expense never struck him. Pritt's sounded like sheer peasant meanness; he was laughing with the jocularity of a man who does not intend to be done. And Desmond—he liked to think of entertaining us in Oxford, and he liked to think of saving money; he liked to look round us, reflect Constantine's Bohemian indifference, Pritt's peasant caution, all at the same time.

Fane said, "If we took a distribution of geography, we should reach a centre somewhere round Banbury. Would that satisfy Desmond and Pritt?"

Desmond at once responded to the satirical smile: "While we're about it," he said, "we might have a good time every week-end at the seaside. Go round the coast, starting at Eastbourne and going west. Like Labour Party Conferences."

"We're not as rich as Trade Union Leaders," said Pritt. The rest of us were beginning to smile. Constantine was working out something; he spoke for the first time:

"Our average income must actually be a good deal greater than the Trade Union Chairman or Secretaries," he announced. "Even if none of us had any private means, which is improbable statistically and which I believe isn't true." With his born indifference to money, he might have expected the others to disclose their incomes: but, knowing that most of them would be shocked, I headed him off:

"Where do these Committees usually meet?" I asked. It was a relic from College meetings, the question of an irrelevant precedent. But it pleased Austin.

"The first I ever sat on," he said loudly, "was in old Kelvin's day. He died a year or two later, but, of course, he didn't expect us to go to Glasgow; he came to London himself, without any argument. I consider our friend Pritt has got this out of *proportion.*

"Perhaps," said Fane, "we could get out of this impasse by what I might call an equipollent compromise. If we met in rotation three times in London, once in Oxford, once in Cambridge, and once in Manchester, that would represent us with equity enough to satisfy Desmond and Pritt: and, in addition, be quite remarkably inconvenient.

"Only twice in London," said Pritt. "Miles is co-opted. He can't count for this."

"As Chairman I should rule that Miles did count for this purpose," Austin enunciated, "if we adopted any such unworkable plan."

Desmond broke in, "Of course, we've got to have an arrangement which will work. It's easier if we meet at the same place. And at the same time. Like lectures. And bridge-parties. And any sort of whoopee." He was enjoying himself. His sentences finished a little breathlessly, I noticed, and he looked round for an answering smile. The supreme commercial traveller, I thought again: and I recalled a public house where I went as a youth, and the travellers gathered round the fire. They would have welcomed Desmond as a man and a brother.

Fane smiled. His eyes were cold grey.

"I suppose you're thinking of Uncle Toby?"

Desmond laughed as heartily as if he had understood.

Constantine's face suddenly broke into wrinkles of laughter.

Pritt looked at him with distaste.

"We're wasting time," said Pritt.

"We're considering a suggestion from our Oxford and Cambridge colleagues," said Fane.

"The sense of the meeting, is I feel," said Austin, "that we meet in *London*." (pp. 210–212)

This discussion illustrates how important a meeting can be for providing individuals with a way to discuss their status and also how important a first meeting can be as individuals negotiate their status and relationships in this particular group. In some cases, as will be seen when I discuss meetings at Midwest, meetings may be the only place for individuals to both negotiate as well as learn about their place in an organizational hierarchy. It is also the case that, in the process of negotiating a meeting, other meetings can be used as a dodge or excuse to get out of a meeting that one does not want to attend. Along with this, once a meeting time and place is set, the organizer can cancel it because of other "pressing" matters, or an individual can cancel out of any specific meeting for the same reason, and both of these are effective status rebukes.

A Meeting Setting (Setting, Channel)

As the preceding example from Snow makes clear, the meeting setting can assume great importance both as a focus of negotiation as well as a context for structuring interaction, reflecting particular social and cultural values and relationships, and influencing goals and outcomes. The meeting setting includes the channel as well as physical location in which a meeting takes place. Most meetings take place using speech as the major channel of communication, although there is variation cross-culturally (e.g., among the Kuna, singing meetings or gatherings occur), and in the United States there are several group effectiveness techniques that specifically change the channel of meetings (e.g., from speaking to writing) in an attempt to improve decision making. For

example, a technique known as the nominal group technique or "NGT" makes a specific effort to "individualize" meetings and curtail speech, without eliminating it altogether. A description from one of the developers of this approach illustrates this shift in channel:

> Imagine a meeting in which seven to ten individuals are sitting around a table in full view of each other. However, they are not speaking. Instead, each individual is writing ideas on a pad of paper in front of him. At the end of ten to twenty minutes, a very structured sharing of ideas takes place. Each individual in round-robin fashion provides one idea from his private list. This is written by a recorder on a blackboard or flip-chart in full view of other members. There is still no discussion, only the recording of privately generated ideas. This round-robin listing continues until each member indicates he has no further ideas to share. The output of this nominal process is the total set of ideas created by this structured process. Generally, spontaneous discussion then follows for a period (in the same fashion as an interacting group meeting) before nominal voting. Nominal voting simply means that the selection of priorities, rank-ordering, or rating (depending on the group's decision rule) is done by each individual privately, and the group decision is the pooled outcome of the individual votes. (Van de Ven 1974:2)

Questions about group effectiveness have also led to the development of interventions by American researchers and consultants that restrict or eliminate the face-to-face meeting altogether. For example, the Delphi approach (Linstone and Turoff 1975) in general is a "meeting" that is conducted through rounds of questionnaires and information feedback. Recent audio- and video-teleconferencing techniques also change the channel of meetings from speech in face-to-face meetings to long-distance speaking through the various modes available (see Birrell and White 1982; also Johansen, Vallee, and Spangler 1979).

The meeting place and particularly the preestablished seating plan that exists in many very formal meeting groups, such as government bodies like Parliaments, councils, congresses, and so forth is important to consider as well in attempting to examine what does (and does not) happen on these occasions. This was humorously suggested some time ago by C. Northcote Parkinson (1957):

> But the British system depends entirely on its seating plan. If the benches did not face each other, no one could tell truth from falsehood—wisdom from folly—unless indeed by listening to it all. But to listen to it all would be ridiculous, for half the speeches must of necessity be nonsense.
>
> In France the initial mistake was made of seating the representatives in a semicircle, all facing the chair. The resulting confusion could be imagined if it were not notorious. No real opposing teams could be formed and no one could tell (without listening) which argument was more cogent. There was the further handicap of all the proceedings being in French—an example the United States wisely refused to follow. . . .
>
> All this is generally known. What is less generally recognized is that the paramount importance of the seating plan applies to other assemblies and

> meetings, international, national, and local. It applies, moreover, to meetings round a table such as occur at a Round Table Conference. A moment's thought will convince us that a Square Table Conference would be something totally different and a Long Table Conference would be different again. These differences do not merely affect the length and acrimony of the discussion; they also affect what (if anything) is decided. Rarely, as we know, will the voting relate to the merits of the case. (pp. 15–17)

The effect of group size, space, and place on the results of group effort, including groups having "meetings" in an experimental situation, has been examined in the research literature (e.g., Paulus *et al.* 1976), but detailed descriptions and analyses of the spatial and symbolic structure of meetings are not the rule in this literature. (There are, however, a number of detailed discussions of this for traditional societies, and I discuss these in Chapter 10.) One exception, for the United States, is Jane Mansbridge's (1983) analysis of the New England town meeting as a participatory democracy. Here she characterizes her first town meeting in "Selby," Vermont, and she includes a discussion of the town meeting house and participation in the meeting and its relationship to the seating and structure of this activity:

> On the first Tuesday in March, at 9:30 or so in the morning, one of the selectmen unlocked the doors to the little white meeting house, and the early comers, mostly old residents of the town, drifted in. They found seats in the wooden chairs lined up to face the raised dais at the front, or gathered to exchange news and speculate on the meeting's outcome. Heavy woolen jackets and coats filled up some of the many empty seats; mud-laden boots, scraped at the door, still left their prints on the floor.
>
> When I entered the meeting house, no more that fifty people had scattered themselves among the chairs, chatting with friends. Counting the chairs in the meeting hall, I realized that the little building could never seat more than half the town's potential voters. The town's electorate had in fact been too large to fit in the town meeting hall since at least 1920, when women's suffrage doubled its number. The hall needs no more space, however, since less than a third of the town's voters normally attend the meeting, a proportion that is actually slightly higher than that of most towns this size in Vermont. On this particular day, ninety of Selby's 350 or so potential voters were present for at least part of the meeting. . . .
>
> That March in Selby, Mrs. Thresher, whom I recognized from the fruit and jellies stand outside her farm, had settled her frail frame in her usual seat up at the front of the meeting hall. She was letting the young man two seats away have a piece of her mind. "I always say my mind," she told me later. "That's a thing I believe in. And I don't go telling you one thing and the other fellow something else, either." Wallace Tyson, owner of the general store, was sitting on the left sideline with Samuel Holt, Clayton Bedell, and some of the older farmers. One of the selectmen had taken his customary place on the right sideline with the men from the volunteer fire department. Along the same wall, closer to the raised platform in front, sat a row of several of the older ladies in the town, including Mrs. Tyson, Wallace's mother, who hadn't missed a meeting in ten years. Sitting on the sidelines

> lets you have a quick consultation with someone else on the floor, or simply leave the meeting, without much trouble. These seats also command a full view of the entire hall. People most active in town politics are likely, therefore, to choose a place on the sidelines. (pp. 47–48)

Meeting Arrivals and Departures (Participants and Setting)

Once a meeting has been arranged, the meeting enters a new phase as an event, and a number of new possibilities are created for information exchange and status display. For example, the issue of who arrives first, who arrives with whom, the seating pattern that is chosen, and finally, whose arrival signals the start of the meeting are all indirect but important communications about status a well as alliance and friendship patterns. The times surrounding the start and finish (and also breaks within) a meeting are also quite significant as they provide individuals with opportunities to exchange gossip, trade information, and hold "minimeetings." In fact, scheduled meetings generally produce a kind of unscheduled meeting "ripple effect" that is probably very important for structuring interaction and relaying information—perhaps more important than the scheduled meeting itself. Dalton (1959) discusses the significance of pre- and postmeeting "confabs," and Mintzberg (1973), in his study of five American corporate executive officers, describes the importance of "side-issue" discussions that occur at the beginning and end of formal meetings. He refers to this as the "ritualistic" phase of a meeting:

> Gossip about peers in the industry is exchanged; comments are made on encounters the participants have recently had or on published material they have recently read; important political events are discussed and background information is traded. It seems reasonable to conclude that the manager collects much information in these discussions, and that this fact alone makes the formal, face-to-face meeting a powerful medium. (p. 43)

Bailey (1983:82–84) discusses the importance of "opening phase" interchanges in university committees. This is the time period of "five or ten minutes spent settling down, waiting for the unpunctual, and it is terminated when the chairman calls the meeting to order" (p. 82). Individuals engage in different types of "opening phase" behaviors, in Bailey's characterization, depending upon the type of committee that is meeting. In a "Type A" committee (e.g., an *ad hoc* committee), this is an important time for acquiring tactical information about other's opinions about a case or problem. In a "Type B" committee (e.g., an elite committee in Bailey's 1965 classification), emphasis is placed on reinforcing formality; and in a "Type C" committee (e.g., an arena committee), this phase serves to establish rank and also camaraderie in order to avoid

serious quarrels later in the meeting (pp. 82–84). Once a meeting starts, in Bailey's terms, the "'proper' framework of procedure is the same: a problem is put forward, its solutions are discussed, and a decision is reached" (p. 85). However, this does not mean that individuals exclusively follow a pattern of rational debate and discussion. In fact, Bailey argues that there is more likely to be a pattern of movement between the modes of reason and passion, and this includes the use of joking, play, sarcasm, drama, heated arguments, expressions of hostility, as well as debate and discussion (pp. 80–100). The use of these modes by individuals "are persuasive techniques for advancing claims both about patterns of social relations and about the task in hand" (p. 89).

Meetings also provide individuals with an opportunity for making strong symbolic statements of disagreement by choosing to break a meeting frame once the event has started (i.e., by dramatically walking out of a meeting.) This effect can sometimes backfire as was the case for New York's Mayor Edward Koch:

> the QCO [Queens Citizens Organization] got off with an Alinsky-style flourish. In what now is a celebrated incident, New York's Mayor Edward Koch, then newly elected, *stormed out of the meeting* with the fledgling QCO when the group refused to allow him five minutes for a speech, instead of the two minutes that had been scheduled. The mayor's action received considerable criticism, and the QCO received abundant attention. With a certain coyness, the QCO now refers to Mayor Koch as one of our "founding fathers." (*Wall Street Journal,* May 13, 1981 [emphasis added])

In this case the mayor chose to break the meeting frame in an effort to disqualify the organization, but, instead, this action served to disqualify the mayor and legitimate the meeting and therefore the organization. Individuals can also make less dramatic exits from meetings, underlining their status, the need for their time, or the importance of some other event, for example, a phone call, an emergency meeting, a crisis, and so forth. Once again these interruptions are an example of the way a meeting unobtrusively facilitates status displays.

The Meeting Frame (Frame, Participants, Goals, Outcomes)

As defined before, the meeting as a communicative event frames the behavior that occurs within it as concerning the "business" or "work" of the organization or community (see Bateson 1972; Duranti 1984 on the importance of frames for behavior). This transformation takes place when a meeting begins as it may be marked by clear-cut and conventionalized markers (e.g., a gavel, a prayer, a ritual) or by more subtle shifts in tone of voice and attempts to gain group attention and focus discussion. As a frame, the meeting provides individuals with a context for interpreting the significance and meaning of the event, for

example, "this is serious," as it directs attention to the task(s) or topic(s) of the event as defined by participants. The process and importance of establishing a meeting frame and of insuring that talk and decisions occur within this frame is illustrated in Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee's (1978) analysis of the recommencement of a meeting following a coffee break. They present the following transcript:

> [general background noise]
> C: Right-e:r-
> [general background noise]
> [pause ca. 4.00] [general background noise]
> C: -Are we ready to go again now?
> [general background noise]
> [pause ca. 3.00] [general background noise]
> R: Yes
> [general background noise]
> C: Good, Ray's ready - e:r can I just mention um . . . just - just mention one more thing before I go round the table and then I really have got a batch of [other points]. Ray has - [background noise ceases]
> C: -just reminded me might as well bring this one up as well
> C: just to mention it . . . (pp. 134–135).

In the terms of Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee, meetings are complex, collaborative productions that require participants to employ a great deal of taken-for-granted cultural knowledge to produce and sustain this event for themselves. The utterance of "Right-e:r-" is an attention attractor in their analysis, but it is not in itself enough to warrant interpretation as a call to the meeting. However, when put in the context of the nature of the scene (it is a coffee break for a meeting) and the role of the speaker (he is the chair of the meeting and the boss of the radio station), it can more correctly be interpreted as a summons to the meeting. This is the start of establishing the frame of the meeting. The importance of the meeting frame is discussed by the researchers when they analyze the significance of "the background noise" that appears in this transcript:

> While it could be the case that some or all of the parties engaged in producing "background noise" could be orienting to the purposes of the meeting and, perhaps could be discussing the business of the meeting, they could not reasonably be seen to be doing the business within the meeting. Their talk, insofar as it is concerned with the meeting, is not recordable or usable as, for example, the "discussion," the "decisions," or the "policymaking" of the meeting. Should some members of the organization attempt to view this kind of talk, as taking the organization's decisions or as having established policy, then others *might* be able to see those decisions and that policy as improperly constituted. They *might* be able to complain that they had not been able to hear the debate or take their proper part in it. They might be able to complain that they had not had their proper say and that things were not in order. (p. 135)

One of the most important aspects of the transformation that the meeting frame produces is that it creates the possibility for individual and group social relationships, agreements, and disagreements to be discussed and "framed" as a discussion of business (see also the prior discussion of Bailey 1983). For example, this occurs when individuals juggle for status about the placement of items on the meeting agenda, or when the presentation of reports becomes a context for disagreement among individuals as illustrated in a description of a company meeting by Bradford (1976):

> The president of a company holds his weekly Monday morning meeting with his vice presidents. After he makes a few comments urging redoubled efforts, he asks the several vice presidents to report on their operations. All reports are generally favorable. However, the vice president for engineering says offhandedly that some of his staff feel the research people have no idea how difficult it is to retool for new products. Somewhat heatedly, the vice president for production adds that no one has any idea how hard it is to retrain workers for new tasks. It might be cheaper, he says, to fire old workers and hire new ones. At that, the face of the personnel director reddens, but he says nothing. The vice president for marketing complains that one of the problems his people face is selling new products. Finally the president interrupts in a soothing voice, saying that the company must keep ahead of the field and he is certain that they will work it all out. (p. 2)

In this way the meeting form provides participants with a way "to challenge or reaffirm friendships and antagonisms" (see Sproull *et al.* 1978), to engage in power struggles (and be assured of an audience), all in the guise of discharging business or work. This is the way that meetings become a (possibly *the*) form for merging formal and informal systems in organizations, as suggested some time ago by Dalton (1959:227). The meeting frame, however, disqualifies itself as performing this function because it indicates that the meeting is merely a facilitating event. This makes the meeting an invisible but very powerful social form.

Meeting Talk (Participants, Topics, Norms of Speaking and Interaction, Goals)

The relationships between meeting talk and the ways and the degree to which it may be regulated, the topics discussed, and particular speaking and oratorical styles are all important aspects of meetings to be examined. Bailey's (1965) comparison of decision-making procedures in arena and elite councils provides us with information on relationships between types of participants, message topic and results, and norms of speaking and interaction (in this case, voting procedures used). In *The Tactical Uses of Passion* (1983), Bailey illustrates his interest in analyzing the nature and types of speech that individuals use in a meeting as

persuasive devices. If we return to the opening discussion among participants of the committee of the "Royal Society," so vividly portrayed by C. P. Snow (1934), it is possible to illustrate the type of approach that Bailey advocates:

> "I take it," said Austin, "we shall meet at regular intervals until we have thrashed out a report. And I take it that London, either here in Burlington House or in my rooms at the College, is the obvious meeting place."
>
> "I wonder," Desmond put in, his eyes darting round us, "whether we mightn't perhaps do better. London's a long way for some us—particularly Professor Fane."
>
> Fane smiled. (pp. 209–210)

Even before a word is spoken in this committee, a great deal of information about individuals, personalities, and culture has been said. But as soon as words are spoken, the transformation of individual into group action becomes even more apparent as individuals begin to mix their discussion of business with their discussion of their relationships to each other individually and as a group. Bailey (1983:191–196) analyzes this meeting in detail to illustrate the resort to rhetorical tricks and devices, ambiguous speech, play, and other presumably nonrational forms of persuasion that the members of this group use to facilitate this type of discussion. This is a meeting of men who have received the ultimate accolade of distinction in the British scientific world (they are fellows of the Royal Society). These are rational men "who need no reminder to make them value reason and eschew the tricks of rhetoric" (p. 193):

> Then in his second sentence, the chairman pulls just such a trick. London, he says is the "obvious" meeting place. It is a monstrous enthymeme; neither major or minor premises is offered and the conclusion alone is asserted. . . . The word "obvious," especially in the context of "thinking" men, carries suggestions of inclusion and exclusion. It is an indirect moral statement that those who cannot accept this conclusion are not merely mistaken; they are unworthy and should not be in such a gathering of distinguished intellects. (pp. 193–194)

The relationship between arguments to persuade and the issue of power in committees is discussed in detail by Barber (1966:47–71). He suggests that "power strategies within a system of shared powers have to be rationalized. Of all the rules of the game, this is probably the most inclusive and pervasive one" (p. 50). This means that participants are constantly involved in the "invention, communication and criticism of the *reasons* for pursuing particular strategies" (p. 50). These strategies are related to the attempts of individuals to achieve their goals, as defined before in the discussion of components. Barber identifies several explanations and strategies that were salient in his study, such as refer-

ring to specific causes and effects that participants perceive, reference to more abstract "principles" of power, and explanations related to "estimates of the motives, attitudes and beliefs which other actors hold" (p. 50). James Howe (1986) has expanded on these points in his recent study of the Kuna (discussed in more detail in Chapter 10), and he offers a list of what may be "near universal forms of argument," including: (1) citing established rules, (2) bending the rules to fit the case, (3) pointing out past precedents, (4) associating a possible opposed opinion with a vice, (5) suggesting that certain courses of action or inaction will have dire consequences, (6) arguing from accepted ideas about human nature, about what motives and actions one can expect from people, (7) adopting the stance of realism and suggesting that certain states of affairs are unavoidable, and (8) buttressing their positions with cosmology (pp. 196–197).

One of the features of many formal meetings is the development or use of procedures for ordering and regulating debate and discussion. The most common procedures utilized today for a wide variety of meeting groups in the United States are contained in the well-known *Robert's Rules of Order*. It is useful, therefore, to briefly consider the development of these procedures. I use as my resource for this history information presented in the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* (Robert 1981:xxvii–xlii). One of the first attempts to define and standardize parliamentary procedure for legislative processes was Thomas Jefferson's *Manual of Parliamentary Practice* (1801). Luther S. Cushing, clerk of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, attempted to codify procedures for the growing volume of voluntary associations in the United States. Cushing's volume, *Manuel of Parliamentary Practice: Rules of Proceeding and Debate in Deliberative Assemblies*, was published in 1845 specifically for "assemblies of every description, but more especially for those which are not legislative in their character" (Robert 1981:xxxv–xxxvi). It was left, however, to Henry Martyn Robert (1837–1923), an engineering officer in the U.S. army who was also very active in church and civic organizations of his time, to develop and publish in 1875 what has become the standard work in this area. Robert became interested in parliamentary law when "Without warning, he was asked to preside over a meeting, and did not know how. But he felt that the worst thing he could do would be to decline. 'My embarrassment was supreme,' he wrote, 'I plunged in, trusting to Providence that the assembly would behave itself. But with the plunge went the determination that I would never attend another meeting until I knew something of . . . parliamentary law' " (p. xxxvii).

In 1867, Robert was sent to San Francisco and promoted to major, where he continued his work with his wife in several community organi-

zations. He discovered that there was a great disparity and conflict over parliamentary procedures in this context: "Under these conditions, confusion and misunderstanding had reached a point where issues of procedure consumed time that should have gone into the real work of the societies" (p. xxxvii). When he moved to Portland, Oregon, in 1871, he became convinced of the need to develop a book of general and systematic principles of parliamentary practice based on the rules of Congress but appropriate for use by ordinary societies (pp. xxxix–xl). The final publication of this book did not take place until Robert was in Milwaukee, and it was a tedious process as, after efforts to secure a publisher failed, Robert decided to have 4,000 copies printed at his own expense (p. xl). His military duties required that he proof pages very slowly, and so the printer would only print 16 pages at a time, but finally in 1875, the "printing of the two parts of the *Pocket Manuel of Rules of Order for Deliberative Assemblies* [176 pages] was completed" (p. xli). After this, Robert was able to secure a publisher. However he still faced skepticism about how much demand existed for these "Rules," and so Robert agreed "to pay for binding the 4000 copies and to bear the expense of giving 1000 copies of the book to parliamentarians, educators, legislators, and church leaders over the country" (p. xli). The first edition appeared in 1876 and was sold out in 4 months, and the 1981 edition lists 3,400,000 copies in print.

Robert developed his "rules" in order to allow groups and associations to focus attention on the tasks or topics of the meetings (as discussed in this section). His view illustrates what I have discussed elsewhere in this chapter as the view that meetings are "tools" for tasks, and his entire concern was with developing procedures that would enable individuals to attend to the "tasks at hand." Of course, not everyone today would agree that the use to which *Robert's Rules of Order* are sometimes put allows this focus, but I believe that meetings in American society, and especially in American organizations, continue to be evaluated as task occasions. This means that individuals approach the event with the expectation that it will produce some*thing* (e.g., a decision, an action, a recommendation, etc.), and they are frustrated when it does not. There is also the assumption related to this issue that decisions, actions, and the like that are taken in meetings will be binding on participants.

Participation and Interest

The processes that may be used to require participation and attendance at meetings have rarely been looked at in the literature because attention has been focused almost exclusively on demands for participa-

tion in groups in American society (Olsen 1976a:277). In a study of nonparticipation in university governance in the March and Olsen framework already discussed, Olsen suggests that it is important to make a contrary assumption:

> Suppose that instead of assuming that nonleaders always demand leadership and participation (in the absence of manipulation or threat), and that leaders always resist new demands, we treat participation and leadership as activities people *seek* under certain circumstances and *avoid* under other circumstances. Such a focus supplements the concern for the representativeness of government and the demands for participation with a concern for the difficulties of getting people to take interest in participation. (p. 277)

Mansbridge (1983) reports that one of the important characteristics of the two participatory democracies that she studied was the time that individuals had, and needed to have, to devote to meetings. In many instances at Helpline, the urban crisis center, individuals begrudged this time as they saw it as taking away from more important service activities. "Everyone complained about the time. Blocked by the time it takes to get something done or by the specter of hours 'wasted' on meetings, highly motivated workers can get frustrated, angry, and depressed" (p. 166).

Ed Bell, the elementary-school principal studied by Harry Wolcott (1973), was required (or felt that he was obligated) to attend numerous meetings. Only rarely, according to Wolcott, did he complain about these events: "He endured meetings he was expected to attend and consciously attempted to be patient when the meetings held no interest. Occasionally I observed him dozing off during large meetings attended by his colleagues, but he did not allow himself this luxury in smaller groups" (p. 95). In his book, *Obligations* (1970), Michael Walzer humorously portrays "a day in the life of a socialist citizen" in order to underline what he suggests is an obvious but frequently omitted aspect of this life "that socialism and participatory democracy will depend upon and hence require, an extraordinary willingness to attend meetings" (p. 231).

> Imagine a day in the life of a socialist citizen. He hunts in the morning, fishes in the afternoon, rears cattle in the evening, and plays the critic after dinner. Yet he is neither hunter, fisherman, shepard, nor critic; tomorrow he may select another set of activities, just as he pleases. This is the delightful portrait that Marx sketches in *The German Ideology* as part of a polemic against the division of labor. Socialists since have worried that it is not economically feasible, perhaps it is not. But there is another difficulty that I want to consider: that is, the curiously apolitical character of the citizen Marx describes. Certain crucial features of socialist life have been omitted altogether.
>
> In light of the contemporary interest in participatory democracy, Marx's sketch needs to be elaborated. Before hunting in the morning, this unalien-

> ated man of the future is likely to attend a meeting of the Council on Animal Life, where he will be required to vote on important matters relating to the stocking of the forests. The meeting will probably not end much before noon, for among the many-sided citizens there will always be a lively interest even in highly technical problems. Immediately after lunch, a special session of the Fishermen's Council will be called to protest the maximum catch recently voted by the Regional Planning Commission, and the Marxist man will participate eagerly in these debates, even postponing a scheduled discussion of some contradictory theses on cattle-rearing. Indeed, he will probably love argument far better than hunting, fishing, *or* rearing cattle. The debates will go on so long that the citizens will have to rush through dinner in order to assume their role as critics. Then off they will go to meetings of study groups, clubs, editorial boards, and political parties which will be carried on long into the night. (pp. 229–230)

The processes that are used or that develop for insuring "obligation," "duty," "commitment," as well as "interest," "eagerness," and even "enthusiasm" for meetings cannot be taken for granted. It is also important to examine the specific processes and procedures, when they have become conventionalized, for maintaining interest in an ongoing production of a meeting (e.g., jokes, drama, surprise, and unpredictability).

Postmeetings (Norms of Interpretation)

When a meeting is concluded, individuals move into a series of other events, including "postmeetings" (where information may be exchanged on a more informal basis, as discussed before) and "postmortems" of the meeting that has just occurred (typically these postmortems occur in a "chatting," "gossiping" or "storytelling" format). In his analysis of university committees, Bailey (1977) notes the importance of gossip for enabling individuals to pass along information and not be held responsible for content, for sending up trial balloons, and for attempting to sanction behavior while avoiding a public position (p. 119). The "folk memory," in terms of stories and tales about individuals, particularly impressed Bailey in this context.

> In recent years I have listened with wonder at the apparently interminable depths of the folk memory about personal failings, quarrels which took place many years ago but may still have a spark in them, personal quirks like loss of nerve, aggressiveness, tactlessness, obstinacy, and so on. Sometimes such information only comes out in a post-mortem into some spectacular failure. Such failures would be much more frequent if there were not this folklore of information about persons. (p. 122)

After the fact, a meeting is objectified as it becomes a text for interpretation and may be "read" as tangible evidence of organizational activity *or* inactivity (depending on the assessment of the meeting that

has just occurred). When meetings themselves become jokes in an organization, then what transpires within them is discounted as not serious. In this way a meeting may negate itself and the information that is relayed within it. The tendency of individuals in many American organizations to ridicule and disparage the meeting format (see previous discussion) may be one reason why many organizations operate on a weak information base (see Cohen and March 1974) and find themselves constantly replicating ideas and information (this is commonly referred to as the "reinventing-the-wheel" phenomenon). On the other hand, it may be that this effect is actually valuable for individuals in an organization because it makes it possible to always recast (and reinvent) history. If meetings symbolize the organization, criticism and jokes about them may also be one way to indirectly criticize the organization.

Meetings, as suggested by a few investigators (e.g., Tropman 1980), are also one way to shift responsibility for actions or decisions from individuals and even from groups onto the meeting event itself. This shift is evident in Allison's (1969) reconstruction of decisions concerning the Cuban missile crisis, for example, "*That meeting* decided to shy away from the Western end of Cuba [where SAMs were becoming operational] and modify the flight patterns of the U-2s in order to reduce the probability that a U-2 would be lost" (p. 711, emphasis added).

The importance of relating meetings to the types of speech that immediately precede them, or that follow them (e.g., generally chats, gossip, or stories, and also, informal "minimeetings") will be specifically examined in the next two sections of this book (see especially Chapter 10).

Meeting Cycles

The work of March and Olsen (1976) is particularly valuable because, although they focus on decisions and choices, they develop a model of choice that specifically emphasizes the variety of alternative decision contexts that may exist in any setting. In other words, March and Olsen look at the interrelationships that exist between meetings and meeting groups in particular settings, for example, what other choice situations exist at any one point in time that may attract participants. The importance of examining relationships between time allocation, interests, participants, and attention to specific issues in meetings are all suggested by this approach. The work of Harry Wolcott (1973) also underlines the need to focus on "meeting patterns" and their effect on the behavior of individuals in organizations. He notes that

> an examination of the time and place distribution of the meetings which a principal attends reveals a remarkable degree of patterning. Given the information that Ed was on his was to a meeting and knowing the hour and day

> one could almost predict who would be at the meeting and perhaps even make a reasonable guess about the general tenor of business. (pp. 92–93)

It is also important here to examine the relationships that exist between particular meetings and meeting groups. For example, as discussed before, a committee is a type of meeting group that is generally considered to be "subservient" to other meeting groups such as a board, council, congress, and the like that are generally "sovereign" meeting groups. It is also the case that organizations and societies may be characterized according to the number and types of meetings and meeting groups that exist and the way in which they are linked to one another. Even though our Western bias has continually focused our attention on individuals or offices and the relationships that exist among them, it seems more instructive for the study of both traditional and complex societies to focus on group and meeting relationships. Thompson and Tuden (1959) suggested this view sometime ago by arguing that "the typical conception of the corporation as pyramidal in form, with ultimate authority peaking in the office of the president, is thus misleading. It would be more descriptive to think of the corporation as a wigwam, with a group at the top" (p. 213). More recently, Bailey (1969) has suggested that

> centralization does not mean that decision-making necessarily resides in one individual. . . . The fact that the decision-making body may be a group rather than an individual is a very important issue that is not always recognized. The ethnocentric bias of our own society tends to see the role of the individual decision-maker as being so important . . . [as] to pose it as the opposite of some kind of "group" or "democratic" process. (p. 74)

What it is important to emphasize here is that it is not groups *per se,* as opposed to individuals, which will help us to understand the issues which the above researchers are discussing. In my view, it is groups *as they use* meetings as communicative events that we must begin to examine in terms of the variety of issues that have been described in this section.

Summary

Researchers and organizational actors alike view meetings as contexts that exist in order to facilitate making a decision, discussing an issue, resolving a crisis, and so forth. This view treats the meeting "task" (e.g., the decision) as something extraordinary and therefore in need of explanation, but it has placed the meeting form in the background, as it has not been defined as a proper subject of study. For example, researchers have constructed a number of decision-making

models (rational models, coalition-bargaining or conflict models, cybernetic models, garbage-can models, etc.), and there is a great deal of controversy about which model is the best predictor of behavior or whether any of these models describe the behavior that actually occurs in organizations. However, it seems premature to develop theories of decision making without first developing a theory of meetings as the primary context in which individuals attempt to make decisions or accomplish other tasks. Researchers have been preoccupied with examining the tasks or content of meetings, and this has led them to neglect analysis of the meeting form itself, that is, how it is constructed and accomplished and what this construction means to participants, as well as the various functions meetings serve in particular social systems.[6] The meeting frame itself contributes to this neglect because it suggests that it is what goes on *within* a meeting (the explicit task as formalized in some meetings by an agenda) that is important.

In this chapter I have suggested that meetings are valuable because they are not what they seem to be. For the most part, researchers have accepted and perpetuated the "blank slate" image of meetings, but the approach that I have developed here, and also in Chapter 2, suggests that meetings may be *the* form that generates and maintains the organization as an entity and one that also influences the work and goals of individuals and an organization or community in ways that may be totally unanticipated and unintended. Using this perspective, it is possible to examine the multiple components of meetings and their relationships to each other in order to discover which relationships and which components are of central importance in particular sociocultural systems. This avoids the bias of current models that automatically give priority only to certain components (e.g., tasks and results), while obscuring the possible importance of other components as well as the variation that I assume exists from setting to setting and culture to culture. In order to illustrate this anthropological perspective on meetings, I turn in the next section, to an analysis of the significance and impact of meetings on individuals in a specific American alternative organization, the Midwest Community Mental Health Center.

[6]Brenneis (1984a) makes a similar point about previous studies of gossip in anthropology, as he suggests that researchers have focused on the content of gossip and "largely ignored how it is said" (p. 487).

Part II

The Meeting

Gatherings in an American Organization

Chapter 4

An Organized Anarchy

In no country in the world has the principle of association been more successfully used, or more unsparingly applied to a multitude of different objects, than in America. Besides the permanent associations which are established by law under the names of townships, cities, and counties, a vast number of others are formed and maintained by the agency of private individuals.
The citizen of the United States is taught from his earliest infancy to rely upon his own exertions, in order to resist the evils and the difficulties of life; he looks upon the social authority with an eye of mistrust and anxiety, and he only claims its assistance when he is quite unable to shift without it.

Alexis de Tocqueville
Democracy in America
(1839:24)

Organizational researchers have traditionally studied large-scale, mainstream, bureaucratic organizations. Attention has been focused on both public and private sector organizations, and the range of topics and types of settings is enormous, from studies of mismanagement in federal bureaus to interaction on industrial shop floors. Coexisting with these large-scale organizations and in the spirit of populist reform that has characterized American society since its inception are the multitude of small-scale, experimental associations and organizations that develop often in opposition to some aspect of bureaucratic practice. These "border" groups (as they have been characterized by Douglas and Wildavsky 1982) exhibit a variety of structures and purposes, but, for the most part, they remain at the border of the organizational research literature.[1] Swidler (1979) notes in her study of alternative schools that "de-

[1]Demarath and Thiessen (1970) suggest that "most organizational analysis follows in the wake of Weber's concern with the bureaucratic monolith. While the topic of organizational growth is common, studies of organizational demise are rare. While the conservative organization has been compelling, the deviant organization is frequently ignored and often shunted to the less attended realm of collective behavior" (pp. 237–238). In this

spite their radical challenge to traditional organization [alternative organizations] have received little more than polemical attention. Analysts have had difficulty taking them seriously as social forms with their own structure and inner dynamics" (p. vii).

This border status has been rectified somewhat by recent literature that will be reviewed in this chapter. The alternative organizations that will be discussed here frequently embrace traditional American democratic values, whereas at the same time posing themselves in opposition to some aspect of what the participants' believe to be mainstream American culture. The exoticism of these systems would seem to be especially appealing to anthropologists because we have pursued the exotic in almost every conceivable way in our investigations of American society. However, while studying everything from card sharks and tramps to gypsies in Iowa, we seem to have overlooked the exotic organization.[2] Of the anthropological studies that have been done, most have not used the research as an opportunity for cultural criticism.

In the following sections, I briefly review the types of studies that have been conducted on these organizations, especially research that has attempted to challenge taken-for-granted concepts about the nature of organizations, their structure and dynamics, and processes of governing. The organization that will be described in this book, which I call Midwest Community Mental Health Center ("Midwest"), was a self-proclaimed alternative mental health center. This review also serves to place this organization in the context of other alternative organizations of its time and, more specifically, other alternative health and mental health organizations. This chapter also places "Midwest" in its community context and presents a description of the type of organizational system that its founders produced. I refer to this system as an organized anarchy following the work of March and Olsen (1976), and I conclude this chapter by discussing the process and experience of conducting fieldwork in such a setting.

Alternative Organizations

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw an unprecedented number of alternative organizations appear in American society as experiments in

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regard, Kanter's (1972) review and analysis of the development and demise of several utopian communities stands out as a uniquely informative study of deviant or "border" organizations in American society.

[2]A good example of the effect of this concern with exotic populations on studies of American society is illustrated in Messerschmidt's (1980) review article, "Inside Looking Around: Studies of American Culture."

"antibureaucratic" ways of organizing social relationships and accomplishing objectives. The communes, collectives, women's centers, free schools, health clinics, and crisis centers that developed at this time were important organizational manifestations of the radical political and cultural movements of this era. These movements were based on both a "politicoeconomic" and especially a "psychosocial critique" of modern institutions that held that modern society had "put people out of touch with others and with their own fundamental nature" (Kanter 1972:6). More permanent and personal than the protest marches, concerts, and other "festivallike" occasions of this time (see Turkle 1975), participants used these settings as the place to realize a multitude of goals, but common among most of these groups were ideals of consensual decision making and equality of status (Mansbridge 1983:21).

Four themes appear in the recent literature on these organizations: extinction/survival, social organization or lifeways, restructured social services, and theoretical or cultural critique. A variety of alternative organizations have been analyzed from one or more of these perspectives, including communes and workers' collectives (e.g., Kanter 1972; Newman 1980; Partridge 1973) free schools (e.g., Swidler 1979), health and mental health clinics and crisis centers (e.g., Holleb and Abrams 1975; Mansbridge 1983; Schwartzman 1978a, 1980), and feminist organizations (e.g., Riger 1984).

The most common concern of researchers is the issue of organizational extinction or survival, and this is understandable given the precarious nature of these groups. In a review of factors that account for the survival, extinction, or transformation of feminist movement organizations, Riger (1984) presents a very useful discussion of these types of explanations that is applicable to a range of alternative organizations. She uses the perspective of research on social movement organizations (e.g., Piven and Cloward 1977; Rothschild-Whitt 1976) to suggest that the "central question examined is whether social movement organizations can meet survival needs while retaining goals and an ideology that calls for social change" (pp. 100–101). Generally, researchers examine whether it is pressure from "outside agencies," problems that result from internal dynamics, or some combination of internal and external factors that leads to change in ideals and goals.

The view that external factors are crucial for understanding the bureaucratization of movement or alternative organizations is evident in the classic works of Weber (1946) and Michels (1966), as well as the more recent research of Piven and Cloward (1977) as noted by Riger (1984:101). This argument is used as well in an anthropological study of 12 worker collectives in Berkeley, California, by Newman (1980). In this study, worker collectives are divided into three different types: business collec-

tives, service collectives, and information collectives. Newman examines which features of these groups allowed members to sustain their ideals and which features moved them in the direction of a more hierarchical structure, which she refers to as "incipient bureaucratization." The major point of bureaucratization for these groups began at the point where they had to solicit outside support (p. 149). Two of the business collectives were able to use members' own capital to invest in the business and, in this way, were able to maintain their egalitarian ideals and format. The remaining 10 collectives found it necessary to relate to a variety of standard bureaucracies (such as banks or federal or local government agencies) to request funds to continue their operations. This led to emergent stratification (e.g., between volunteer and full-time staff) and also undermined egalitarian processes of decision making that the group had adopted (p. 154). In Newman's view:

> Once the decision had been made to enter the "granting game," the collectives had to face an entirely different cultural milieu, one that rejected the value system which they espoused. The larger society and its institutions had a positive value on hierarchy. The collectives had to contend with this clash in normative orientations from a rather weak position of financial dependency. Economic viability and cultural evaluation were intertwined difficulties that the collectives had to face; in many cases, as we have seen, "incipient bureaucratization" was the end result of this "culture contact." (pp. 161–162)

The impact of internal pressures on an alternative organization's goals and structures is examined in detail in Riger's (1984) study of feminist movement organizations. She argues that these may be the most important factors for understanding survival/extinction in these settings. In this regard, she cites Weisstein and Booth's (1975:3) assessment that "our organizations and our alternate institutions die from internal bleeding long before they succumb to external pressure" (Riger 1984:101). This "internal bleeding" is related to a number of factors associated with the tendency of these groups to use a collective structure characterized by shared power, a leveling of status distinctions and consensual decision making.

This approach produces strong levels of commitment, feelings of solidarity, and, contrary to many interpretations, it can also lead to quick and concerted action (as when a proposal/grant is written overnight in order to respond to a newly discovered funding source). On the other hand, face-to-face groups are frequently emotionally intense experiences, and the process of making decisions can be very time consuming (see Mansbridge 1973, 1983; Riger 1984). In addition, the ideal of status equality is difficult to realize even when obvious distinctions (like titles or pay differentials) are eliminated because members differ in their "skills, abilities, and effort" to influence each other (Riger 1984:103; also

Mansbridge 1973, 1983). There are also problems that frequently develop between members over the goal of the organization: Should it emphasize process, or the delivery of specific services, or push for social and institutional change? All of the previously mentioned problems are related to an additional difficulty that seems to be endemic in such organizations, the phenomenon of "burnout." In general, this is the process of too few people, trying to do too much, in too short a period of time. The result is that members are unable to sustain this level of activity and find it necessary to leave the organization.

The life cycle of an organization must also be considered in attempting to understand the survival, extinction, or transformation of such settings. The early, "birth" stage tends to be the most exciting period when it seems that the organization has the most commitment from its members and the most potential to accomplish its objectives. As the organization becomes more established it exhibits more of a tendency to routinize and formalize activity (Riger 1984:101, 104).[3] The tendency for conflict between those members who are willing to allow/accept this formalization for the sake of services or social change and those who believe that this move violates basic ideals and goals is greatest at this stage (see Rothschild-Whitt 1976). In later stages, some organizations are able, more or less, to maintain a collectivist structure. According to Riger, these are generally the small settings where skills and knowledge are distributed more or less equally throughout the group; the group is dependent on its members for support; it can respond efficiently to external demands; members value participation as a goal; and members receive solidary or purposive rewards as incentives for participation (1984:105–106).

A number of organizations, however, follow a different track and eventually become, as described before, more hierarchical in structure and formalized in procedure. Many of these organizations begin to look like the systems that they originally opposed. Another path that some groups follow is that of "fission" (see Douglas and Wildavsky 1982) that results when conflict that develops among members over goals and

[3]Of course, the works of Weber (1946) and also Michels (1966) are the most well-known analyses of the process whereby an organization may subvert its original goal and adopt more conservative objectives and bureaucratic procedures in order to maintain itself. Simmel (1964) describes the process whereby "structures which resist larger, encompassing structures through opposition and separation, nevertheless themselves repeat the forms of these structures" and he refers to this as a "ubiquitous social norm" (as quoted in Kanter 1972:130). Lipset, Trow, and Coleman's (1970) study of the history and structural development of the International Typographers Union is an important work that attempts to specify those organizational conditions and processes that lead to a change in democratic goals and those that contribute to the maintenance of these goals.

procedures cannot be resolved within the group and certain members leave the group with the express purpose of founding another organization that will be more compatible with their ideals and desires. Finally, a group may simply vanish due to conflict among members that is unable to be resolved and lack of internal or external support for its continued existence. Riger reports that, for feminist movement organizations, "many groups simply fade away, leaving behind a residue of guilt and bitter feelings among former staff, as well as fewer organizations which serve women" (1984:100).

Studies that focus on descriptions of the social organization and life-style associated with alternative organizations are also available. For example, studies of the social system of communes established in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., see Kanter 1972; Myerhoff 1975; Partridge 1973). Partridge presents an early anthropological ethnography of "the hippie commune," basing his research in San Francisco. Myerhoff (1975) adopts a comparative perspective in examining what she refers to as deliberate and accidental communitas (see Turner 1969, 1974) among Huichol Indians and American youth. Here she describes the social organization of a group of "Woodstock Pilgrims" with particular emphasis on what Woodstock meant to these individuals in the context of their countercultural life-style.

Concern about the provision of social services is evidenced in all of the previously mentioned studies of alternative organizations, but this theme is most evident in the literature on alternative health and mental health clinics, crisis centers, and so forth. The most radical challenge to traditional bureaucracies and traditional values appeared in the social service sector of American society (see Swidler 1979; also Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). As argued by these authors, this was the area that saw the greatest growth in the post-World War II era, and the influx of educated, affluent, "baby boom" individuals into the marketplace is clearly an important factor here:

> The economic boom and the educational boom together produced a cohort of articulate, critical people with no commitment to commerce and industry. The entry of enormous numbers of young people into higher education kept them outside the mainstream of American economic life while they were in school, and when they came out of school most new jobs opened up in service industries (Douglas and Wildavsky 1982:159–160).

The area of mental health and psychiatric services received one of the most sustained critiques led by proponents of radical therapy such as Laing (1967, 1969), Scheff (1967), and Szasz (1961). The attempt to restructure both medical and mental health services has received considerable attention both in the popular press and in the research literature. During the 1970s community mental health centers in the United States became a

context for developing and utilizing nontraditional therapies as well as antibureaucratic structures and processes. Holleb and Abrams (1975) describe this ideology in terms of the faults of traditional mental health services and the solutions for these faults. First, social service agencies, in their view, were "hopelessly mired" in bureaucratic rules and regulations and inflexible hierarchies of management that wasted time and money, alienated workers, and deflected energy away from the provision of direct services. In response to this situation, alternative agencies sought to eliminate formal organizational hierarchies by establishing democratic organizational and governance forms. Second, traditional mental health ideology, according to Holleb and Abrams, imposed an unnecessary split between therapist and client and thus placed the client in a one-down position that only increased his or her feelings of weakness, frustration, and confusion. Therefore, alternative agencies tried to eliminate distinctions between staff and client and introduced the view that a client could be a helper and a helper could become a client (see also Bearman's 1974 discussion of the importance of "blurring" the lines between patient and staff in a free medical clinic). Finally, Holleb and Abrams suggest that professionals in traditional agencies were cold, isolated, and out of touch with the changes their clients were experiencing, and so alternative agencies promoted the importance of personal growth for their staff. These organizations sought "to build an open trusting community that included both staff and clients" (pp. 181–182).

A number of studies of American alternative organizations attempt to go beyond a description and analysis of the specific setting that was the subject of their research by using this material to present an examination or reexamination of taken-for-granted aspects of American life. Kanter (1972) recognizes the opportunity that the study of communes provides for examining unquestioned assumptions in American society:

> Contemporary social systems, from schools to families to businesses, are founded on many assumptions about human needs and the requirements of social life, which communes challenge. Confronting the "givens" of American life with data from communal orders poses interesting questions. (p. viii)

A number of questions are raised in this fashion, including:

> Can commitment and collective feeling replace individual, material rewards as a source of motivations? Is the nuclear family in its present, isolated form a necessary ingredient for emotional satisfaction? Could productive work be reorganized, perhaps in terms of rotating shared jobs rather than individual careers? Should ritual and symbols return to communities? What pressing contemporary social problems could be solved by creating communal enclaves within larger political structures? How can commitment—an important but under-researched concept—be built and maintained? What are the real possibilities for new social institutions, from new towns to consumer

> cooperatives to community development corporations? As America's problems grow, so does the need for conceiving of new ways of being and doing, and hence for a return of the utopian imagination. (p. viii)

Following in this tradition of cultural critique, Ann Swidler (1979) presents her study of two free schools in Berkeley, California Ethnic High and Group High, as a challenge to traditional Western conceptions of authority. She also uses an ethnographic approach as a sociologist to examine the organizational consequences of attempting to abolish authority and the processes developed or used to regulate social life in such a context (p. 1). This leads her to consider charismatic influence and its fragility and unpredictability in these two schools. The pleasures and pains of living in such a setting as teacher and student are depicted in detail in the case studies presented here. Ethnic High and Group High were schools designed as models of a new society and the motivations for such designs and the processes and procedures utilized in constructing such settings are considered in the context of Berkeley that became a symbol of opposition for youth in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Jane J. Mansbridge (1983) presents one of the most detailed documentations of life in American participatory democracies in her study of an urban crisis center, "Helpline," and a town meeting government in "Selby, Vermont." She also chose an anthropological approach for her study because she wanted to find out "what happens to an ideal under stress" (p. xiii). Her study is both a successful ethnography and a successful challenge to the taken-for-granted assumption of most political theorists that individual interests always conflict:

> My conclusion that members of certain kinds of democracies have predominately common interests . . . required a sharp break with the way I had been trained to think about democracy. It will require most Western readers to make an equally sharp break with their prior assumption. (p. x)

She uses her conclusion to elucidate the difference between *adversary democracy* that assumes underlying conflict and is characterized by electoral representation, majority rule and one citizen/one vote, and *unitary democracy* that assumes underlying common interest and is characterized by face-to-face consensual decision making and equal respect and status (p. 3).

In *Risk and Culture* (1982), Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky challenge objectivist views of the givenness of risks and dangers in society. They do this by considering a wide range of cross-cultural material including Douglas's earlier work with the Lele of Zaire. This book also presents a critique of liberal ideology and American politics in its attempt to relate ideology to the social organization of public interest

groups, especially environmental and conservation groups. The authors consider public interest organizations (specifically environmental groups) as "border groups" in their analysis of the cultural construction of risk perception in American society. Their specific concern is with understanding how and why certain groups select certain risks (in this case environmental pollution), and they present a continuum of organizations from center to border that is related to Douglas's (see 1978) well-known group/grid analysis. The authors compare and contrast the operation as well as issues of the more hierarchical and center groups such as the Sierra Club with "sectlike" groups such as the Clamshell Alliance that are said to be characteristic of the border. These groups search for fraternal equality, but they are unable to make decisions, and it is difficult for them to engage in sustained action. These groups also exhibit a tendency for splintering and fission to maintain their small size. However, it is the:

> losing battle against the difficulties of voluntary organization [that] presses its members into rejecting increase of scale, preferring egalitarian rulings, and attempting closure against the rest of the world (insofar as that is possible without negative sanctions). (p. 121)

This approach is intriguing and suggestive, but what is missing is the ethnographic research on these organizations that would provide the foundation for their argument. What is also missing is information on the considerable "indigenous" analysis of sects (see Marcus and Fisher 1986:146–149) as well as the growing literature on alternative organizations that researchers have produced.

The final example of research on alternative organizations formulated as cultural critique is found in the work of James March and Johan Olsen and colleagues (e.g., 1976; Sproull, Weiner, and Wolf 1978). These researchers do not present themselves as engaging in anything as grand as the term *cultural critique* seems to imply, and yet in my view their research (and that of Mansbridge 1983) is the most successful example of this approach in recent literature. As discussed in Chapter 2, in *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (1976), March and Olsen bring together the work of a number of colleagues in Scandinavia and the United States, all of whom are engaged in the study of what they refer to as "organized anarchies" (such as free schools) as well as a variety of public bureaucracies (such as educational institutions).

All of these settings are said to experience severe ambiguity in all areas of their operation, and it is this experience that is characteristic of the organized anarchy. In this chapter I briefly review the characteristics of organized anarchies as they are relevant to the specific ethnography to be presented here. In these settings, according to the authors, one finds (1) ambiguous or inconsistent goals and ideologies; (2) unclear or

fuzzy technologies; (3) fluid participation of members; (4) confusing histories; and (5) unpredictable environments (1976:12). It is important to emphasize here that organized anarchies are not viewed as "bad" organizations in this model. In fact, the actions that occur within them are often quite creative in the authors' view, but these systems have been badly understood by traditional theories of organization.

Although March and Olsen state their objectives very modestly, the major thrust of their work is a sustained challenge to both rational and coalition-bargaining models of decision making as these have been developed by American researchers. This perspective is particularly significant for the description of Midwest as an organized anarchy that will be presented next. In my view, this model is important because it is one of the few approaches in the literature that uses the experience of life in an alternative organization to develop a view of organizations that is a bold alternative to traditional models and very critical of traditional reasoning about organizations.[4] It is this approach to theorizing, which is built on a series of case studies of alternative organizations and educational institutions, that opens up new perspectives on life in both alternative as well as more traditional organizations. This perspective provides an important model for the type of argument and reasoning that I will use later in my examination of meetings and "Midwest." In the following section, I use the organized anarchy model to describe the characteristic features of Midwest.

An Alternative Organization: Midwest Community Mental Health Center

The northwest corner of Harding Avenue and Central in the city of Midtown, Illinois, has seen businesses, programs, and facilities come and go. In 1970 it was the site of a bowling alley, and it is now a drive-in McDonald's, but for 8 years it was the location for Midwest Community Mental Health Center (Midwest). The center was studied by a team of anthropologists, of which I was a member, between January 1975 and July 1976.[5] Midwest was the Midtown community of West Park's "Mil-

[4]By implication, this approach is also critical of the culture that supports these models, but this is not developed by the authors. Sahlins's critique of utilitarian and materialist thought in Western society in *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976) could be joined with March and Olsen's work to develop a cultural analysis of decision making and ideas about decision making.

[5]In keeping with anthropological convention, fictitious names have been used for the center and the community in which it was located as well as for all of the individuals and groups mentioned in this ethnography. The names of specific places and in some in-

lion Dollar Mental Health Center," and for a time participants believed that it was *the* solution to the multitude of social problems that the community experienced. This is a lot to ask of any organization, but at the time no one seemed to mind, caught up as they were with the enthusiasm for social change that characterized the early 1970s in American society. The individuals responsible for organizing the center (in the center's language, they were referred to as "the founders") had been waiting a long time for the opportunity for change that this organization seemed to provide. The organizational structure and processes that the "founders" put into place are described in this chapter, first by sketching the community context of West Park and then by examining the organization as an organized anarchy.

The West Park Community

In most major American cities, there are one or more communities like West Park, areas that have experienced waves of migrant and immigrant populations (the so-called "port-of-entry" community) combined with waves of "helpers" and social action programs attempting to meet the needs of these populations. It is this combination of individuals who were defined as "needy" (the rural Appalachian white, the Native American, the Mexican, the deinstitutionalized schizophrenic, the alcoholic) and the "helpers" (the Vista volunteer, the SDS organizer, the free clinic worker, the clergyman, the nun, the social worker, and the tenants' rights organizer) that most characterized West Park in the 1970s.

At one time, this had been a more affluent community, and there are still some mansions standing from this era, although most have been torn down or subdivided. Now it is a community of three- and six-flat apartments, with some single-family homes, and it is bordered by the institutions of society (hospitals, schools, a fire station, high-rise apartments, and a park). The hotels of an earlier era are now shelter-care homes for the large number of former mental patients who were "dumped" or "deinstitutionalized" (depending on your point of view) into the community beginning in the 1960s.

West Park was once Midtown's Bohemia; it is now Midtown's "psychiatric ghetto." Walking down Harding Avenue is sometimes like

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stances the times of events have also been changed in order to preserve anonymity. I would like to thank all of the members of this team of researchers, Anita Kneifel, Don Merten, and Gary Schwartz, as well as all of the individuals at the center for their collaboration on this project.

walking down the corridors of the back ward of a mental hospital, except that, instead of hospital walls for a backdrop, it is now city streets. The mental patients who shuffle (they call it the "thorazine shuffle") down the street are shuffling alongside the Native American mother and her 2-year-old daughter, the southern white male who did not take a temporary job this day, the well-educated (possibly University of Michigan) activist on her way to a tenants' rights meeting, and an alcoholic throwing up at the curb.

In 1970, the population estimate was 134,696, making this one of the most densely populated areas of Midtown. West Park was also home to an estimated 8,000 former mental patients, and it reported the second highest suicide rate in Midtown. Because of recognized problems of migrant and immigrant populations, alcoholism, drug abuse, crime and delinquency, school dropouts and poverty, the heart of West Park was designated a Model Cities target and study area.[6]

Even without checking the statistics, it is obvious that this is community with a multitude of problems. It is also obvious walking down any major street that this is a community with an array of helpers offering solutions, generally in the form of an organization, to these problems (the Jobs Now Committee, Youth in Action, the community outpost of the state mental hospital, the Organization against Racism, the Tenants' Rights Union, the Catholic church, the Freedom Drug Clinic, the Committee to Protest Urban Renewal).

In the early 1970s, a small group of these helpers began discussing the mental health problems of this community. It is not surprising that mental health should have been recognized as a problem, given the significant number of mental patients living in West Park. An alternative mental health center began to be seen as a viable solution to these problems when it became known that federal monies for "comprehensive community mental health centers" were available. Frustrated with the overly bureaucratic, unresponsive, and inaccessible professionalized state mental health system, a cross-section of helpers representing a variety of agencies and organizations in the community began meeting, and working over the space of several months, they wrote a proposal to secure funding for a "community-run" mental health center. The extraordinary amount of time and effort that went into preparing this grant was rewarded in 1972 when the center was awarded funding for a staffing grant from the National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) as a "free-standing" community mental health center. Here was a problem and an organizational solution whose time had come.

[6]This statistical information is taken from the staffing grant submitted to NIMH by Midwest.

What the founders proposed in the words of the staffing grant was "to organize and operate a system of comprehensive mental health care" (pp. 11–12). What the founders had produced in the words of March and Olsen's (1976) model of organizational systems was an "organized anarchy." Although not surprising, given the process by which the center was created and the multitude of parties interested in the funds that had been secured, it is useful to consider exactly how and in what ways ambiguity and conflict were built into the center's design and operation. Five areas will be briefly considered here: goals and ideology, technology, participants and governing structure, history, and environment.

Goals and Ideology

> It is common to understand organizational actions in terms of intentions, either organizational or individual, to imagine that individuals have intentions, and that those intentions are translated into action in a way that makes organizational action some product of individual or group will. (March and Olsen 1976:19)

The founders of Midwest believed that mental health services in the community of West Park were fragmented, impersonal, inaccessible, bureaucratized, and professionalized and not reflective of the community. To rectify this situation, they developed a "community-based" model for service delivery. The key to these services was the mental health paraprofessional who would in some way tie all of the services together:

> The worker . . . as a service giver [may perform] the following functions: (1) therapist; (2) behavior changer . . . ; (3) community planner . . . ; (4) care giver; (5) data manager . . . ; (6) administrator . . . ; (7) companion; (8) counselor . . . ; (9) supporter . . . ; (10) intervenor. . . . One of the primary jobs [of the worker] will be concerned with the service relationships between agencies and community residents—seeing to it that *service is given* . . . . This means that he will perform the following roles: (1) outreach worker . . . ; (2) interpreter . . . ; (3) negotiator . . . ; (4) teacher-educator . . . ; (5) instructor . . . ; (6) helper. (Midwest Grant, pp. V–19)

The overall goal of Midwest was to provide comprehensive "services to all 'high-risk' populations within the community" (Midwest Grant p. II–3). Although no one could quarrel with these objectives as stated in the grant, everyone had a different interpretation of what they "really meant." Because the goals were so broadly defined, no clear or consistent set of preferences existed for making choices or evaluating achievement, and so appeal was always made to a series of concepts and symbols ("the community," community representation, the paraprofes-

sional concept), but because these concepts were interpreted differently, there was never a clear-cut relationship between individual goals and group action (Kreiner specifically discusses and illustrates the significance of this issue in March and Olsen 1976:156–173).

Technology

> Technology is often unclear. Although the organization manages to survive and even produce, its own processes are not understood by its members. (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1976:25)

Midwest lacked clarity about two technological processes: (1) the technology of treatment or therapy, and (2) the structure and processes of governance. Once again, although everyone could support the promotion of mental health, it was not clear how best to promote it (group therapy, individual therapy, family therapy, rap groups, social change and action programs, education and prevention), and, of course, a multitude of models exist, each claiming some version of therapeutic truth (psychoanalytic models, Rodgerian therapy, family systems therapy). The technology for governance was also unclear because, although many individuals espoused egalitarian ideals and the view that distinctions between staff should be minimized, there also existed a hierarchy of offices and obvious differences in rights, duties, obligations, pay, and so forth. There was also a specific attempt to blur role distinctions between patients and staff, but this became an early source of conflict and confusion, and it was never resolved during the course of our research.

Participants

> Participation is often fluid. Participants vary in the amount of time and effort they devote to different domains, involvement varies from one time to another. (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1976:25)

At Midwest participants would come and go, wandering on and off stage in March and Olsen's terms, and even though there were recurring characters, it was generally impossible to know which group of individuals would be assembled for any one occasion. The participants at Midwest could be divided into five different groups: *staff* (those individuals delivering services); *patients or clients* (those receiving services); *management* (those directing and supervising staff, including community board members); *sponsors* (those allocating resources to the program, in this case the National Institute of Mental health [NIMH] and the state mental health department [MHD]); and the *researchers* (in this case a

team of anthropologists to be discussed later; see Krause and Howard 1976). At the time of this fieldwork, the center employed approximately 100 individuals in staff or management positions as defined here. In addition, approximately 40 individuals were involved with the organization as active board or council members. The patient population, of course, was constantly shifting in this setting, but this was true as well for staff and also board and sponsors. During the course of our fieldwork, the center experienced approximately a 60% turnover of personnel. In this case, the researchers were put in the unusual position of staying in the setting while informants came and went.

History

> The past is important, but it is not easily specified or interpreted. History can be reconstructed or twisted. What happened, why it happened, and whether it had to happen are all problematic. (March and Olsen 1976:12)

There was no history at Midwest, only *histories*. Informants recognized and commented on this by comparing their own "history" to the movie *Rashoman* (anthropologists have also used this comparison to discuss the multiple realities that ethnographers always confront; see Frankel 1973). However, even with this recognition, participants were originally very interested in our research project because it was thought that the process of interviewing and trying to organize material about the center would help them try to make sense of what had been happening to them. Of course we constructed another history, the anthropologists' history of Midwest. What is interesting about this history is that it was then used by informants to construct and reconstruct events at the center in papers that were presented at our informant's professional meetings.

Environment

> Environmental actions and events are frequently ambiguous. (March and Olsen 1976:18)
>
> The boundaries of the organization are uncertain and changing. (Cohen, March, and Olsen 1976:25)

Midwest was both the creator as well as producer of its multiple environments. The center created a consortium structure where staff were employed and paid by Midwest but worked in a variety of community agencies (e.g., a day-care center, a drug clinic, an Indian Center).

This meant that individual staff were responsible to, at least, two different organizations for their actions as well as their training and supervision and evaluation. This also meant that the center was essentially an organization of organizations, making boundaries between *it* and other programs difficult to draw.

The environment of West Park, as should be apparent from the preceding description, was also characterized by flux and impermanence, as changing populations, problems, helpers, solutions and resources created numerous potential and actual "community" environments. The major source of funding for the center was NIMH, but this was a "staffing grant" and a "declining" grant. This meant that Midwest was dependent on the state mental health department for all nonstaff expenditures from space and equipment to paper and pencils. This also meant that as the amount of the grant declined yearly, the center needed to generate other funds. Originally it was thought that this would happen from community businesses like banks, companies, and so forth, but when this support did not materialize, the Center found it increasingly necessary to turn to the MHD for funds. However, the state and federal bureaucracies exerted conflicting demands and policies on the center in regard to types of services that they emphasized. Federal demands stressed consultation and education and primary prevention, whereas the state system demanded a focus on the treatment of "priority patients," that is, former state hospital mental patients. From the beginning, the center posed itself in opposition to large-scale bureaucracies, attempting to draw a clear boundary between "them" and "us." These divisions between "institutions" and "the community" were supported as well in the rhetoric of the early federal initiatives for community mental health centers, but when it came right down to it, Midwest was funded by one large bureaucracy (NIMH) in order to stimulate another large bureaucracy (the state MHD) to stop relying "on the cold mercy of custodial isolation" and to supplant this "with the open warmth of community concern and capability" (John F. Kennedy's Message to Congress on Mental Illness and Mental Retardation, 1963:3). Adopting this perspective, it can be seen that the center was born in the context of a conflicting resource environment that, like all of the previous issues discussed here, had great consequences for participants working in this setting.

Fieldwork in an Organized Anarchy

The center's status as an organized anarchy also had great consequences for the research team, of which I was a part, and our attempts to

undertake a study of Midwest. In the first place, as employees of a research institute which was part of the State Mental Health Department (MHD), we were initially perceived to be "spies" for the state. Of course, this is a typical response to anthropologists, and it took quite some time to negotiate a different perception of ourselves because of relationships between the center and the MHD. In fact, the researchers developed a study of the center's paraprofessional model of treatment as a way to examine what we believed was an interesting experiment in the organization of mental health services in a community in which two of the members of the team had previously conducted research. No one in the state system demanded that such a study be conducted, even though the center was receiving the most support of all community mental health centers in the state at the time of our research.

We initially approached the center by writing a letter to the director and also by making contacts with board members and founders. After approximately 6 months of letters and a few tentative meetings between the research team and some staff and board members, we were allowed to present our project to the governing council. This presentation led to an approximately 1-hour discussion (which ranged over issues of purpose, confidentiality, staff time, who we "really" were, and statements of support from staff and board members). At the conclusion of this meeting, we were granted approval to begin the project.

This was a very tense time for the researchers because we felt that we had invested a great deal of time and effort into the "access negotiations," and we really could not predict how they would turn out. Of course we were very pleased when our project was finally approved, but we were then told that we must present our study to the staff in 2 days to secure their support. Immediately we began to worry about this meeting. An excerpt from my field notes, written after this first meeting, reflects my concern as well as surprise about the events at this first meeting with staff:

> After 6 months of access negotiations, we have finally been granted permission to begin our study of Midwest. Our first meeting with staff (2 days after the council meeting) occurred today (Wednesday) during the regularly scheduled staff meeting held in what I believe is called the "hub" at the "barn" (which I think is what the center's main building on Harding Avenue and Central is called). We were *very* apprehensive about this meeting because we thought that our presence and purpose might become a focus of controversy for staff and we would be denied access, but we were *very* surprised (and relieved) by the response to our presentation. We passed out copies of our outline which people didn't seem to read. I briefly presented our research project by discussing the nature of the research, the potential value of the research, and our relation to the state mental health department. There was only one question, concerning how much time we would be at the center. Following our presentation, staff continued their staff meeting, and

> became very involved in listening and responding to a report about a recent statement from the board which essentially seemed to say that center staff should not be "in therapy" with other center staff.
>
> There was a great deal of very agitated discussion about this issue, including problems with defining what is therapy, who was a therapist, and especially the issue of how (or whether) one could distinguish between therapy and supervision. There were many side comments around the table (most of which I could not hear). One person, I think her name was Sheila, seemed to dominate the discussion, and she was very skillful and articulate in speaking. Paul Chase, the acting director, was technically in charge of the meeting. The results of this discussion seemed to be to bring these issues of staff and therapy back to the board to ask for clarification. . . . After this meeting, one of the staff said to me that he still wasn't convinced that "you bug-collectors should be here."

One of the things that I later realized was how so many of the interests, issues, and interpretations that we developed in this research were foreshadowed in these notes. Briefly, as these will be elaborated in subsequent chapters, they are

1. The importance of meetings at the center (all of our first encounters, except the initial letters, were in meetings)
2. The recurring conflict and confusion over who could be a proper patient and what it meant to be staff at the center, as this reflected different staff and board perspectives on this issue
3. Our concern that we might become a subject of controversy or, at least, of protracted discussion, and our surprise when we were quickly approved, as staff moved on to the issue that was most salient to them at that moment (the therapy issue).

Research Texts and Contexts

Into this somewhat bewildering and also intimidating context we came, with notebooks and tape recorders in hand (three anthropologists and one research assistant trained in sociology). Having proven ourselves through the access process, it seemed that we were accepted very quickly by most participants, although there were certainly varying degrees of skepticism. We started going to meetings, first the Wednesday staff meeting, then board meetings, then the Personnel Committee, and so our research began. It was not long before we were given our own mailbox, and, at about this time, many people began to think of us as other staff (possibly from a unit or outpost with which they had little contact). I will never forget the way that our original concerns and worries seemed to rapidly fade away as we began to participate in the

daily routines of life at the center, and we began to learn about each other as actual people, instead of as "researcher" versus "staff."

As it happened, we arrived at Midwest at what was a very important transitional period, because the center's original director and assistant director had left a few months before our project began (some people reported that they had resigned; some people reported that they had been fired), and an acting director recruited from within the system had replaced these individuals. This change was a time of heightened anxiety and conflict as well as reflection about what the center was and where it was going. The large staff turnover during the time of our research was probably due, in part, to this transition period.

Always willing to talk, in meetings and elsewhere, center staff seemed to be particularly interested in talking to us during this time. Some individuals described our discussions "as a therapeutic experience" and in the context of Midwest, this was a positive evaluation. We began interviewing current staff, management (including board members), founders as well as previous staff, other community individuals, and also state and federal personnel involved with the center's operations (sponsors). At the end of the 1½ years of our fieldwork, we had conducted 65 tape-recorded interviews, varying in length from 1 to 6 hours, and representing a cross-section of the individuals involved with the center since its inception (see Table 4.1). Because of issues of confidentiality, we only talked to patients who made themselves known to us, and in these instances, these interviews were not tape recorded.

In conjunction with our interviews, we also participated in the day-to-day activities that occupied the participants' time. This meant that we went to a lot of meetings. For example, I attended between three to six meetings a day (also nights), approximately 3 days per week, for 1½ years, which means that a conservative estimate of the time I spent in meetings would be about 702 hours. This figure in and of itself would seem to require understanding and explanation, and Chapter 6 pursues the issue of time, attention, and meetings in more detail. Field notes were taken (in varying degrees of detail) about all events at the center.

Table 4.1. Types of Midwest Participants Interviewed

Current and former staff	43
Current and former board and council members	12
"Founders" (also board/council members)	4
Sponsors (NIMH or MHD staff)	6
Total	65

Field notes were written about meetings either during or after the event, and the documents produced by participants relating to these meetings were also collected (e.g., announcements, agendas, minutes, comments about meetings in informal conservation or in formal interviews).

The center made a practice of tape recording many meetings (especially board meetings), and we were given access to 22 tapes of present and past meetings, all of which were transcribed. These tapes provide a look at the center through the meetings that our informants chose to both record and save (several of the meetings had occurred one to 2 years before we began our research).

We also collected an array of documents that, by informant or researcher judgment, seemed to be important for understanding the center (e.g., "the grant" that had now assumed the status of Biblical scripture complete with conflicting exegesis; also state and federal guidelines and legislation pertaining to CMHCs, announcements, calendars, memos, reports, and files that center staff as well as some of the founders had established expressly for the purpose of keeping track of the large quantity of paper and information that the center produced). One of the center's "founders" opened two large file drawers with over 50 different categories of files, containing paper and documents about the center. During our interview with him, he said that we could take all of these documents "because I'm closing this chapter of my life." Another "founder" gave us large stacks and piles of paper and documents that were sorted only according to the most recent on top, and we were allowed to keep this material long enough to sort through it and make copies if we wished and then return it.

It should be obvious from this description of research texts and contexts that, once we were accepted into the center, the majority of participants went out of their way to be helpful, responsive, and also interested in our research. Over the many months of our study, as is typical in anthropological research, we came to know our informants as friends (some more than others) as well as expert guides into their organizational world. We also saw that many of these individuals were in deep conflict with each other, and we constantly reflected on one of the expressions that we heard repeated: "At Midwest the people are nice, but the place is crazy." Fortunately, because this was a team project, we were able to move back and forth between the variety of shifting and conflicting groups at the center, but I can only now say that I understand the meaning of that expression. The process of engaging in fieldwork in such an organization was certainly the most intense, absorbing, exciting and also frustrating fieldwork experience that I have had. Participants reported their experience of working at the center in almost the same terms.

Armed with field notes, interview transcripts, guidelines, memos, meeting notes, and transcripts, we wondered in our research meetings, "what does it all mean?" We learned that our informants were asking themselves the same question, over and over again.

Reconstructing an Image and Constructing an Ethnography

I originally conceptualized this research as a description and examination of the structure and ideology of an alternative treatment approach in a community mental health center. I wanted to understand the participants' goals and ideology, but they seemed to be constantly in conflict. I wanted to assess the participants' efforts to implement a "paraprofessional" model of service delivery, but there seemed to be multiple models of service, and all of them were difficult to characterize. I wanted to understand who the various participants (past and present) were and what role they played in the organization, but everyone had multiple roles and multiple interpretations of their significance. I wanted to examine the organizational structure, and someone gave me an organization chart and laughed. I wanted to collect a history of the center's development, but I learned that there were multiple and always conflicting histories. I wanted to examine the organization and its relationship to its environment, but the environment and the organization kept changing. I was confused and frustrated. I went to a lot of meetings.

I now realize that I was learning some important lessons. I was approaching the organization *as if* it were an objective, concrete entity and members' ideology, technology, roles, structure, environment, and so forth were "things" that could be taken for granted and examined for their effect on other "things." I should have known better. However, working in a large state bureaucracy along with beginning to read the literature on organizational behavior had reinforced the dominant objectivist view of organizational systems for me. The process of conducting fieldwork at Midwest was personally and professionally meaningful on many different levels, but most important was the way in which this experience ultimately reconstructed my image of organizations. I believe that if I had conducted fieldwork in a more traditional setting, this process of reconstruction might not have occurred, or at least it would not have occurred so readily.

In this book I am asking questions about the nature of life in organizations that are typically taken for granted by participants and re-

searchers. In this ethnographic section, I present an extended discussion of life in a specific community mental health center as I participated in it with my informants between 1975 and 1976 and as I have come to understand and chosen to portray it in 1987. This is not the same discussion I would have written if I had prepared this book in 1978 (and indeed it is not the same discussion I prepared in articles in 1978 and 1980). When I conducted research at Midwest, I became a part of a world of individuals caught up in a battle for control as they engaged in secret and not-so-secret manipulations, strategies, and plans, while simultaneously viewing their activities and their organization as "out of control." This world (or worlds) came together and was, in fact, created and revealed in the meetings that were the organization's common feature. This book takes the characters, events, and experiences of this world that I shared with my informants for 1½ years and puts them into one that is in many ways very different than the one (I think) we thought we were inhabiting. In one sense, this may seem to be a violation of the anthropological concern with "the native's point of view." However, I believe it is a manifestation of it because my concern is still with my informant's "point of view," but I have shifted my interest to an analysis of how this "point of view" is constructed. I am concerned specifically with how participants developed a sense of the organization as well as a sense of themselves in this setting. I believe, with the ethnomethodologists, that this is a problematic accomplishment and one that it is not taken for granted in alternative organizations that are, by definition, organizations that push our sense of organization to the limit. This is why the organized anarchy model is so valuable, in my view, because it captures the sense and nonsense of life as it is frequently experienced in these settings.

I argue that meetings were the major form that provided participants in this setting with a sense of organization as well as a sense of themselves *in* the organization. It is in this light that the tremendous emphasis on this form of gathering, which is widely reported in the literature on alternative organizations (see Mansbridge 1983; Swidler 1979), must be understood. But this is not to suggest that the meeting is merely put in the service of ideology, or power structure, or technology, and so forth as is often assumed. It took me several years to realize that, in order to understand what was happening at Midwest (and, I now believe, in many other organizations as well), I had to reverse this assumption. Instead of assuming that concepts such as ideology, power, leadership, structure, and so forth were primary concepts in need of understanding and analysis, I discovered that meetings should be the primary focus of my attention and that their production as well as reproduction was in need of understanding and analysis. It just so happens that concepts such as ideology, power, and the like can be used to

investigate meetings just as easily as meetings have been used to study these concepts. This approach will require the reader to suspend or break with cultural assumptions about the purpose of meetings. Instead of accepting task-focused assumptions that suggest that ideology, decisions, problems, and the like are what meetings are all about, the opposite is proposed here, that meetings are what decisions, problems, and crises are about.

Once this break has been made, then meetings can no longer be taken for granted. If meetings are "constructed, practical accomplishment" (see Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee 1978), then how they are constructed and produced as events, how they are interpreted by participants, and how they effect the lives of individuals in particular settings become important questions for research. With this shift in emphasis, I also wish to mark the idea that the story or ethnography that I present here could have been otherwise. There are, and will continue to be, multiple readings and interpretations of the story of "Midwest,"[7] but faced with the inevitable and final ethnographic task, reducing the experience of individuals in particular social settings to words on a printed page, I present my story of life and the meetings at Midwest. I begin this story with an excerpt from a meeting, because all participants became acquainted with the center and its activities in such a forum. Excerpts from this meeting are included between each chapter in this section in order to illustrate how individuals (organizational actors, researchers, and readers) may come to "see" and experience an organization *through* its meetings.

[7]The best example of a recent ethnography that emphasizes this point is Latour and Woolgar's study of *Laboratory Life* (1986). In their concluding paragraph, the researchers describe their view of the status of their ethnographic account:

> Our account of fact construction in a biology laboratory is neither superior or inferior to those produced by scientists themselves. It is not superior because we do not claim to have any better access to "reality," and we do not claim to be able to escape from our description of scientific activity: the construction of order out of disorder at a cost, and without recourse to any pre-existing order. In a fundamental sense, our own account is no more than *fiction*. But this does not make it inferior to the activity of laboratory members: they too were busy constructing accounts to be launched in the agonistic field, and loaded with various sources of credibility in such a way that once convinced, others would incorporate them as givens, or as matters of fact, in their own construction of reality. Nor is there any difference in the sources of credibility upon which they and we can draw so as to force people to drop modalities from proposed statements. The only difference is that *they have a laboratory*. We, on the other hand, have a text, this present text. By building up an account, inventing characters . . . , staging concepts, invoking sources, linking to arguments in the field of sociology, and footnoting, we have attempted to decrease sources of disorder and to make some statements more likely than others, thereby creating a pocket of order. Yet this account itself will now become part of a field of contention. How much further research, investment, redefinition of the field, and transformation of what counts as an acceptable argument are necessary to make this account more plausible than its alternatives? (pp. 257–258)

Council Meeting—November 26, 1974

8:20 P.M.

Greg *Can we start the meeting? We have a big agenda tonight as usual. [background voices] Is this it here? Does anybody have any questions in regard to the minutes of the previous council meeting of September 24? They were passed out at the door. [papers shuffling] Does anybody have any questions, additions, corrections to the minutes of the September 24 meeting? If not, I'd like to entertain a motion that they be approved as submitted.*

John *So moved. So moved.*

Greg *Do I hear a second?*

Manny *Second.*

Greg *All those in favor signify by saying Aye.*

All *Aye.*

Greg *Opposed. [pause] The other minutes that we have tonight are the minutes of the fund raising, special fund-raising meeting that we had, and I'd like to have Mary sum this up and [softly] you have a copy.*

Ellie *Yeah.*

Mary *Those of you who were here will remember that there were a lot of ideas bouncing around about fund raising. Since then, in view of the fact that nobody else really wants to do the job, I thought I might, at least for the time being, see what I could do. I've gone over to the Midwest Commission and spoken to them, and some of the staff were kind enough to come along. Paul Chase and—what's her name?*

Rita *Andrea Rodgers.*

Mary *Andrea Rodgers, and who's the new lady?*

Rita *Oh, Louise Bella.*

Mary *Louise Bella, yeah. So they were very kind to us, and they seem to have changed their attitude considerably about our presence in the community. So what we're going to get out of this I'm not sure, but I'm going to talk to Rodney Dixon. I have been talking to him about the possibility of exploiting the Midwest Commission for money. And I think we'll probably get somewhere in the near future.*

Ellie *I suspect not very much.*

Mary *Huh?*

Ellie *I suspect not very much.*

Mary *Oh, you never know. It depends on how/*[1]

John *Did you tell them about what happened at the meeting up there?*

Mary *Oh, yeah, yeah.*

John *It's rather earth shattering.*

Mary *[laugh] Steve Lindahl volunteered a remark to the effect that he felt that our presence in the community was a very distinct asset, and he now approves of us. [laughter] And after picking myself up off the floor, I said, "Thank you, Steve." It was rather amazing, but I was glad to hear him say that he felt he had been wrong. Mistaken. So I've also talked to a guy who's willing to let us use his reverse telephone book. I called the phone book company first and they want $17.50 a month for a minimum of 12 months to use the phone book which is listed by addresses rather than by names. This seemed to me rather steep. They don't give any special rebates to organizations like us, so I called up a mailing service, and the guy said, Sure we could borrow his and xerox the pages we need any time we want. Free for nothing. That will take care of that. I need more—what I really would like is a couple of people who would be interested in bouncing ideas and working on them with me. We have a number of people here at the bottom of the sheet, special meeting minutes who have offered to help, and I'm going to check with all of them and see if we can get together, at least maybe two or three of us, just get things going. If anybody else here wants to help us in our fund raising, let me know. I think it's going to be fun.*

Greg *Does anybody have an comments on the fund raising meeting? The minutes or/*

Mary *We've got to talk now. Oh, incidentally, if any of you like—could arrange, could you please go back to your organization, if you would like us to come and talk to your organization about the Mental Health Center, to give a complete description of exactly what's going on right now, I now have a talk that more or less describes. I gave it to the Midwest Commission. They seemed to like it, so OK we can try it out on somebody else. And in this way we might get more people interested. So we have that too.*

[1]The symbol / is used to denote interruption of the speaker.

Chapter 5

Constructing a Meeting

Step 1: What am I?	*I am the rector.*
Step 2: What do rectors do?	*Rectors go to meetings.*
Step 3: What do I do?	*I go to meetings.*

James G. March and Johan P. Olsen
Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations
(1976:49)

Participants at Midwest frequently experienced frustration, ambiguity, and conflict in their relationships with each other—this is characteristic of life in an organized anarchy. But it would be a mistake to focus only on this ambiguity and confusion without examining the order and predictability that individuals also experienced. This sense of order was produced by the variety and cycle of gatherings in which participants engaged during their working day. Each day individuals were brought together in recurring as well as novel combinations by the gatherings that they were either obligated to attend (by prior commitment, due to their position at the center, etc.) or that they had themselves scheduled and/or organized. What these gatherings had in common was talk; as participants moved from a therapy session to a chat to a meeting, they continually talked to one another. Each one of the typical gatherings at Midwest was characterized by a particular pattern of speech and action as well as group expectations about what constituted "proper" speech and action and use of speech on these occasions, and, for the most part, everyone understood the difference between a chat and a meeting or a therapy session and a lecture. The similarities and differences, and sometimes confusion, between these types of gatherings will be discussed in detail in this and subsequent chapters.

A display of the variety of gatherings that brought the major participants at the center together is presented in Figure 5.1, using the description of types of participants presented in Chapter 4 and the notion of

	PATIENT	STAFF	MANAGEMENT	SPONSOR	RESEARCHER
PATIENT	Informal waiting room interaction. Group treatment meetings. Council meetings.	Treatment sessions: individual, group, family, play & workshop. Medical clinic. Council meetings. Indiv. interaction. Parties. Telephone.	Council meetings. Individual interaction. Parties.	Council meetings.	Informal discussions & interviews. Council meetings. Parties.
STAFF	Treatment sessions: individual, group, family, play & workshop Med. clinic. Indiv. interaction. Council mtgs. Telephone. Parties.	Meetings: Unit, Training, Staff. Council/Board. Memos-reports. Supervision mtgs. One-on-ones. Workshops. Story telling. Record keeping. "Spec" mtgs. Telephone. Lectures. Parties.	Meetings: Committee, Cabinet, Training, Supervision, Staff, Individual & Council/Board. Memos-reports. "Spec" mtgs. Informal discuss. Telephone. Lectures. Parties.	Council meetings. Informal discussions. Memos-reports. Telephone.	Meetings: Committee, Unit, Training, Staff & Council/Board. Interviews. Lectures. Telephone. Informal disc., coffee, lunch. "Spec" mtgs. Parties.
MANAGEMENT	Council meetings. Individual interaction. Parties.	Mtgs: Committee, Cabinet, Supervision, Staff, individual & Council/Board. Memos-reports. "Spec" meetings. Informal disc. Lectures. Parties. Telephone.	Meetings: Committee, Cabinet, Council/Board, Budget/Record-keeping & "Spec." Parties. Memos-reports. Telephone.	State/NIMH monitor mtgs. with Board & Exec. Director. Indiv. meetings. Informal discus. "Spec" mtgs. Memos-reports. Telephone.	Meetings: Committee, Cabinet, Staff, Training, Council/Board committee, Budget/Record-keeping & "Spec." Interviews. Telephone.
SPONSOR	Council meetings.	Council meetings. Informal discus. Memos-reports. Telephone.	State & NIMH monitor mtgs. with board & exec. dir. Indiv. meetings. Informal discus. "Spec" mtgs. Memo-reports. Telephone.	Occasional state & NIMH monitor meetings. Memos-reports. Telephone.	Council/Board meetings. Interviews. Informal discus. "Spec" meetings. Telephone.
RESEARCHER	Informal discus. & interviews. Council mtgs. Parties.	Meetings: Committee, Unit, Training, Staff & Council/Board. Interviews. Informal discus. "Spec" mtgs. Telephone. Lectures. Parties.	Mtgs: Committee, Cabinet, Staff, Training, Council/Board com. Budget/record-keeping & "Spec." Interviews. Telephone. Lectures	Council/Board meetings. Interviews. Informal discus. "Spec" meetings. Telephone.	Team research meetings. "Debriefs" reactions. Res. planning & process. Telephone.

Figure 5.1. Midwest: Gatherings and scenes.

gatherings and scenes developed in Chapter 2. The participants in this figure include patients, staff, management, sponsors, and researchers as discussed in Chapter 4. As is evident here, the focus of action at the center was on group activities, and the dominant gathering was "the meeting." Individuals might also spend time writing as well as talking on the phone, reading memos, reports, files, records, grants, and so forth; however, only a small portion of each day was devoted to these non-face-to-face activities. When viewed from this perspective, it seems obvious that meetings should become a topic of study for this organization, but it was not obvious to me while I was conducting fieldwork. In fact, it took me quite some time to recognize and then to question the recurrence of this form.

In this chapter I begin to examine this recurrence by focusing on the appearance of meetings in social systems. My interest is specifically in what participants must do and say in order to produce an activity that is recognized as "a meeting" and distinguished from other activities. Along with this, I am concerned with how participants at Midwest evaluated the significance of meetings in their lives. I initiate this analysis by describing how I "discovered" meetings at the center.

Discovering Meetings

> Well, you felt you couldn't, you couldn't miss a meeting because so much was happening. . . . I remember one time my mother was in the hospital and I kept saying to the doctor . . . couldn't you keep her just a couple more days, because I've got this important meeting! (an informant)

When I first heard this comment in an interview, I should have immediately suspected that something was special about meetings at Midwest, but I did not. while conducting field work at the center I attended numerous meetings—staff meetings, unit meetings, intake meetings, board meetings, and so forth. At the time, I believed that it was important to observe these events because their content would help me understand something about what the center was doing, and in the process of attending these meetings, I would locate people whom I could talk to outside this context to discover what was "really" happening at the agency. I now believe that what was "really" happening at Midwest was meetings and that it was the meeting format that actually constituted and maintained the organization. Instead of attending meetings to learn about something else, I came to see that it was the meeting itself that should be the subject of my study. I believe that what happened to me is an example of something that often happens in fieldwork investigations, that is, the researcher conducts the study to find out

what he or she has been studying. This is what is meant when we discuss the process whereby research topics "evolve" during fieldwork. However, this process is considered by many to be "odd" and also unscientific, and so our research reports are written *as if* we were studying "our topic" from the beginning to the end of our fieldwork. This is not what happened to me. Fortunately, because the research was conducted as an ethnographic study, I was able to make use of the multiple data sources already described to develop the analysis of meetings presented in this book.

Center staff were very involved and interested in the meetings that took up a great deal of their work time. Center staff spent an average of 40% to 50% of their day in this context, whereas center management spent close to 80% of their day in meetings.[1] In addition, individuals also spent a great deal of time planning for future meetings as well as discussing past meetings. Informants repeatedly remarked on the "craziness" of the center and its meetings; however, most participants took the general form as well function of meetings for granted when trying to understand and make sense of what was happening at Midwest. As a researcher, I adopted this attitude as well, and it was only later, as I have already reported, that I decided that this view concealed some extremely important aspects of the meetings that took place at the center as well as the meeting as a social form in American society.

Constructing a Meeting

In order to analyze the influence of the meeting form on participants at Midwest, it is first necessary to describe the process of constructing a meeting at the center. This analysis suggests some general processes and procedures that are probably necessary for individuals in any organization or community to produce a meeting. The significance

[1]The time estimates reported here were made based on the researcher's field notes and calendar of activities for the various participants at the center and also on the basis of the amount of time the researcher spent in meetings during the course of the study. The time involvement and participation of staff in meetings in other U.S. organizational settings has been commented on and/or examined in several research studies, including Frankel's (1973) study of Eagleville, a therapeutic community for the treatment of drug and alcohol addition; Mansbridge's (1973, 1983) study of several participatory democracies, including Helpline, a crisis intervention center; Mintzberg's (1973) investigation of how American managers spend their time; and Wolcott's (1973) ethnography of an elementary-school principal's work life. The importance of meetings, in terms of time allocated to them, is found in both public sector and private sector bureaucracies and alternative as well as traditional organizations.

and value of the various processes to be described next to individuals and organizations will be discussed following the approach to the ethnography of meetings outlined in Chapter 3.

Negotiating a Meeting

A formal meeting requires the negotiation and ultimately the acceptance (even if it is only temporary) of a set of social relationships that define someone(s) right to call a meeting, to specify time and place, someone(s) way to start and end a meeting, and a series of rules and conventions for ordering and regulating talk and recognition of this as talk that may be legitimated (and sometimes delegitimated) by the meeting frame.

At Midwest, individuals participated in a great variety of both scheduled and unscheduled meetings. The relationship between these two types of meetings is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, as unscheduled meetings frequently interrupted scheduled meetings, creating a constant need for negotiating and renegotiating meetings at the center. It is probably for this reason that the phenomenon of meeting negotiations was more apparent in this context, but it would seem to be something that is required in all social settings.

It was not an easy task to arrange a meeting at Midwest because many participants recognized the implications, as suggested before, of agreeing to meet with one another. In some instances, individuals would flatly refuse to meet because of what acceptance of this form meant in terms of recognizing and legitimizing social relationships and cultural values. However, even when individuals did agree to meet with each other, it was no easy matter to arrange the meeting because of each individual's meeting and appointment commitments. In this case, meeting negotiations tended to focus on setting the meeting time. A brief interchange of a meeting negotiation illustrates the difficulty center actors experienced in attempting to set the time for a formal meeting. This interchange also illustrates the wealth and range of information that is communicated in such a negotiation. This particular event is taken from a tape made of a special grievance committee meeting. In this case, representatives of board and staff were meeting about a grievance filed by an employee, but because of their need to read another report, they found it necessary to break the original meeting frame in an attempt to schedule another meeting:

1. M. A. I would like to see as the schedule, and if we can swing this, you and I will have that report by noon from Carol.

We will spend Monday afternoon reviewing, copies should be made to everybody involved, and even I will have drawn conclusions by, hopefully, Monday evening. And we should be ready for a meeting Tuesday if the time allows. For everybody present. Is that fair?

2. B. G. I don't know. Because Monday night we have a steering committee meeting, and then there's always lots of stuff to do on Mondays. We need like—I would prefer to have some time Tuesday morning. Whatever we can do Monday afternoon, but I need some time Tuesday morning, cause I don't know what all, you know—whenever there's a meeting—

3. V. H. Why don't you notify us, notify Carol and me, when you've reached your final conclusions on this, and we'll set up a meeting as soon as we can thereafter.

4. M. A. I would like to take a block of time, because I know how hard it is to get everybody to meet—

5. B. G. We could do it like Tuesday—if it's like mid- to late-Tuesday afternoon, that's OK.

6. M. A. Yeah. Either that or Wednesday morning perhaps, one of the two times. Tuesday afternoon? You're shaking your head.

7. D. S. I can't make it Wednesday. I can't make it Thursday.

8. M. A. Can you make it Tuesday afternoon around/

9. D. S. Not if there's going to be a MHD negotiating meeting.

10. M. A. Is there?

11. P. R. There will be people meeting. I do not know how long they will meet. . . . I think we ought to plan it for, and notify people for, any time from 3:30 on. Depending on/

12. D. S. MHD meeting Tuesday.

13. P. R. Depending on what happens with the MHD meeting. It may not go any length of time whatsoever. On the other hand, it may require our attendance. There are plenty of those people who can be there without us. In the event that we can't make it at all on Tuesday, when would be our alternative time?

(background talk, mostly inaudible)

14. P. R. Wednesday and Thursday are the

15. M. A. You mean that's the other meeting?

16. P. R. Yeah.

17. M. A. I wasn't invited. Friday morning?

18. P. R. How come I'm not going to go?

19. M. A. You want to go?

20. P. R. I don't know.

21. D. S. Monday we'll decide that.

22. M. A. How about Friday morning?

23. B. G. If not Tuesday afternoon.

24. M. A. If not Tuesday afternoon, then Friday morning will be the next best time as I see it.

25. P. R. When's the NAS meeting?

26. F. E. Friday morning.

27. M. B. Yes.

28. M. A. I think we should set a goal of Tuesday. That's for sure.

This excerpt illustrates several aspects of the meetings at Midwest, including how the seemingly inconsequential (although often annoying) process of arranging a scheduled meeting contains innumerable possibilities for displaying as well as finding out about one's status in an organization (e.g., whose time takes precedence in setting a meeting, who "needs" to be there and who does not, who knows about which meetings). In the process of negotiating a meeting, other meetings would frequently be used as a dodge or excuse to get out of a meeting that one did not want to attend, or to see how important one's presence really was in terms of whether or not the meeting negotiation could continue without your participation. Along with this, once a meeting time was set, the organizer might cancel it because of other "pressing" matters, or an individual might cancel out of a specific meeting for the same reason, and all of these actions were effective markers of status at the center. In some cases, it was only by astutely "reading" meetings (e.g., who knows about, was/was not attending, calling/canceling, arriving or leaving, etc., a meeting) that an individual might learn about his/her place in the status system of the Center.[2]

[2]Wolcott (1973) specifically examines the significance of meetings for American educators in these terms, focusing on how meetings validate status hierarchies in the world of American school administrators. In egalitarian societies, meetings may be most important for the generation of social relationships as they may become one—if not the—major social form that constitutes and reconstitutes the organization or community over time. The importance of meetings in this regard is suggested by research on alternative organizations (e.g., Mansbridge 1983; March & Olsen 1976) and also by recent work on political language in traditional egalitarian societies (e.g., Brenneis 1984b, on Figi Indians; Lederman 1984 on Mendi community meetings; and Rosaldo 1973, 1984 on Ilongot political meetings). This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.

The preceding excerpt also illustrates how meetings structured the time of individuals at the center. In this organization a variety of meeting contexts competed for each individual's time, and meetings were constantly being scheduled, canceled, and rescheduled. Once a meeting began, it was also often impossible to say just how long it might go on, and so some meetings would go into a kind of "holding pattern" waiting for other meetings to end. This made it difficult and sometimes impossible to make a decision about when to have a meeting. As will be noted in the preceding excerpt, the participants in this particular negotiation were unable to make a final decision about the time of the next grievance committee meeting. These issues, as they affected the lives of individuals at the center and especially their ability to attend to issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

A Meeting Place

At Midwest, any place could (and probably was at one time) a meeting place. The two preferred locations were the "ed room" (named because it was the site for the original training meetings) and the "hub" that was the large meeting and gathering area located in the middle of the center. The "hub" was the preferred meeting location for large and open meetings, and the "ed room" was typically used for small- to medium-size meeting groups and for groups that wished to have private discussions. Figure 5.2 illustrates the location of these two important meeting areas within the context of the main Midwest building that was referred to by staff as "the Barn." No one at the center seemed to be too concerned about the shape of the tables; generally one or several rectangular tables would be used, depending upon the size of the meeting group. However, it was important to have a table for meetings. In fact, one of the distinguishing features between a meeting and a therapy session was the presence or absence of a center table. Tables were preferred or present in meetings and absent in therapy. Of course, meetings did occur without tables, but if it was at all possible to create some type of table in the room in which a meeting would be held, this was done.

This interest in tables would seem to be related to wanting to look at notes and reports, and so forth, or to make notes and to write, and there were certainly more than enough reports, memos, and papers to sift through at most meetings. However, very few people actually wrote anything down at meetings with the exception of a secretary who might be designated to take minutes and the researchers. Notes were sometimes scribbled on reports, and many people doodled during meetings,

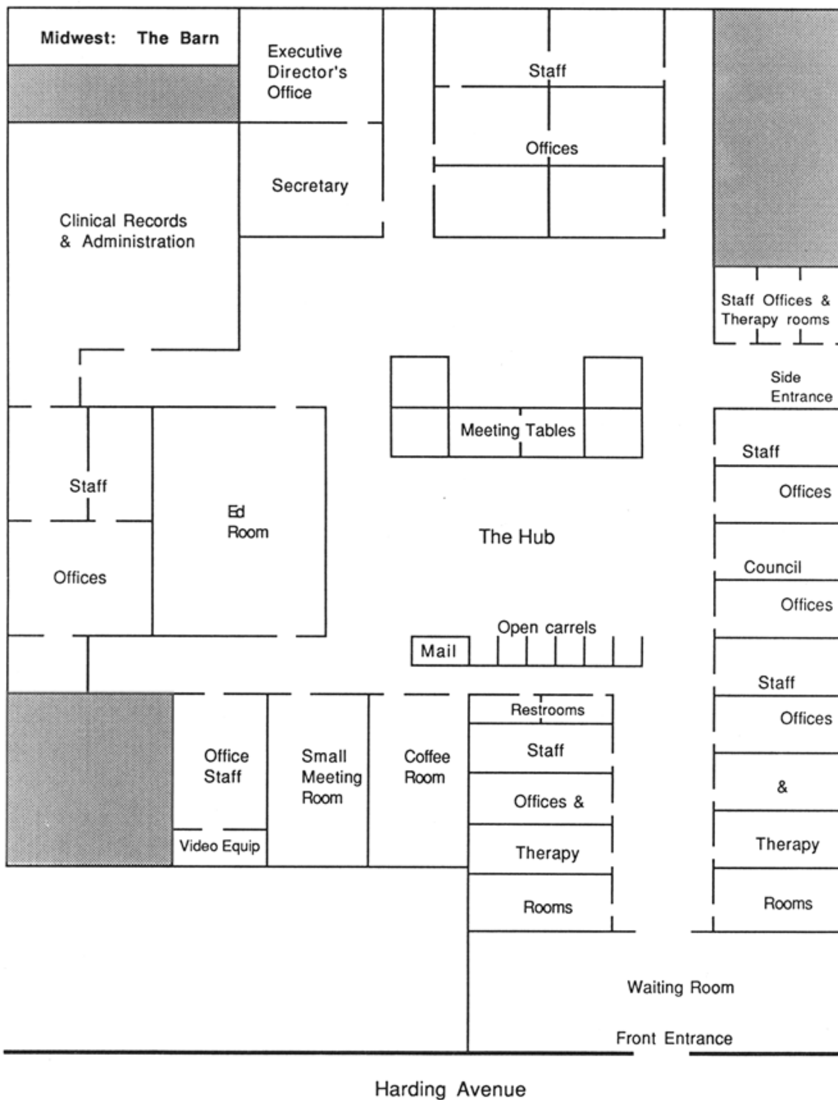


Figure 5.2. Midwest: The barn.

and some participants had a habit of passing notes to each other. Tables were very useful for holding the ubiquitous ashtrays and coffee cups, but their most important function in this context was probably as a buffer or barricade between individuals and groups, as well as serving as a central object around which talk could be focused, reinforcing the

meeting as a single-focus communicative event. Tables were also an object around which individuals could symbolically align themselves and communicate this alliance information.

Meeting Arrivals and Departures

Once a meeting has been arranged, the meeting enters a new phase as a social event. Because the formal meeting requires that individuals converge on a specific place at a particular time, the times surrounding the start and finish (as well as breaks within) this event assume great importance as they provide individuals with opportunities to exchange gossip, trade information, and hold "premeetings." Meeting arrivals and departures also provide important information on status and social relationships. For example, the issue of who arrives with whom, the seating pattern that is chosen, who chats with whom before the meeting, and finally, whose arrival signals the start of the meeting are all indirect but important communications about alliance and friendship patterns.

Individuals at Midwest spent a great deal of time waiting for meetings to happen, which often meant waiting for the "right" person to arrive. Frequently, in this context, this person was late because another meeting was running late. The right person also varied from meeting to meeting; in some instances it might be the convenor of the meeting, or one of the center's directors, but in many instances it was the person with the most "current" information. Because "current" information was typically conveyed in meetings (as opposed to memos, reports, lectures, etc.), this contributed to the holding-pattern phenomenon of meetings waiting for meetings. It was not uncommon during one of these waiting periods for individuals to dash in and out of the meeting room and back and forth to their office or possibly to sit in on another meeting until "the time had come" for the meeting. Sometimes, exasperated by the difficulty of trying to assemble everyone, or the feeling that the meeting *must* wait until X arrives, individuals would start the meeting and turn it into a discussion of their feelings of exasperation, or alternately they might dramatically cancel the meeting. Once a meeting had begun, individuals might also choose to make strong symbolic statements of disagreement. Individuals might also make less dramatic exits from meetings, underlining their status, the need for their time, or the importance of some other event, for example, a phone call, an emergency meeting, a crisis, and so forth. Once again, these interruptions are an example of the way meetings unobtrusively facilitated status displays in this context.

Meetings at Midwest were important as "prestige auctions," in the sense that Bloch (1975) uses the term to characterize Merina council meetings and as dramatic events (see discussion in Chapter 10). Midwest meetings were *the* place to "be seen and be heard," especially when something "hot" was on the agenda (e.g., a personnel or fiscal crisis). These meetings never started or ended on time, and a board meeting of 4 to 5 hours was not uncommon during a crisis experience. Attendance at meetings was rarely mandatory, but for many staff meetings, board meetings, council meeting, and crisis meetings it was standing room only. A staff member recalls her first staff meeting in an interview:

> So I came here . . . and my first meeting at that time—nobody comes now—I guess it's not exciting enough—I thought it must be the theatre matinee of the week, because there was hardly a seat. You had to come early to get a seat if you remember it. You sat on the floor and brought your lunch and it was always at least someone crying, screaming, just on a rampage and not knowing the people too well. I had trouble figuring out first whose side was who and decided early in the game to keep my mouth shut because neither side came up with anything I was too hep to. . . . I don't know what they did with their clients; it was not important at that point, but to stay right there and hear the hysterics. . . .

The Meeting Frame

March and Olsen (1976:11) suggest that a decision process transforms the behavior of individuals into organizational action, but they do not say how, in fact, this important process happens. It will be suggested here that it is actually the meeting form (and not the decision *per se*) that performs this transformation because, as a social form, it brings people together and creates the possibility for them to assess each other as individuals and to generate as well as comment on their relationships with each other, and all of this is framed as the "business" of the group or organization. The process of establishing or utilizing rules of interaction to communicate the message "this is a meeting" is a subtle but very important framing process that can best be observed at the beginning of a meeting. This is the period when individuals move from one form of interaction (chats, two-party discussions, etc.) into the meeting form. Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee (1978) analyzed this process by observing the transition from a coffee break back to a meeting at an American radio station (this study was discussed in Chapter 3). At Midwest, this process can be illustrated using tapes from board meetings. In some instances, the tape recorder was turned on just prior to the beginning of a meeting.

This transition is evident as the participants jointly construct and then attend to the event as a meeting:

1. G. S. [sotto voce] Who's that fellow at the end of the table?
2. G. A. Uhhahh, Might be—
3. M. J. Yeah, the stuff's all out there [reference to papers on the table].
4. G. S. Let's start. 11:00! Gee whiz! [gavel, laughter]
5. G. A. It's later than our usual time.
6. G. S. Fred. Do you want to start the executive director's report, Fred?
7. F. H. You're supposed to do things like minutes first.
8. G. S. Well, the minutes are number three on the agenda tonight. We change things once in a while to keep the troops alert.
9. F. H. One of the reasons for not having it mailed was that we were waiting for Dr. Stein to come. If he had come, it would have been a different report. Since he didn't come, we have all this luxurious time. I'll go quickly through the report [G. S. and G. A. whispering] reading some parts, and you can ask questions on others. It doesn't pretend to be a complete report on activities. The first section deals with personnel changes and then the training part. . . [report continues and meeting continues].

Once the meeting frame has been established, everyone attends to the discussion *as if* it concerns the specific business and details of operating the organization. In the preceding example, the focus of this part of the meeting is the executive director's report, and all discussion is assumed to be related to this report. What is perhaps most important about the meeting frame and the transformation it produces, however, is that it creates a context for individual and group social relationships, agreements, and disagreements to be discussed and framed as a discussion of the business of the organization. This occurs, for example, when individuals juggle about the placement of items on the agenda (see preceding interchange between G. S. and F. H.), or when the presentation of reports becomes a context for disagreement among individuals. This frequently occurred in board meetings when Fred Hart (F. H.) presented his executive director's report and board members who were in conflict with him (including Greg Stone, G. S., who was president of the board) would question Fred about every detail, point, statistic, and so forth. This process would sometimes occur throughout the presentation of the report, as the executive director would present information

and a board member would question him or correct him, and he would respond by correcting the board member's correction (usually making a very long statement). This interchange would then be followed by more questions and corrections from board members as the discussion would proceed into the early hours of the morning, as was the case in the following example:

1. F. H. [presenting executive director's report to the board] A major effort in the last two months has been spent working on the MHD Grant in Aid application. Pardon?
2. H. M. Do you mean two weeks or two months?
3. F. H. Two months.
4. H. M. I wondered if you meant weeks or months. You meant two months actually.
5. F. H. There was one at the end of April, and there's one now at the end of May. In terms of activity report, when I looked at what I've been doing for the past two months, there've been three major areas of effort. One is the MHD Grant in Aid application, the second is the NIMH continuation grant, and the third is getting involved in redesigning and improving some of our procedures, including some direct work with patients out of rehab services. . . . There are no major changes to the NIMH grant since the West Park Care Committee was not dropped to a smaller case load and a smaller participation.
6. G. S. Well, Fred you said there was no change. Actually, there is the dropoff though. Which gives people/
7. F. H. Instead of 75%, 15% drop but in terms of our NIMH grant, that has not changed, basically. Except for the dropping of the St. Theresa program last year. The only change is that we ask for 5% over what they gave us last year, and then we had to calculate 60% of this instead of 75% of it/
8. M. R. Didn't Wanda make some positive comments about the Mission Charities' Program for the Aged while she was here?
9. F. H. Wanda?
10. M. R. Yes.
11. F. H. Oh, yeah.
12. M. R. That you didn't mention. I don't think you mentioned. I didn't hear it.
13. F. H. I didn't, but you know it's reciprocal. I think we find them a specialist service that we need. They find us a specialist service that they need. Staff identify with Mission Charities *and*

with Midwest, including Gary Edwards, program director, who's been with services to the aged for 17 years.

14. G. S. What would happen if that money [for the program for the aged] didn't come through? That $15,000 from MHD.
15. F. H. It's not *$15,000!* It's 15%!
16. G. S. 15%.
17. F. H. And it's really not a horrendous amount of money. [report and meeting continues]

In these examples, the meeting frame is clearly established, and individuals are engaged in a question–answer routine presumably about the nature of the information contained in the executive director's report. The meeting frame facilitates this discussion, whereas it also provides participants with a way "of challenging or reaffirming friendship or trust relationships, antagonisms, power or status relationships" (March and Olsen 1976:11) while they are assured of an audience and all in the guise of discharging business at work (see also Duranti 1984:218). Meetings provide a perfect form for doing this because discussions of social relationships can always be framed as "business"—and therefore conflict is legitimated and framed as "business." In this way, the social relationships acted out in the meeting are legitimated, and the conflict that may occur is also legitimated and framed as "for the group/organization/business."

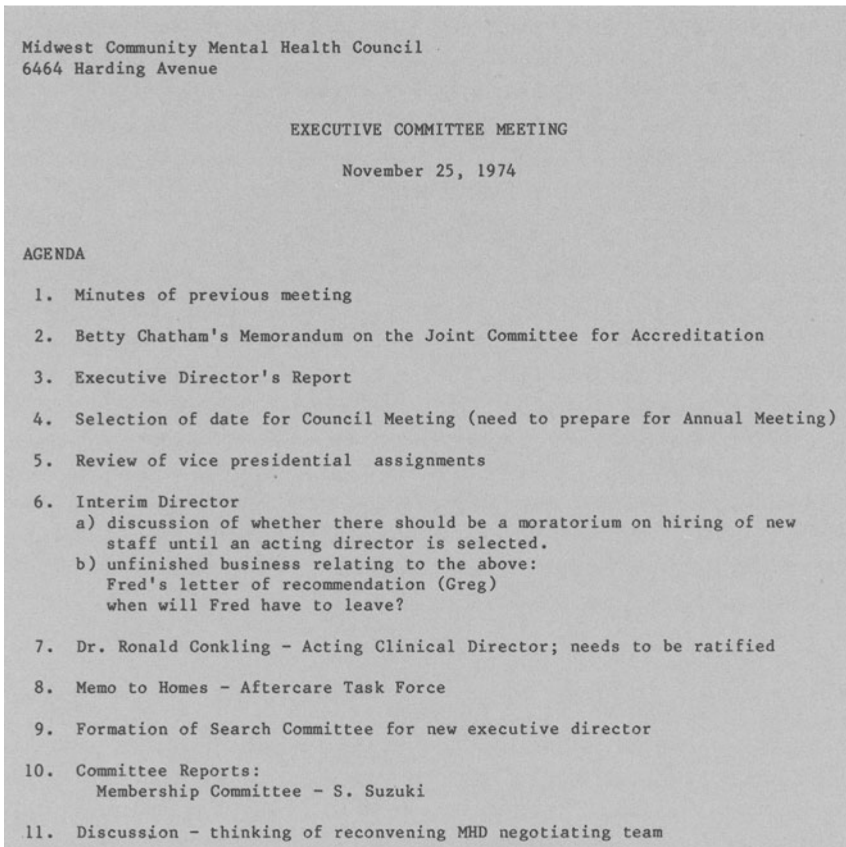
Meeting Talk and Style

I have suggested that meetings may be characterized according to the way in which speech and action are regulated, results are produced or expected, and responsibility is assumed (as discussed in Chapter 3). These features of meetings are typically taken for granted by participants, but they contain powerful statements about cultural patterns and constraints that are not generally recognized unless groups with different patterns and expectations come into contact with each other. When this happens, meeting talk serves to both comment on as well as sometimes to exascerbate cultural differences between groups.

At Midwest, board and staff members at the center were frequently in conflict with one another over their interpretation of what community mental health meant as a treatment and service ideology. The organization and regulation of talk in board meetings and in staff meetings and differences in expectations about talk in meetings involving board and staff members frequently led to the exascerbation of hostilities between these two groups. This amplification of differences frequently occurred

in the very same meetings that had been called to resolve disagreements between these conflicting parties.

Board meetings (and related council and committee meetings) regulated speech according to a very loose interpretation of *Robert's Rules of Order*, and there was also the expectation that formal and preferably written reports would be presented, reviewed, and debated. For board and council meetings, an agenda was prepared to organize the discussion, and minutes were taken and kept for the record (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4 for examples of a meeting agenda and meeting minutes). For over 2 years, the board and the center's executive director, who were in conflict with each other, fought about whether or not the executive director should be required to present a written report to all meetings. All board and council meetings were also tape-recorded by participants


Midwest Community Mental Health Council
6464 Harding Avenue

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

November 25, 1974

AGENDA

1. Minutes of previous meeting
2. Betty Chatham's Memorandum on the Joint Committee for Accreditation
3. Executive Director's Report
4. Selection of date for Council Meeting (need to prepare for Annual Meeting)
5. Review of vice presidential assignments
6. Interim Director
   a) discussion of whether there should be a moratorium on hiring of new staff until an acting director is selected.
   b) unfinished business relating to the above:
   Fred's letter of recommendation (Greg)
   when will Fred have to leave?
7. Dr. Ronald Conkling - Acting Clinical Director; needs to be ratified
8. Memo to Homes - Aftercare Task Force
9. Formation of Search Committee for new executive director
10. Committee Reports:
    Membership Committee - S. Suzuki
11. Discussion - thinking of reconvening MHD negotiating team

Figure 5.3. Midwest meeting agenda.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

November 25, 1974 Meeting called to order at 9:15 pm

Members present:	Members absent:
Marjorie Bell	Maria Martinez (excused)
Joanna Curtis	Jay Austin
Mildred Rose	Bill Okawa
Jim Turner	Jo Maruyama (excused)
John Longhouse	
Ellie Marsh	
Manny Giovanni	
Gary Morris	
James Ratner	
Luis Alvarez	
Gregory Stone	

MOTION Greg: To formally commend the Task Force for doing an excellent job. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTION James: To correct the minutes of the November 11th executive committee meeting regarding the charge of the Task Force; to reflect that the charge is to select procedures for selecting an acting director and not to transfer the responsibilities of the executive director to the acting director. Motion seconded and carried.

MOTION Jim - James: Accept the report of the Task Force on procedures for acting executive director. Motion carried.

Discussion of Fred's letter of recommendation:
Fred had requested that Greg's original letter of recommendation be shortened. Shortened version read to executive committee.

MOTION James - Mildred: Move that letter be placed in Fred's personnel file. Motion carried.

Discussion of whether there should be a moratorium on hiring of new staff until an acting executive director is selected:
Fred, speaking for Ron Conkling, pointed out that there are certain job categories that should not be affected by a moratorium - 1) Coordinator of Rehab Services; there is a person almost ready to be hired and that person was selected by joint staff-council procedures and 2) people to be hired by component directors where there is a scarcity of staff.

MOTION Joanna - Jim: Move to postpone indefinitely agenda item 6a. Motion carried.

Fred will be here, at the most, two weeks in November. Doesn't know when he will have to leave exactly.

Figure 5.4. Midwest meeting minutes.

as a convenience for preparing the minutes and also in order to document "what really happened" if questions were raised (and they often were). Board and council members viewed themselves as assuming ultimate responsibility for making "major decisions" (e.g., financial, budget, executive director) regarding the center's operations, whereas committee meetings were expected to produce recommendations that they

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING November 25, 1974 page 2

Executive Director's Report:

Tricia Denton has started as Coordinator of C&FS. Sol. Leiberman has left.

Mr. Oakley is going to be the pro bono legal counsel for MCMHC. He comes from the firm of Chatham & Stein. He is going to treat us as if we were one of his regular clients. He's going to look into the matter of recording his time as donated time which would not only be pro bono (free) to us but also serve as community match for MHD grant-in-aid. However, his time availability will probably be limited and we may need to seek additional counsel. He is seeking to get at least one other member of his firm to help us. His first matter of representation for us will be dealing in small claims court to get the funds owed to Midwest by MHD.

Level One Opening began today in order to increase the number of clients for whom we get credit from MHD. Moved from one levelsystem of care to a two level system of care.

West Park Task Force on Child Abuse has submitted a grant request to HEW for a three year demonstration project. The Task Force decided to incorporate in order to be the fiscal agent for a grant because they could not resolve the question of which agency would serve as the best agent for the grant. Council and staff are represented on the board. Josh Silver is the chairman.

LCC is going thru a crisis. Symptomatic of it are that client and staff are feeling anxious and overwhelmed leading to a high level of tension pervading LCC. List of causes read. As a temporary measure they have closed their intake and other outpost will have to accept sustaining care clients.

Received a mailing from State Hospital Citizens' Advisory Council regarding a series of meetings November 15 and December 11 (rcvd after Nov. 15 meeting). MHD is re-examining its boundaries and the Council felt it was important to get citizen input from all the planning areas. Need to find a representative to State Hospital Citizens' Advisory Council.

A memorandum from the Midwest Community Development and Housing Coordinating Committee and an article both regarding the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 were passed out and discussed.
Need to appoint an official liaison to Community Development Planning.

Discussion of Rewiring of Barn that was done.

MOTION Ellie - James: Approve the rewiring of the Barn. Motion carried.

NIMH Site Visit - December 11/12 or 12/13., Ken Martin with MHD staff Andrew Vernon, Bruce Long, and Don Perry will be visiting. Visit will center around administrative committee relationships - authority, responsibility and structure. Also to be covered is administration at the Center, record keeping, fiscal planning, board operations, and relationships with other affiliate organizations. Agenda for site visit needs to be set up with staff person who will be heading the visit. Paul Chase designated as the proper person to handle the NIMH site visit in this transition period.

Figure 5.4. (*Continued*)

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING November 25, 1974 page 3

MHD - Budget
Preliminary revised budget passed out.

Fiscal '75 Monitoring; Fiscal '76 Budgeting:
MHD is instituting a tighter fiscal monitoring system. Every month Andrew Vernon will have to file a program by program report on each program at the Center. In effect it is a ghost payroller report; it amount to a fiscal audit. Protests on the part of MHD people required to do that and some staff at the Center. Written description of monitoring system is not available. Try to use Association of Community Mental Health Agencies to get every agency to question this procedure. Funds will be withheld if there is a variance from the fiscal plans in terms of the number of clients seen.

Meeting of Association of Community Mental Health Agencies on December 5th or 12th. Need to designate an interim liason to ACMHA from staff - that's an executive director function. Ronald, Wendy, or Paul could fulfill that function on a temporary basis. Probably all three should go to combine the knowledge they have.

MOTION Joanna - Jim: Move that the next council meeting be December 16, 1974 and the Annual Meeting will be January 20, 1975. Motion carried.

MOTION Jim: Move that Dr. Ronald Conkling be ratified as Acting Clinical Director. Motion seconded and carried.

Betty Chatham's Memorandum on the Joint Committee on Accreditation passed out and discussed.
July, 1975 appropriate target date for deadline on getting accreditation business together. Joanna or Mildred are going to try to attend the Friday morning meetings of the Joint Committee on Accreditation and report back to the executive committee.

Memo to Homes: Discussed.

Virginia Respigi and Peter Smith volunteered to report to the executive committee about the Aftercare Task Force.

MOTION Jim - Joanna: Request be made that this report be made to the Council at the December 16th meeting. Motion carried.

Membership Committee Report:
Tabled until next meeting because of lengthy agenda of tonite's meeting. On agenda for December 9th meeting.

Discussion of Reconvening the MHD Negotiating Team: Final draft by Andrew Vernon needs to be reviewed.

MOTION James: Move that the MHD Negotiating Team be reconvened. Motion seconded and carried.

Discussion of Formation of Search Committee for new executive director:
Staff and executive committee to make recommendations as to who should be on the Search Committee - persons from NIMH, MHD, community people, staff and council.

lwm

Figure 5.4. (*Continued*)

would take to the board for action.[3] The board and council adopted a majority vote decision rule, although in practice there was often pressure for consensus.

At board meetings, speech style ranged from informal reporting and discussion about specific issues to reports and presentations that were quite complex, detailed, confusing, and difficult to follow without a great deal of knowledge about grant and funding regulations and bureaucratic agencies and procedures. Along with this, it was necessary to become accustomed to the "alphabet-soup" speaking style preferred by participants (this was their term for their tendency to speak in acronymns of agencies and regulations). In the following example, Fred Hart discusses the intricacies and financial implications of servicing certain types of clients while functioning as an affiliate of the center:

> Fred See we've been through this with Molly and George. Is there a PA66783 waiting list for sheltered workshops? If you opened up a workshop outside of the planning area, then you could do it. But as long as there are ARV eligibles, perhaps, in the planning area, as long as there's a waiting list, there gets to be a monitoring conflict, and what they do, they threaten us with fund cutoffs in grants. So if you're going to expand, there needs to be some expansion capital. As well as operating capital. For those kinds of things. Then also, there has to be an estimation of the amount of ARV income per year that you're going to get. That has to be put on one of the 88Ds. They check—they will check out the amount of time—let's say Tim's salary is [not audible] . . . gets translated down to a cost accounting basis. He's spending 50% of his time working with 66783 clients and 50% of his time working with clients from outside 66783. They want us to take that 50% of his salary off. We're now going through that with TAL.

Staff meetings, and cabinet meetings, training meetings, and unit meetings all involved center staff in discussion with each other, and nonstaff members were typically excluded from these events. Speech in these meetings was regulated by turn-taking rules and the expectation that the points of speakers should relate to each other, but in these meetings (especially training meetings and staff meetings), it was also expected that individuals should "express their feelings" and "share themselves" with each other. For example, an interchange between Sylvia and Howard in a staff meeting:

[3]Bailey's (see 1965, also 1983) contrast between arena and elite committees is used to compare and contrast the variety of meeting groups that existed at the center in Chapter 7.

Howard *I don't feel that way.* I feel like, I think that's going the route of blame yourself first is what is getting everybody to lay down flat around here and then crawl.

Sylvia *I didn't say that, Howard,* and I'm really sorry that you heard it that way. I'm saying hold each other accountable and hold yourself accountable and that's a lot different than blaming yourself.

Howard Alright, Sylvia, that's *my* interpretation of it, and I'll take responsibility for that, but it's like an attitude, I feel that is, I think that that is something that has gone on and it doesn't work. It get's us more depressed and more laid out, and there has to be an answer outside of ourselves.

This merger of therapeutic speech with meeting speech was developed early in the center's history in the training meetings as one informant recalls:

> people would talk, discuss their own problems, their own hangups. And the theory . . . was that by discussing your own problems, the problems you have seen in other people, that you begin to understand what causes these things . . . by this sort of discussion, they would train themselves. . . . This went on for months and months . . . you really weren't an "in person" until you really spilled your guts.

A "good meeting," from this perspective, might involve a great deal of emotion, expressions of conflict, crying, posturing, yelling, and so forth.[4] Less emotional and more formal discussions and meeting speech were often a source of frustration to staff who saw this as a way to "deny feelings" and "suppress emotions." For example, an interchange between the board president and a unit director in a staff meeting illustrates this difference in speech expectations (this meeting is examined in detail in Chapter 9). The board president was attending this particular meeting because the board had recently announced its decision for executive director to staff. The decision was not a popular one, and the president was attending for "feedback." The unit director,

[4]The way in which displays of passion are interpreted and used to exert power over other people is the specific subject of F. G. Bailey's book, *The Tactical Uses of Passion* (1983). Mansbridge (1973) examines the emotional advantages and disadvantages of participatory, face-to-face decision making using examples from a number of American participatory groups. Her observations suggest the following:

> The process of making an important decision involving strong feelings on all sides can completely dominate the emotional lives of the people in the group. Members may have nightmares, talk and think about nothing else, cry uncontrollably during the day, have fits of paranoia, be unable to work, begin to distrust themselves, and often have to leave the group. In a Vermont town, several people do not go to town meetings because the emotional strain is so great. One says, without exaggerating, that he is afraid of having a heart attack, and many residents complain about the "bickering," "fussing," and "arguments." (p. 359)

Tracy Brown, who speaks in this example had recently announced that she was resigning because of her dissatisfaction with what was happening at the center, and, in this meeting, another unit director, Carol Winter, had spoken in a "confessional speech" that she wished to resign but felt that she could not do this because she needed the money.

> Tracy Greg, I would like to say one other thing to you. You've known me for a long time and you've known Carol for a long time, and when you hear Carol standing up I don't know how it isn't tearing you apart [Tracy is crying] to see that the only reason she's staying here is that she is trapped. I mean, I've known Carol a long time and that tore me up inside, and I felt guilty because I'm not trapped. I felt good, on one hand, but really guilty on the other, and when you hear me leaving, I can't understand that that doesn't upset you. I can't believe it! You don't say things like that!
>
> Greg I don't want to see you leave, I don't want to see Carol leave.
>
> Tracy *But you don't say it, Greg! That's the whole point!* [Tracy is screaming and crying.] Don't you see how people leave feeling like they could disappear in the night *and it doesn't even matter.* I've been here 2½ years, Greg, we've had a lot of conversations, and you don't even address them.

This emphasis on emotional discussion did not rule out the expectation that other products might result from meetings, such as decisions, policies, recommendations, feedback, and so forth. Cabinet members, for example, were expected to report to staff in the weekly staff meeting about administrative actions, and the cabinet itself was assumed to have some authority for center operations. However, it was not clear what this authority was, and this lack of clarity was frequently the subject of debate. No formalized decision rule was utilized in these meetings. There was, however, sometimes pressure for consensus about issues, and at other times there seemed to be a press for disagreement and conflict. (The relationship of meetings to issues of power, authority, and conflict are discussed in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8.)

Even though they used different, and frequently conflicting, speaking styles, participants also used many of the same approaches to argumentation discussed by Howe (1984:196–197) for the Kuna of Panama and Barber (1966) for American local government committees as outlined in Chapter 3. I use Howe's style for presenting this information for Midwest. Examples were taken from speech in both staff and council or board meetings:

1. *Citing the established rules:* "Did you know that MHD does not give us any match for education positions?"

2. *Bending the rules:* "What we need to do is to forget about what has gone down and essentially demonstrate through who we are serving, as we get the hard figures of the clientele that we serve, then we can begin to drive home the fact that we are serving poor people no matter what they say about our poverty area designation. This is what I think we should focus on."

3. *Pointing out past precedents:* "You'll find through the centuries that the people you have in your federal records are below the poverty income level which is necessary to qualify for poverty classification."

4. *Suggesting that certain courses of action or inaction will have dire consequences:* "If we simply take this from MHD, I think we're absolutely—we've got our heads in the sand, because we're not going to have the money, and we're not going to have the positions and we're not going to be able to offer the services."

5. *Arguing from accepted ideas about human nature, about what motives and action one can expect from people:* "They're saying, 'Hey listen, people under me can only work under certain kinds of conditions, can only work with a case load of x number of people and right now that is just too much.' You have to hire more staff because in order for these people to do a good job that's what needs to be done."

6. *They buttress their positions with ideology* (in Howe's list, cosmology is included here): "If you're going to think about *the community,* Greg, and not think about us—I mean, think about something *even* more important than this council, right" (speaker is pounding on the table).

"And I've been very insistent that they stop thinking about what they'd like to do, you know, from the staff perspective, this is the kind of work I like, and start thinking about, these are the *needs of the community.*"

Postmeetings

When a meeting is concluded, individuals move on to a series of other events, including "postmeetings" (where information may be exchanged on a more informal basis) and "postmortems" of the meeting that has just occurred. After the fact, a meeting is objectified and becomes tangible evidence of organizational activity or inactivity (depending on the assessment of the meeting that has just occurred). When meetings become jokes in an organization, then what transpires within them may be discounted as not serious. In this way, a meeting may negate itself and the "on-topic" information that is conveyed within it. This may be one reason that organizations such as Midwest, with a high frequency of meetings, often operate on a weak information base (see

Cohen and March 1974) and also find themselves constantly replicating ideas and information (in the jargon of many organizations, including Midwest, this was popularly referred to as "reinventing the wheel").

This is a particularly interesting phenomenon in a system such as Midwest where participants often reported that they were "drowning in information and meetings." The meetings did indeed seem to generate volumes of information (verbal and written) for individuals to digest. For example, in one typical board meeting, I received more than 20 pages of reports, memos, minutes, and other written material about topics to be discussed on this one occasion. In addition, in this particular meeting, individuals were attempting to deal with at least five different issues, including an impending site visit for accreditation, negotiations with the staff union, reading and responding to a recent NIMH site visit report about the center, budget plans for the upcoming fiscal year, and clarification of personnel policies. Each one of these issues required a great deal of effort to understand, and each one would seem to have great consequences for the operations of the center.

It seems clear that a surplus of information was generated by all of the meeting activity, but because it was generated by this form, the information was often negated and the result would be duplicated information, but there was no learning (in the sense that March and Olsen 1976:22 use this term) from it. In fact, it might be proposed that, instead of the typical view that information informs meetings, what seems to happen is that meetings generate information that becomes more grist for the mill of the meeting processes but irrelevant as information *per se*. This is why, in certain systems such as Midwest, information is so readily duplicated, ignored, and/or "reinvented."[5] Information is not really the point here; meetings are the point. To state this another way, what I am suggesting is that communication of task information is not what the meetings are about; instead meetings are what the information is about (i.e., as a stimulus for more meetings, involving other participants, etc.).

Once a meeting has occurred, it is also possible to place blame on the event (i.e., "the meeting made me do it"), as opposed to individuals, for any flaws or problems in a decision or action (see Tropman 1980). As suggested in Chapter 3, this phenomenon is very common in organizational systems and particularly useful when decisions that are believed to be of major importance are made and actions that result are

[5]This point is dramatically illustrated in Alford's (1975) analysis of the efforts of 20 different commissions of investigation created to examine problems of the New York health system. After investigating the commissions' activities over a 20-year time period, he discovered that the last commission was asking the same questions as the first.

not successful or not popular. This tactic was frequently used at Midwest, as participants often reported that it was "the meeting" and it's dynamics that *led them to a decision or action.* As one informant stated:

> There's the dynamics of the meeting that leads you to a certain decision, and people on the outside wonder, "How in hell did you decide that," and if you weren't at the meeting, you really can't appreciate how it was done.

Interpreting the Meetings

Meetings are texts for cultural interpretation both during and after the occurrence of the event. It took me some time, however, to understand the significance of these occasions in this way. Although informants frequently remarked on the number as well as extraordinary amount of time that they seemed to spend in meetings, for the most part, everyone took the form as well as function of meetings for granted. When informants attempted to make sense of the meetings to themselves they typically interpreted them in one of three ways: (1) as "crazy" and nonsensical events; (2) as "a colossal waste of time"; or (3) as "dangerous." For the most part, individuals made these interpretations while regaling themselves with stories about particular meetings. The entire phenomenon of storytelling is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9; however, I present one example of the process of interpreting meetings as "a waste of time" here.

"We Just Go On and On"

The feeling that meetings involved people in endless discussions that never seemed to accomplish anything was a common interpretation.[6] These types of remarks were frequently made either before or after meetings or during times waiting for a meeting to happen. Individuals would frequently make comments such as "I don't know why we're even having this meeting, its just a waste of time" or "we always lose sight of what it is we start out with, we just go on and on and never seem to accomplish anything." In describing a particularly frustrating and "crazy" series of committee meetings set up to establish criteria to

[6]This evaluation of meetings as tedious, inefficient, and a waste of time is very common in traditional as well as alternative organizations. As discussed in Chapter 3, this view is related to the cultural assumption that talk is inaction; however, as Austin (1975) reminds us, talk is action, "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something" (pp. 6–7). Recent research on political speech in egalitarian societies helps us to reconceptualize the role of talk in meetings along these lines (see discussion of this issue in Chapter 2 and also Chapter 10).

evaluate the administration of the center, James Ratner, a board member recalls:

> James It was bizarre. They were supposed to talk about setting up some criteria to evaluate job performance on the part of administrative people, and we spent a long time discussing whether or not it was possible to set up criteria to evaluate anybody, and it was the contention of some staff people that it was impossible and that if the council tried to do any evaluation it was overstepping its bounds and no matter what was said it was too vague. . . . It wasn't objective, it was subjective, it was really personality, and Christ it was crazy, and we met a long time. I don't remember how many times, but we met many times. . . . Every point was voted on. If there was a change in wording then that was voted on, everything was voted on. It was a large committee, and I think it was pretty well attended. Greg and Carol alternated in chairing the sessions; this was to lend objectivity to the whole proceeding, and there was a secretary from each side. Maria and somebody, I don't remember who. . . . But there was somebody from the staff side who took the minutes and that was all compared, all of that was put together and it was given out.
>
> Helen One side's minutes were compared to the other side's minutes?
>
> James Yes. . . . There were a lot of things to take down; everybody wanted to say something and there were, whoever sat next to the person chairing the meeting had a piece of paper with names of people raising their hand and point them out in order and say first it's this person and then that person and then this person, they just went on and on.

In order to bring one series of committee deliberations to a final conclusion, a consultant for the center resorted to the technique of literally locking the meeting group into the ed room and refusing to allow anyone in or out for any reason. Even with this somewhat unusual intervention, the committee deliberations still lasted over 5 hours. On the whole, most efforts to shorten the time spent in meetings, or to curtail discussion, were unsuccessful, and meetings continued to take up large portions of the staff's days as well as the board's nights. Mansbridge (1983) suggests that in participatory organizations, struggling to utilize consensual decision-making procedures, the time it takes to make a decision as well as to deal with differences and conflict is greatly increased. At Midwest individuals struggled to achieve consensus on some occasions but they seemed to spend a great deal of time in conflict with each other. The meetings became an important context for generat-

ing and displaying the conflicts that existed between groups at the center (see the preceding description of the criteria committee). The continued existence of conflict between individuals and groups both served to produce and reproduce meetings and therefore the continual constitution and reconstitution of the center as a social system.

Summary

Although common, a meeting is not as simple as it appears to be. In fact, when looked at from the perspective taken in this chapter, a meeting is an extraordinarily complex phenomenon that requires that a variety of individuals agree to converge at a particular time and place to participate in a specific type of talk and action. By definition, meetings require the sustained interaction of individuals, but this interaction cannot be taken for granted as it is always a problematic accomplishment. The very act of constructing a meeting provides individuals and organizations with a way to understand as well as to change their place in the social system. The process of constructing a meeting also elicits multiple meanings and feelings from participants about the significance of their individual and collective actions.

As meetings require the interaction of individuals to produce the event, meetings also interact with each other to attract participation and to distract individuals from engaging in other types of gatherings and activities. These interactive processes are also frequently taken for granted, as they are assumed to be "the way of life" in organizational systems, but I believe that they require a closer inspection if we wish to understand both the impact of the meeting and the meeting*s* on the work life of individuals at Midwest. These issues are taken up in the following chapter.

8:50 P.M.

Greg *OK, next item on the agenda is a report from the treasurer. He's not here right now. But there is a request that involves the—came out of the Budget and Finance Committee meeting. At the present time, any revolving fund checks for small amounts, petty cash reimbursements, and so forth have either got to be signed by Fred or John Dante. And it can be rather a nuisance to find John or Fred and bother them to sign the 10- or 15- or 20-dollar checks when Andrea Rodgers, who is actually involved when they come in. They present to Andrea what the amounts are for, and the suggestion is that Andrea Rodgers also be authorized to sign these checks. This is something that has to be recommended by the Council, and she's demonstrated the necessary prudence and reliability, John assures me, and she should be given the right to sign these checks.*

Mary *So moved.*

Greg *Do I hear a second?*

Mildred *Second.*

Greg *All those in favor signify by saying, Aye.*

All *Aye.*

Greg *Opposed. Abstaining. Very good. The motion is carried. Next thing on the agenda is the correspondence. I have two letters here that I wrote to members who are no longer on the steering committee or on the council. One letter is to Heather Arnold. It says, "Dear Heather: It is with deep regret that we accept your resignation from the Midwest Community Mental Health Council. Your contributions to the growth of the Council and Center have been many through the Steering Committee, Personnel Committee, Membership Committee and Alcoholism Committee, to name only a few. The issue of spouses of staff members being on the Steering Committee is one with which many of us had to wrestle. While we wanted to*

maintain your membership, the principle involved was also an important one. I sincerely hope that after considering the dilemma which all of us faced, you can understand that the decision made was not to oppose you, but to uphold what seems to be a vital principle to eliminate the possibility of conflict of interest. It is unfortunate that in enforcing this principle the ax should first fall on someone like you, Heather, because there is no one whom I personally consider to be more sincerely involved with the entire problems of the West Park community than you are. In my mind there is no one who has been more concerned for this community than you, but I trust that in that capacity you will continue to participate and give us your valued input. With or without a vote I will value it just the same. Sincerely, Greg Stone." Heather and I have had arguments at times, but there is nobody that has given of herself more to this community than Heather has.

The other letter is to Gary Martin, who was the assistant administrator, I guess was the official title, at Northshore Hospital, and who now is with St. Stephen's Hospital in Lake City. "On behalf of the entire Midwest Mental Health Council, I would like to extend our thanks to you for your many contributions to the efforts of the council and your continuing support of the center and its work in the community. It's been a pleasure working with you and we will miss your participation in the ongoing work of the council. Since you are no longer able to represent Northshore Hospital on the council, we will contact the council in order to get a new representative. Mr. Gene Witkin, if possible, since he was your recommendation. We wish you the best of luck in your new position at St. Stephen's Hospital, and anticipate that you will find your work there rewarding. Please feel free to drop in or call us any time. We hope that you will maintain an interest in the Midwest Community Mental Health Council." Those are the letters as of now [text deleted]

Ellie *News. It has not come up before the board, and the board meeting of this Wednesday. It is not on the agenda. We don't know if we've won a battle or a part of a war or what's happening yet, but we understand there will be a variation on the proposal. When she will bring it in will be when we're asleep. I hope not. [laughter] But we've got to keep our eyes open. I spent an hour, two hours in the district office this morning.*

Marjorie *But she does plan to redistrict, I mean to redistribute staff anyway. Regardless of whether there's a . . .*

Ellie *Yeah. I just did a survey on that, and Wendy has something to say on our board statement on it.*

Greg *Did you want to say something more? Ellie?*

Ellie *I have a layout of all the certificated teachers and civil service positions that are in the district offices of Area B. And if anyone wants duplications of this, someone can run them off from this original. If somebody would like, social workers, speech correctionists, etc., etc.*

Greg *Hum?*

John *I'd like a copy?*

Greg *Well, Rita can make/*

John *Well, I heard pretty much through [Rita talking in background] the consultants at the area level that we're still going to lose a social worker in this district.*

Ellie *We can't afford to lose one. We have/*

John *[inaudible] on paper [inaudible]*

Ellie *[inaudible] two social workers on paper. And indeed District 17 has not gotten what it should get. District 19 has by the way. I'm not [inaudible]*

John *[inaudible] What they have in the budget and what they have in reality are two different things.*

Ellie *Are two different [inaudible] Well, what they have are social workers at certain schools.*

John *Right.*

Ellie *And the problem is that when you go through the budget, what's in the district office budget may not reflect what actually is available in the district. That's true in 20. For example, we have a teacher nurse stationed at Willis who does not appear in the district office budget. But this is true in every district. This is what has been funded through the district offices and this is the approach, one of the approaches that has to be used on [inaudible] this particular thing.*

Rita *[softly] Run about six or seven copies if you want to have them.*

Greg *[softly] You can to do it later if you want.*

Chapter 6

Meetings, Time, and Attention

The life cycle of the committee is so basic to our knowledge of current affairs that it is surprising more attention has not been paid to the science of comitology. The first and most elementary principle of this science is that a committee is organic rather than mechanical in its nature; it is not a structure but a plant. It takes root and grows, it flowers, wilts, and dies, scattering the seed from which other committees will bloom in their turn. Only those who bear this principle in mind can make real headway in understanding the structure and history of modern government.

C. Northcote Parkinson
Parkinson's Law (1957:33)

When the processes of meeting construction are examined, as they were in the previous chapter, one important characteristic that stands out is the fact that, in order to have a meeting, it is necessary for individuals to allot time to it. As has already been demonstrated, this is not an easy task in a system where there are many competing claims (most of them other meetings) on one's time (see March and Olsen 1976, especially pp. 38–53). This means that it becomes important to understand how and why individuals decide to allot time to particular meetings or to other gatherings. Once individuals at Midwest agreed to allot time and attention to a meeting, however, there was a very good chance that the meeting would recur and that it might even proliferate. The dynamics of this process and its effect on the lives of individuals at the center are the subject of this chapter. I begin by describing the major types of meetings that existed at Midwest. This is followed by a brief portrait of a typical day as it was experienced "from meeting to meeting" from the perspective of a staff member and also the researcher. The idea of meeting cycles and their effect on the ability of individuals to do "things" in this context such as respond to issues, make decisions, resolve problems, and so forth is presented here in preparation for a more detailed discussion of these issues in Chapters 7 through 9.

Types of Meetings

The variety of meetings and meeting groups that existed at Midwest can be classified, following the approach discussed in Chapter 3. Two very general types of meetings emerge from this classification, scheduled and unscheduled meetings, and examples of these two meeting types are presented here.

Scheduled meetings are those events in which a group's gathering has been scheduled in advance and also often recurs over time. A vast array of scheduled meetings existed at Midwest, and the time, location, participants, and presumed purpose of several of these meetings is summarized in Table 6.1 (I use categories for presentation of information here following Wolcott's description of types of meetings for the educational administrator whom he studied; see 1973:94). These meetings varied in the way in which speech and action were regulated, results were produced or expected, responsibility was assumed, and the degree of privacy that was sought for discussion.

As discussed in Chapter 5, in board meetings, and to some extent council and committee meetings, speech was regulated according to a

Table 6.1. Scheduled Meetings: Time, Place, Participants, and Purpose

Time	Place	Participants/Purpose
Monday, 1 per month	The Barn, Hub	Council meeting/ Information, decisions, governance
10:00 A.M., Wednesday, 1 per week	The Barn, Hub	Staff meeting/ Announcements, discussion
7:30 P.M., Monday, 2 per month	The Barn, Ed Room	Executive committee meeting/ Information, decisions, governance
Various	The Barn, Ed Room, or units and outpost of center	Committee meetings/ Information, discussion, develop recommendations and reports
8:30 A.M., Wednesday, 1 per week	The Barn, executive director's office	Cabinet meeting/ Information, discussion, decisions, governance
Various 1 per week	Unit and outpost offices	Unit meetings/ Information, discussion, decisions

very loose interpretation of *Robert's Rules of Order*, and there was also the expectation that formal and preferably written reports would be presented, reviewed, and debated. For board and council meetings an agenda was prepared to organize the discussion, and minutes were taken and kept for the record. All board and council meetings were also tape-recorded by participants as a convenience for preparing the minutes and also in order to document "what really happened." Board and council members viewed themselves as assuming ultimate responsibility for making "major decisions" regarding the center's operations, whereas committee meetings were expected to produce recommendations that they would take to the board for action. At one count, initiated by board members, the center was reported to have over 40 different committees and subcommittees, considering matters such as personnel policy, bylaws revisions, unit component activities (e.g., the family service committee, etc.). The board and council adopted a majority vote decision rule, although in practice there was often pressure for consensus.

Problem-oriented meetings involved a cross-section of staff and sometimes individuals from other community agencies, programs, and so forth in discussions about problems currently recognized as pressing and important and needing the involvement and attention of a variety of individuals. Problem-oriented meetings were established in order to discuss drug abuse issues, (the Drug Abuse Task Force), intake issues (intake meetings), reorganization, the merger of MHD staff with Midwest (MHD merger meetings), and so forth. For the most part, discussion in these meetings was regulated according to general turn-taking rules and the expectation that individuals would make comments and relate points to previous speakers' statements. It was also expected that this discussion would produce some type of product/action (a grant, a report, a plan, a chart/diagram, an agreement, etc.). It was, however, always unclear what authority, if any, these groups had to implement any action that they might recommend. This ambiguity was frequently the topic of debate and a good deal of acrimonious discussion during meetings of these groups.

Cabinet meetings, staff meetings, training meetings, and unit meetings all involved center staff in discussion with each other, and nonstaff members were typically excluded from these events. Speech in these meetings was regulated by turn-taking rules and the expectation that the points of speakers should relate to each other, but in these meetings (especially training meetings and staff meetings), it was also expected that individuals should "express their feelings" and "share themselves" with each other. This merger of therapeutic speech with meeting speech has already been discussed and illustrated in Chapter 5.

Bailey's (1965, 1977, 1983) contrast between arena and elite commit-

tees may also be applied here to distinguish between meeting groups that see themselves as the "guardian of the institution and its values" and that seek privacy for their discussions (elite groups) and meetings in the "public model" where individuals are presumably accountable to other groups and there is "a push toward posturing and the language of principle and policy" (arena groups) (1977:71–72). The board meetings (especially when they went into "executive session"), certain committee meetings, training meetings, and to some extent cabinet meetings were elite groups in Bailey's terms. Each of these groups saw themselves as guardians of Midwest ideology and values and especially their interpretation of the values of community mental health. Each group also sought privacy and had a means to exclude individuals from attending meetings if necessary.

As groups moved back and forth between public and private discussions, the speaking style of meetings changed, but in a somewhat different direction than Bailey's examples. In general, the more "elite" a board meeting became, the more individuals would use formal speech, although more gossip would also be introduced into the group discussion (instead of in informal discussions and phone calls). The more "elite" a training meeting became, the more "therapeutic" speech would dominate.

Examples of arena groups would include council meetings and staff meetings as both meetings were considered to be "open meetings" for the community or the organization. Anyone who wished could attend a council meeting, and the council members were presumably representing community groups and organizations. Any staff person who wished could come to a staff meeting, but there was no formal mechanism for representation. In fact, staff at the center would frequently send individuals to staff and council meetings "to report back to the unit." It was very common to find staff attending board and council meetings; it was much less common for board or council members to attend staff meetings. This is certainly related to the fact that most staff meetings were held during the day, and many council members could not attend meetings at this time.

Unscheduled meetings are those in which the gathering of individuals has not been planned in advance and the meeting talk is generally loosely regulated. A group that holds an unscheduled meeting generally does not have a clear-cut responsibility to represent or report back to a larger group. Groups engaged in unscheduled meetings are generally smaller in size than those involved in scheduled meetings (although this is not always the case). An unscheduled meeting may be called because of a need to exchange information or to respond to a crisis; however, these events also may occur quite spontaneously to consider routine

matters, as when a "lunch" is transformed into a "quick meeting" because several individuals with common interests happen to be together. Groups engaged in unscheduled meetings generally do not have names attached to them, and there are no sanctions for "holding" participants to their decisions or conclusions. (However, this lack of sanctions was also true for scheduled meetings as well at Midwest.)

Unscheduled meetings occurred frequently at the center, for example, individuals often held pre- and postmeeting discussions surrounding the time of a scheduled meeting, or when a lunch or dinner would be transformed into a "quick meeting," or when individuals would be summoned out of one meeting (generally a scheduled meeting) to confer on a developing crisis or problem (producing an unscheduled meeting). The relationship between scheduled and unscheduled meetings at the center will be discussed in more detail on pages 165–167.

A Work Day and a Fieldwork Day

This description of a typical workday is presented from two perspectives. It is a work day from the perspective of one of my informants, Carol Winter, and it is a fieldwork day from my vantage point as a researcher. Carol played a variety of roles at the center, and she was one of the very first paraprofessionals hired by Midwest. This meant that she was a "survivor" in the center's language, and this gave her special status. Carol had also recently become one of the center's associate directors (for educational services), but she still continued to work directly with some patients in the ethnic outpost that she had formerly directed. The day presented here is a composite that has been reconstructed from my field notes, interviews, and familiarity with Carol's work life at the center. This is also a description of my fieldwork life at the center, as it was experienced in the company of specific individuals and from meeting to meeting.

The day that is portrayed here was like many that occurred during the month of September 1975. This was a busy time for Midwest participants. A number of issues seemed to demand attention, including the search for a permanent executive director, an impending union election, an accredidation review of the center with implications for insurance payments, the need to move some staff offices to another building, a suspected problem of drug abuse among staff in the drug clinic, the development of a formalized intake system, dissatisfaction of a number of staff about the "state" of the center and its leadership, and, as if that were not enough, a difficult financial problem.

At Midwest, work days sometimes ended very late at night, and

this description begins following a meeting of the search and screen committee for the permanent executive director, which has just adjourned at 12:30 A.M. Carol is sitting in the "ed room" adjacent to the "hub." She is talking to Mike, another staff member on this committee. Four rectangular tables have been pushed together to form a large center table to make space for approximately 20 people. Tonight there were only 10 people in the room because it was a search and screen committee meeting, and this is the number of designated committee members (staff and board representatives). Chairs are pulled up to the table, but they also line the room, and now they are placed askew. The table is littered with coffee cups and a few stray papers with scribbling and undecipherable notes and overflowing ashtrays. The remnants of a meeting. Ten minutes ago, members of this committee were engaged in a heated discussion about the quality of candidates (which many considered to be poor) that the search process had produced and the feeling that this whole process "was just a setup to keep Paul [the acting executive director] on as the permanent executive director." The meeting adjourned to be continued in two nights. Mike and Carol are caught up in conversation about this issue, and I am hurriedly trying to scribble field notes about the meeting which has just occurred.

I have already sat through more meetings than I will ever remember, patiently recording who participants were, what issues were discussed and how, what actions (if any) were taken, collecting documents, and so forth. I am exhausted, but I also feel exhilarated as it seems like important things are happening; they must be because people seem to be so angry at one another. I assume that I will develop a better understanding of what is important by becoming more familiar with the issues and also by coming to know more about the "behind-the-scenes" manipulations that I assume have made people feel that they have been "set up."

I finish my notes trying also to keep track of what Carol and Mike are saying to each other. They do not seem to mind that I have been sitting there taking notes as they have seen me do this many times both before, during and after a meeting. The three of us walk out of "the Barn" together, and Carol begins discussing a hiring issue with me and with Mike, but then she says that she has to go home and get some sleep because she has an 8:30 A.M. cabinet meeting. We say goodbye, and Mike makes a joke about how late night meetings demonstrate "commitment" to mental health. I leave with the idea that I will go home and write more field notes, but it is very late and I also want to attend the cabinet meeting the next day. I decide to write my notes later.

The cabinet meeting is set for 8:30 A.M. in the office of the executive director, but it does not begin until 8:50 when Paul Chase (the acting

executive director) arrives. Before this time, people drift in and out with coffee cups and engage in conversation about a variety of issues, including what they did the previous night, as well as current issues such as the union election and the impending move. Carol is yawning and reports that she was up past 12:30 A.M. in the search and screen committee, and she begins to state her frustrations about this when Paul Chase enters. People begin to pull chairs closer to the table; there are now nine people assembled. The smokers in the room begin to pull ashtrays closer to them; Paul mutters something about having to talk to the center's lawyer on the phone about the union meeting this afternoon. Presumably this is his reason for arriving late to the meeting, although it is not really offered as such. Bill Tinley (the medical director) asks, "How long will this meeting last?" and someone responds, "Who can ever tell." The meeting begins with John Dante (business/office manager) reporting about who is slated to move next week. He reads a list of names, and then Sheila Jones (director of Crisis Services and a new member of the cabinet) asks, "What is this cabinet's authority? Is it advise and consent, actual decisions or what?". She says she sees the same things going on as has happened in the past, with people politicking to get what they want and with decisions changing constantly. For example, she talks about the "decision" that the drug clinic was going to move and then the decision that this would not happen. Dorothy Bennett (coordinator of the medical unit) says "No one wants to accept responsibility or hold each other accountable." John says that a consensus was developed about who would move, and Sheila shoots back, "But whose consensus was it?" We are only 10 minutes into this meeting, and John already is beginning to look very nervous, and his hands are shaking. He replies, "Well somebody has to move." Sheila responds, "But is the move the issue or is it the way it was accomplished. Was the discussion about this a 'discussion' or a 'decision'? And can we discuss the decision or is it final?" She adds that she is "scared" to see "high-level" people respond this way. Everyone looked at Paul, but he said nothing.

Ellen Lewis (director of the West Unit) says to Sheila, "What do you mean scared? And, anyway, how do you know what people have been doing since this is only your third meeting as a cabinet member." At this point, Sheila turned to me and asked what I thought about this process. I stammered a bit and felt very uncomfortable but said something about the need to make a decision about what kind of process was going to be used for making decisions. Sheila pushed her point more and asked "was the cabinet ambivalent about taking responsibility, where are decisions made?" Carol commented on her feeling that she "was tired of being fooled into thinking that she had input when in fact she did not." She gave an example of a position in educational services for which she

was told there was no money, and her discovery that money from this position was used to fund a grant writer. Paul explained that they could not use that money for a training person but could use it for other staff. Carol did not respond. Dorothy gave an example of how money did not follow patients from one medication unit to another in the community. Carol did not respond.

The discussion shifted to the move, and Carol and Laura (staff in educational services) asked why their unit was chosen, because they did not have sufficient input into this decision. John responded again that someone had to move. He said that he was responsible for making the physical arrangements for the move and would be in touch with people about this next week. At this point, Wanda Moore came in from the Evaluation Unit to report on plans for an accreditation review as well as evaluation possibilities for center programs. It was now 10:00 A.M., and individuals began to get up to leave this meeting even as Wanda was speaking. At 10:30 A.M., Wanda finished her report on planning for the accreditation review and for potential evaluation projects. She concluded her report by stating, "It is necessary for us to specify goals for the center and then to examine whether or not we are living up to them. We say that we can train community people to become clinicians, but can we support this?" At this point, four people, including myself, were left in the room. Paul and Bill had left earlier to take "emergency" phone calls in the next room; John had rushed out in the middle of Wanda's report to attend a meeting with the North Unit to discuss the move, and Dorothy and Ellen had also left earlier because of "previous meetings scheduled."

I left this meeting with Carol, and Laura and returned to her office. Carol is very angry about the moving decision and the hiring issue and the lack of what she feels are adequate explanations about these issues. She receives a phone call from a friend in another community agency that is in the process of trying to "depose" its current director (who is also a member of the Midwest council and a "founder" of the center). Carol finishes her call and talks to me about whether or not she should support this "ouster" attempt. The individuals engaged in tactics that Carol opposes, but she is not sure what to do because if she votes against her remaining as director (Carol is a member of this agency's board), then she is sure that this individual "will kill me here at the center."

At this point Carol receives a phone call from the ethnic outpost that she used to direct, and she says that she has to go there immediately because of a client problem. She asks that I not come along because it will be a very private discussion, but she agrees to have lunch with me at 12:30. I stay in the hub and write field notes until lunch.

We meet for lunch at a Mexican restaurant that is close to the center, and Carol reports that she thinks that she has been able to deal with a very tricky drinking problem with this client, but she will wait and see what happens. We talk about the union, and she says that she is still not sure whether it will be a good thing or not, but she tells me that she is very angry about the hiring issue and she plans to circulate a memo about this issue at the meeting with the center's lawyer later today. Carol talks briefly about the early training meetings and her first encounter with "professionals" and the fact that she is much less intimidated by psychiatrists, psychologists, "professionals of all sorts" than she used to be and that she has learned to be both assertive but also "nice" when necessary. She says that she is not going to be "nice" to Paul today because she is infuriated with him.

At 1:30 P.M., we return to "the Barn" and go to the "ed room" for a meeting about the intake system. Several people have already assembled, including Ellen Lewis, Dorothy Bennett, Mary and Mike Garettson, Toni Michaels, Cara Worthy, and Norm Rosen, but it is reported that Paul Chase cannot attend this meeting because of an emergency meeting downtown and so individuals say that they are "meeting about when to have our next meeting" (I was unable to learn when or if another meeting time was established based on this discussion). When Paul Stevens arrives, he becomes very angry when he discovers that this meeting was canceled, and he says "why don't we meet anyway when so many of us are here already." Dorothy says that it is OK with her if everyone wants to list their ideas for intake mechanisms, but then someone suggests that Juan Alvarez and Wilma Dickens need to be here for this discussion, and they are not here because they had already heard that this meeting would be canceled and so had gone to a crisis services meeting. Several people seem very irritated about this information, and they ask, "How did they know that this meeting was canceled and I didn't?" in the end, it seems that many people think that Paul should be present for this meeting to occur, and so everyone leaves the room except for Dorothy and Cara who later reported to me that "we stayed and had our own meeting."

This nonmeeting ended at 2:15 P.M., and we returned to Carol's office and she begins to fill out some paperwork and look at her mail. She also received three phone calls, two from individuals discussing the search and screen committee, and she reiterates her comments about being "set up" and her feeling that Paul was going to be ratified in this process.

At approximately 3:00 P.M., individuals begin assembling again in the "ed room" for a meeting with the center's lawyer to discuss the upcoming union election. Carol reported that she had to cancel several

meetings and at least one therapy session for this afternoon in order to make this meeting, but she was "not going to miss this meeting". When we arrived, Wanda Moore, John Dante, Calvin and Dorothy Bennett, Tracy Brown, Barbara Wasserman, and Ellen Lewis were already in the room. I sat at the table closest to the south door of the room which is where I frequently sat. Carol sat on the east side of the table which is where she frequently sat. Toni Michaels, Sheila Jones, and Bill Tinley arrived several minutes later and at approximately 3:15 P.M. Paul and the lawyer, Ken Lewin, arrived, and the meeting began. Toni was the first to speak, and she began by asking what this meeting was to be about. Paul said that we were meeting with the lawyer to discuss the upcoming union election. The lawyer said that he would try to explain what "management" legally could and could not do in a union election situation, for example, you can talk to employees, but you cannot intimidate or threaten or even seem to do this. Wanda immediately responded by saying that this statement assumed that everyone here was "management," although this was not clear, and why did he assume that everyone was against the union. The lawyer reported that he was often prounion but not in this case. Wanda asked why some "so-called management" were here and others such as Sheila Greene were not. Someone said that we know that Sheila G. is prounion and that she would divulge the discussion.

The discussion began to focus on why the union had come about in the first place. Sheila Jones said that she knew that it was a former staff member (she implied but did not say, Paula Gray) who had instigated it as a way of getting back at the center. Paul looked very interested in this comment and said that he "had suspected that." Other individuals countered with other reasons for the union, including the reorganization and the interview process for new positions that the reorganization had created (Dorothy), the fact that the reorganization had set up expectations for change that were frustrated (Tracy), the existence of salary inequities, problems in communicating information. Tracy said that she was not able to defend a decision-making process that was inconsistent and unspecified. Several comments were made here about the fact that all decisions seemed to be made in a crisis context. Tracy said that she was very angry about the recent budget process, where it seemed that the budget was formulated on the basis of Ronald Brewer's (former clinical director) likes and dislikes. Ellen asked if they should try to solve all of these issues now. Someone else suggested that they could use the list of concerns developed at the special all-day cabinet meeting held August 25, but no one had a copy of this list, and this suggestion was dropped as the discussion about the variety and number of problems at the center continued. Dorothy said that she was very frustrated about the process of developing an intake system because, at each meeting,

issues that she thought had previously been resolved had to be resolved over and over, and the result was that "we still have no intake system."

Carol took this opportunity to raise the issue of how new staff were hired and funded, especially the recently hired program developer/grant writer. She passed a memo around that detailed this issue. The memo raised several points, but the key ones were the following, and I quote from this memo:

> To: Midwest Cabinet
> From: Carol Winter
> Re: Positions and Budget
>
> Several months ago Paul Chase, Acting Executive Director, informed me that the position of Training Coordinator no longer existed because of MHD's position, i.e., after three years it is assumed that a full-time training coordinator is unnecessary, they will not fund this position. . . .
>
> Therefore it came as a great surprise to read the Board meeting minutes of 9/23/75: "The vacant training coordinator position will provide the salary (about $20,000) for this program developer position."
>
> The purpose of this memo:
>
> 1. To share this information with you.
> 2. I am overwhelmed with the feeling that I have been lied to.
> 3. I don't know what else to do about it.
> 4. To provoke a discussion which will make available information justifying taking funds from one area of allocation and using it for another purpose.
> 5. To include in such a discussion an acceptable explanation of the above chain of events.

Paul became very angry when Carol passed this memo out and said in an uncharacteristically loud and clear voice that he had already explained this situation to Carol and that he would not discuss it here. Several other individuals, including Toni, Tracy, and Wanda, however, discussed this situation eagerly and stated that, in their view, this was yet again another example of the types of problems at the center that had led to the formation of a union. All during this discussion, the lawyer attempted to introduce questions and/or statements regarding what "management could/might/should do to counter the union." Finally he asked how many staff members people thought were supporting the union and would individuals consider talking to them. Bill said he did not know how many but seemed to think that there were many prounion supporters. During this entire meeting, the lawyer looked very frustrated and confused, as well as nervous as his hands were sweating and shaking. He commented at one point that "in most businesses management meets and decides to do X, and it is done and that is that, but this process seems to be quite different because it is so emotional." Tracy responded that his concerns were the same as the staff's.

Wanda suggested that everyone should develop concerns and issues

and present them at the next cabinet meeting and that all involved parties should come to this meeting with ideas as to how these problems might be resolved. Near the close of the meeting, Barbara said, "maybe we do need a union after all, because it will help us to clarify procedures, guidelines, and decisions." Dorothy responded, "why do we always lose sight of what it is we start out to do?" The meeting ended at 4:30 P.M.

Carol returned to her office with Wanda and said that she was going home to get some sleep. She said that she could see that nothing was going to happen about her concerns. She discussed the events of the meeting briefly with me and with Wanda and Laura and then left abruptly to go home. It was the end of her day. It was not the end of my day as I spent the next 2 hours writing field notes about this last meeting, and as I left the center that day, I was invited by some staff, who were still there even though it was 7:00 P.M., to attend an "impromptu meeting" about the next day's staff meeting. I declined, thinking about the infinite regress of meetings in which I seemed to be entangled and also about Clifford Geertz's Indian story.[1] I decided that it wasn't turtles; it was meetings "all the way down."

As a postscript to this description and with no implication that any of the events described "caused" one another, I note the following events that occurred and that are related to issues or individuals that appear in the previous description:

1. In the beginning of October, Toni Michaels resigned as director of clinical services.
2. Paul and Toni argued quite long and ardently in a cabinet meeting about whether she had followed appropriate procedures in resigning, and Bill Tinley reported in a board meeting that he was glad that Toni was leaving, and he characterized his relationship to her by saying, "I stand behind her with a knife at her throat."
3. Greg Stone wrote a letter to staff urging them not to vote for the union.
4. In October, the union election was held, and the union was successful.
5. Paul Chase was selected as the permanent executive director.

[1]The story that I was thinking about is in Geertz's essay, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture":

There is an Indian story—at least I heard it as an Indian story—about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked (perhaps he was an ethnographer; it is the way they behave), what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that turtle? "Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down" (1973:28–29).

6. Tracy Brown submitted her resignation as director of the South Unit.
7. Union contract negotiations began and continued for approximately 6 to 7 months, and when the contract was finally signed, most of the original union supporters had already left the center.
8. In January, the lawyer, Ken Lewin, submitted a bill to the board for $2,500, and everyone was very upset because this was much more than had been expected for his consultations regarding the union issue; everyone said that this was "a major misunderstanding."
9. Carol Winter was "laid off" in July because of a budget crisis.

Time and Attention

There are only 24 hours in a day, and most people need to sleep at least some portion of this time. Although time is finite and therefore a scarce commodity in any organization, at Midwest it seemed as if the problems, crises, and decisions that required the attention of participants were infinite. In general, individuals appear to view the time and scheduling problems that result from these two observations in the same fashion as they view meetings, that is, as annoying but inevitable "facts of life" in organizations. The dismissal of these events has made it very difficult to recognize that these topics might be worthy of serious research attention.

The research of March and Olsen (1976) is unusual because it treats the allocation of time and attention in organizations as problematic and in need of understanding and explanation:

> We need a theory of organizational attention. Such a theory should treat the allocation of attention by potential participants as problematic. Where will they appear? What are the structural limits on their decision activity? How do they allocate time within those limits? Such a theory must attend to the elements of rational choice in attention allocation, to the importance of learning, to the modification of attention rules, and to the norms of obligation that affect individual attention to alternative organizational concerns. (p. 22)

In their attempts to understand time and attention phenomena in organized anarchies, March and Olsen reveal several features of meetings and their interaction with issues and also other meetings that seem to have gone unnoticed by most researchers. These features will be discussed here particularly as they are illustrated in the description of the workday presented before.

Time, Meetings, and Participants: "From Meeting to Meeting"

In a very real sense, the day of an individual at Midwest was pushed along from meeting to meeting and the ability of individuals to attend to issues and focus on problems was greatly affected by the amount and timing of meetings in the individual's schedule. In one sense, individuals structured their own time as they could and frequently did choose between an array of meetings, but in another sense, meetings structured the time and attention of individuals because to go to one meeting invariably meant declining other meetings, and commitment to one meeting would frequently commit an individual to the cycle of meetings that organized this group's activities.

Five general categories of participants have been identified for Midwest: staff, patients, management, sponsors, and researchers. All of these participants spent a great deal of time in meetings of all types, although they also engaged in other forms of interaction (see Figure 5.1). Meetings were by far the most common communication context at the center, and I estimate that management spent close to 80% of their day in this activity, whereas staff spent an average of 40% to 50% of their day in meetings. These estimates were made based on my field notes and calendar of activities for the various participants at the center and also on the basis of the amount of time (at least 50%) I spent each day in meetings. Figure 6.1 is an estimate of the time that Carol Winter spent in particular types of activities. It will be noted that 70% of her time was spent in the meeting context, far overshadowing the time spent in

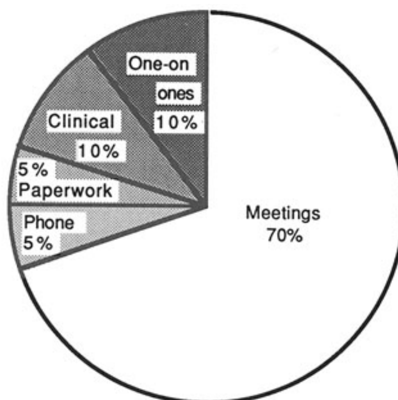


Figure 6.1. Carol Winter: Time and activities.

clinical work, paperwork, phone calls, and "one-on-ones." As a manager at the center, this figure is somewhat low in comparison to others, and this is probably due to the fact that Carol still spent some time in direct clinical work with patients. Examples by type of activity for a typical staff day and a typical management day are presented in Tables 6.2 and 6.3. An average day in terms of number of hours for staff was approximately 8 hours, but for management it was between 9 and 12.

Individuals at Midwest exhibited a high degree of involvement in their meetings, as might be expected given the quantity of time that individuals devoted to this activity. If one wanted to understand what was happening at the center, it was necessary to participate in the flow and drift of meetings that occurred throughout the day and night at the center. Individuals who did not or could not (because of external demands on their time) participate in meetings were essentially "nonindividuals" in this context. Most staff, management, and even some patients as well as all of the researchers invested a great deal of time and effort in the meetings at Midwest. Individuals who did not attend meetings or who disliked what some described as the "meeting craziness" of the center did not remain long in this setting, as they either resigned or were "forced out" as noncommitted to the center and its goals.

In this way meetings and the time they required of individuals selected for a particular type of participant that is, an individual with few external demands on his or her time (see Weiner 1976).[2] This meant that a large number of participants were relatively young (average age

[2]This point is insightfully developed by Weiner (1976) in his analysis of decision-making processes concerned with desegregation of elementary schools within the San Francisco Unified School District in the 1970s. In attempting to work out a desegregation plan, in order to comply with a judicially imposed deadline, a Citizen's Advisory Committee composed of 67 citizens was appointed by the Board of Education. Deliberations of this committee began on February 16, 1971, and concluded on June 2, 1971. Between February and April, there were 25 meetings of the full committee or its subcommittees for an average of one meeting every 3 days, and between the end of April and the beginning of June there were 45 meetings of the full committee or its subcommittees for an average of one meeting per day (p. 234). Weiner makes the obvious but very important point that given the high meeting rate described, all members of the committee could not attend all meetings. In this case, the imposition of the deadline created differential meeting attendance rates between participants and selected for a certain type of participant.

> Thus, the deadline led to a domination of the decision making process by middle and upper class white women, who had available time during the day because they were not employed and could arrange care for their children, and by other participants whose employers permitted them to devote daytime hours to the decision making process. (pp. 234–235)

This differential in meeting attendance creates a difference in meeting and issue competence among participants, and, of course, it also affects the results of the decision

Table 6.2. Staff Day

8:30–9:30 A.M.	Unit meeting
9:30–10:30 A.M.	Patient therapy session
10:30–12:00 P.M.	Staff meeting
12:00–1:00 P.M.	Lunch, often combined with a meeting
1:00–3:00 P.M.	Patient therapy sessions
3:00–4:00 P.M.	Supervision/training meeting
4:00–5:00 P.M.	Paperwork, records, forms, etc.

26), single, or married with no children. There was also a higher percentage of females than males in both staff and management positions, although this does not seem to be related to the time issue. Characteristics of the center participants can be illustrated by briefly reviewing some of the major actors who appear in the work day description presented above.

Carol Winter was 25 years old and single during the course of this study. Shortly after the events described in the previously mentioned workday, family problems began to require her attention, and this was a time when Carol needed more than ever to attend meetings to maintain her position at the center. However, for several reasons, partly of her own choosing (as a protest and marker of her frustration with "the state

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process. Weiner refers to this as the *competence multiplier*, and he illustrates how it affects the decision process:

> The tendency for the most active participants to spend greater energy on the choice is reinforced by two things. The first is the fact that they are relatively free of other obligations and thus are able to spend large amounts of time on decision making. The second is the fact that as high participation rates continue the most active members become a relatively small group possessing a near monopoly position concerning the competencies required in decision making.
>
> The joint operation of these factors constitutes a positive feedback loop where activity causes greater competence and greater competence leads to increased activity. The total effect of this feedback process quickly cumulates along both dimensions of activity and competence leading to what we describe as the *competence multiplier*.
>
> Thus one effect associated with the sharply increased participation rates by some participants in the choice is that the most active participants gain a much higher share of the competence and experience necessary to deal with the remaining problems. As they become substantially more competent it becomes more difficult for other potential participants to gain access to the decision making process. (p. 247)

Weick (1979) suggests that Weiner's research illustrates how "people with time to spend on a problem [transform] that problem into something that only people with time to spend on the problem can manage. . . . *Thus the mundane activity of simply showing up at meetings* generates an environment that only those who show up at meetings are able to manage and control" (p. 159, emphasis added).

Table 6.3. Management Day

8:00–8:30 A.M.	Writing, reading reports, memos, mail, etc.
8:30–9:30 A.M.	Meetings with individuals or groups
9:30–10:30 A.M.	Cabinet meeting
10:30–12:00 P.M.	Staff meeting
12:00–1:00 P.M.	Lunch, often combined with a meeting or with paperwork
1:00–2:30 P.M.	Presentations to external groups, agencies, etc.
2:30–4:00 P.M.	Meeting with funding source personnel
4:00–5:30 P.M.	Budget committee meeting
5:30–7:00 P.M.	Dinner
7:30–10:30 P.M.	Center executive board meeting

of the center"), she stopped attending many meetings and because of external time demands, she was unable to sustain the meeting involvement that the previous description portrays. In July 1976, shortly after the research project was completed, Carol was "laid off" by the center ostensibly because of lack of budget for her unit.

Helen B. Schwartzman was 30 years old and married with no children at the time of this research. Because of involvement with this study, I was able to spend as much time as I chose engaged in work at the center. This meant that, according to a review of my field notes, appointment books, and calendars, I spent at least 50% of my fieldwork days in meetings. It should also be noted that the variety as well as press of meetings was as great for me as it was for participants, and I was frequently frustrated in having to chose between meetings and also in having very little time for conducting other research activities such as interviews, writing fieldnotes, and so forth.

Mike Garretson was 22 years old and married to another staff member, Mary, who was 21 and the North Unit secretary. They had no children during the time of our research, and both spent long hours, day and night, working at the center. Mike was frequently a member of staff committees working with council members on various projects and issues.

Paul Chase was 38 years old and married with two children. He was formerly the director of the Education Unit. As "acting" executive director during this period, he spent long days at the center, and he also spent several nights a week attending council-related meetings (board, committees) and community meetings.

Bill Tinley was 29 years old and was married with no children at this time. He had been working at the center for about 3 years as a psychiatrist and was now the medical director. He reported that he had finally cut down 12- to 14-hour days to more manageable 9- to 10-hour days.

Sheila Jones was 27 years old and the mother of three children. She was the director of the Crisis Services, having moved into this position from a paraprofessional position. Like Carol, Sheila was regarded as one of the center's successes, and she was a "survivor." She spent, by self-report, long hours attempting to "take care" of her unit, and when she was not doing this, she was taking care of one or more individuals in the community in her apartment that was frequently a "crash pad" for people with problems.

Issues, Meetings, and Attention: "Which Meeting?"

At any one point in time during the day (and night), there were multiple meeting opportunities for participants to choose. I estimate that during the day at any one point in time there were an average of 10 different meetings taking place throughout the center and its outposts. Sometimes the most consequential decision that an individual would make would be which meeting(s) he or she would attend. Choosing to go to one meeting frequently meant not going to another meeting, and it also meant becoming involved in a particular series of meeting cycles, with particular participants and particular issues. In this way, an individual's day, work life, and work colleagues and view of the organization would be structured.

However, one's plans and choices for meetings were always dependent, by definition, on at least two other individuals' choices about how and where to allocate their time and focus on issues. This is not a simple matter as Cohen, March, and Olsen (1976) suggest:

> Person A cannot allocate attention to a meeting unless the meeting exists, and the meeting does not exist unless B, C, and D are also there (i.e. have also allocated attention time to it). X cannot talk to Y unless Y is prepared to talk to X; alternatively, if X coerces Y to talk to him, then Y cannot do other things. (p. 51)

In such a context, issues or problems do not become issues or problems unless they are discussed in a meeting (the importance of the meeting frame for conferring legitimacy and the label *work* on discussions and talk has already been discussed in Chapter 5), but all individuals cannot attend all meetings to discuss all issues. In addition, it was never self-evident or obvious, given the stream of problems that appeared at the center, which were the truly "important" problems or issues. Therefore, seemingly mundane or inconsequential factors such as when meetings were scheduled, who allocated attention time to them, what other meetings or other events were available at that partic-

ular time, whether or not an "emergency" or "crisis" appeared and was allowed to "bump" or disrupt a scheduled meeting, as well as how much excitement was generated by discussions in particular meetings all affected to a very great degree whether and how an issue became recognized, handled, resolved, or forgotten at the center. In March and Olsen's (1976:38–53) terms, it is the timing of the arrival of participants, problems, solutions, and the like that is crucial for determining how or whether an issue is resolved.

If a meeting occurred in a favorable timing and attention context (e.g., time allocated to it, people come, other opportunities declined, no interruptions), then this increased the possibility that the meeting would recur. Once the meeting recurred, then this helped to create the idea that the issue discussed was (1) important, and (2) probably exciting. These evaluations in turn made it possible for the issue to secure more attention time than other competing issues. For example, in the workday discussion presented before, there were a range of issues that appeared to compete for individuals' time but Carol chose to attend to (1) the hiring issue that related to her unit, (2) the union issue, and (3) the search and screen process. Participants specifically excluded consideration of other issues, for example, the intake system (even when a meeting had been arranged and some individuals but not all of the "right" individuals came to the meeting), the drug abuse problem, the financial issues, the accreditation review, and so forth.

As an issue began to be recognized as an issue, the size of the meeting group would frequently increase (although this was certainly not true in every case). This meant that more people would allocate time to these meetings (as March and Olsen 1976 suggest), and so there would be fewer competing time claims for individuals to juggle, and it would become easier to arrange a meeting. For example, it became easier to arrange a meeting to discuss the union than to discuss the intake system. However, as the size of the group increased, there was a tendency for the meeting to become a stage for the presentation of multiple problems and issues and the ability of the discussion to focus on the original purpose might be lost. This enhanced the "garbage-can" quality of these meetings.

In conjunction with this development, as a cycle of meetings was initiated, this would frequently activate the "meeting response" of any groups who might be in conflict with the meeting participants (see March and Olsen 1976). The development of the union at the center illustrates this process. In the initial organizing stage, secret meetings to explore the possibility of forming a union (an AFL/CIO union local) at the center were held by staff. When it was decided that there was enough support to bring the issue to a vote, staff/union meetings were

held in the open, whereas management began holding meetings in private, to discuss strategies to avoid having the union voted in by staff. The relationship of meetings and group conflict will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Even if only one or two issues became selected as important following the processes discussed before, this very designation had an effect on who became involved in the discussion and what ultimately happened with the issue. If "important" people were involved in a discussion, then, by definition, the meeting was important, and "important" meetings attracted "important" people. However, "important" (typically but not always management) people had the most time overload and meeting overload of all participants in the center which meant that important issues always had difficulty sustaining the attention of important people (March and Olsen 1976:47).[3] This meant that issues that had deadlines attached to them frequently would become "the issues" (e.g., the impending union election deadline helped to secure attention), or alternately, an artificially constructed deadline would be consciously used to force decisions or actions (March and Olsen 1976:50; see also Weiner 1976). For example, one of the center's consultants resorted to the technique of locking one of the board committees into a room and refusing to allow anyone in or out for *any* reason until a series of recommendations were completed. The final meeting of this particular group, even with the consultant's somewhat unusual intervention, still lasted 5 hours, but a report was generated at the conclusion of this meeting.

Another result of this process, also reported by March and Olsen, was that when "important" issues were discussed at length they were frequently discussed by unimportant people, that is, people who had nothing else to do with their time (March and Olsen 1976:47). However, when this happened (and it frequently did), the discussions would ultimately be dismissed as irrelevant, and so people would move on to new

[3]In this regard, March and Olsen (1976) again make some obvious, but not generally appreciated, points about how individuals allocate their time and what effect this has on decisions:

> An important reason for someone not being one place, is that he is somewhere else. In order to understand the pattern of participation within an organization, we have to understand the context of alternative claims on time. There are almost no decisions that are so important that attention is assured.
>
> The result is that even a relatively rational model of attention makes decision outcomes highly contextual. Since every entrance is an exit somewhere else, the distribution of "entrances" depends on the attributes of the choice being left as much as it does on the attributes of the new choice. Substantial variation in attention stems from other demands on the participants' time (rather than from features of the decision under study). . . . The individuals who end up making the decision are disproportionately those who have nothing better to do. (pp. 46–47)

meetings, frequently appearing to forget the issues that only last week had seemed to be life or death struggles. For example, the activities of one particular Drug Abuse Task Force were followed for 1 year. This group met every week and included center staff as participants as well as individuals from other agencies in the community. These meetings were characterized by long, and sometimes very bitter, debates about proper service modalities. Eventually, this group decided to write a proposal to secure funds to coordinate drug abuse services for the West Park area. At the end of a year, the proposal was completed after a long and very complex negotiation process. Shortly thereafter and much to the researcher's surprise, the proposal was lost, and even more remarkable was the fact that no one seemed to notice or care.

Interactions between Meetings: "Meetings Generate Meetings"

A third complicating factor affecting the participants' time and attention may be examined by considering the interaction between scheduled and unscheduled meetings in the day-to-day life of individuals at the center. Special, emergency, crisis meetings were quite common and included discussion of a variety of topics, especially clinical and organizational emergencies. Because of the topics discussed, there was always a sense of urgency and excitement about these meetings. Crises occurred so frequently at Midwest that unscheduled meetings often were responsible for disrupting the pattern of scheduled meetings and initiating waves of canceled meetings and rescheduled meetings. This would, in turn, necessitate a new series of meeting negotiations to set the time and place of rescheduled meetings. The genesis of many of the scheduled problem-oriented meetings discussed before was as a crisis unscheduled meeting. Typically, these meetings concluded with the belief that more time should be spent on the issue, and so a new meeting "opportunity" would be created that individuals would then have to fit into their already crowded schedule. This process insured, however, that there were always more than enough meetings available for participants to attend. My participation in a grievance committee meeting illustrates this process:

> I am attending a meeting to discuss a recent grievance filed by a staff member against her supervisor. She is claiming that her duties and responsibilities have not been clarified, and therefore she does not know what to do or how she will be evaluated. The meeting includes Ellen Lewis, Wanda Moore, Toni Michaels, Bill Tinley, and Mike Garettson. Rosa Guttierez rushes into the meeting to speak to Toni; she says that Susan Bradley in the South Unit is

"freaking out", and they are trying to calm her down and decide what to do. At this point, Toni, Bill, and Ellen leave this meeting (and it is then canceled) and go to the South Unit where Bill sees Susan and Toni, Bill, Ellen, Barbara Wasserman (director of this unit), and Jim Smith (also of the South Unit), and they begin meeting to discuss this issue, but they decide that the entire issue of "staff pressure" needs to be discussed at length, and many people have other commitments coming up at this time, and so they quickly arrange a meeting for the next day at 4:00 P.M. to continue this discussion and to try to develop some guidelines for dealing with this issue. I was not able to attend this 4:00 P.M. meeting, but my notes indicate that this group scheduled two other meetings, and then I can find no more evidence of it in my records.

As should be obvious from the preceding discussion, the best place for creating a new meeting group was, not surprisingly, in a meeting. This is the generative process of "committees" that Parkinson refers to in the heading quote for this chapter, but it is important to examine how, in fact, meetings are generated. In the transcripts of meetings that I examined in preparing this book, one of the striking features of most meetings (especially council and board meetings) was the amount of time that individuals spent either discussing and interpreting previous meeting events or creating new meeting events. An excerpt from one of the board-meeting tapes illustrates the process of interpreting a meeting in a meeting:

Fred Let me use another piece of . . . two things which happened at the meeting [a meeting with MHD personnel which he is reporting on] which I think I should include. The formal evaluation system is the X,Y,Z system. The credibility of the formal evaluation system is what has been killing us for the last 2 years. The distortions introduced into the reporting back by Deanne Jasco. OK, we all knew what they were there because we heard some of the things and read the reports. Well, Al Pauly pulls out of his hat at the end of the meeting, Charles Ellis' comments about Midtown Hospital. Charles Ellis is one of the MHD people who also happens to be a friend of Al Pauly. And I'll be damned if Charles Ellis didn't say the same thing to Al Pauly that we've been saying to Al Pauly for 2 years. The credibility is different. So that the questions about credibility, about the amount of needs, also is changing somewhat. . . .

The creation of new meeting contexts may also be illustrated from a transcript of a board meeting tape:

Greg Uh, Uh. You just opened up a big can of worms, but—you want to add to it?

John Well, let's open it up. Because/

Mike Is there a committee that can deal with this? Don't we have a committee. . . .

Fred No, there is no inpatient committee.

Millie [Softly] That's what we've been saying.

Fred There never has been one.

Mike [inaudible] need one.

Fred Janet Ross as vice president is charged with coordinating that. . . .

Mike What I'm talking about, [inaudible] not, let's see/

Fred It would be a full/

John [inaudible]

Fred Time job for 10 people.

Greg Frankly, I'd suggest that we have a group of four or five, something like that. It sounds like we're going to get into an hour's worth. . . .

Summary

Parkinson was right to suggest that committees (although he should have said "meetings") are organic rather than mechanical because this calls attention to the way they "flower, root, grow, scatter, wilt and die." However, no one, with the exception of March and Olsen (1976), has paid attention to these important processes even though they seem to be essential for understanding the structure that meetings give to the work life of individuals in organizations. How is the need for a meeting, or another meeting, or a new meeting generated in interaction, and what are the implications of these processes for individuals and for the organization. In this chapter, I have attempted to examine some of the effects of what are generally taken-for-granted "intermeeting processes." In the next three chapters, the influence of meetings on the accounting of history, the construction of environments and ideologies, the relation between power, decisions, and meetings, and finally, the expression of emotion at the center are all examined through the meeting format.

9:30 P.M.

Greg *We'll have to skip, for the moment, number 4 on the agenda 'cause Francis Burns isn't here. Try to get to that later on. I'd like to go on to number 5 and ask Joanna if she would start off by giving us her recollections of how things—the status of the Midwest/Mental Health Department negotiations are going, and where we're at now.*

Joanna *First let me say, Greg, If anybody else has been negotiating, you know, add to what I'm going to say. And secondly that there are complete reports from the work that has been done, and anybody who [inaudible] in detail, can be in touch with Rita this evening. These detailed reports will be from the negotiating team and the subcommittees that were subsequently set up.*

Manny *[softly] [inaudible] detailed reports.*

Rita *[softly] From whom?*

Manny *[softly] Detailed reports from the negotiating subcommittees.*

Rita *[softly] Are they prepared? They're not all prepared.*

Manny *They're not all prepared right now, so I move that we just [inaudible] this report right now under input until we have a detailed report to look at prior to your discussion. Because I think without the prior data, we don't really have too much to look into and analyze and discuss with.*

Joanna *If somebody will second that, I'll speak against it, but/*

Marjorie *I'd like to respond to it.*

Ellie *I would too.*

Marjorie *Well, my response is that pretty much, at the Steering Committee meetings and the Coordinating Committee meetings, and the council meetings that have been held since the negotiations began, we've discussed it. And several council members*

are involved in it. There is no finalized, you know, nice little 10-page packet that's been summarized and yet it's still very important. I don't see how we can possibly just, you know, say since there's no finalized written report, we'll forget about it.

Manny *It's a question of input of data. That's all.*

Marjorie *Well, no.*

Manny *And I think where an input of data, you have a better ability to understand the discussion on the matter. When there's no input of data, it's very hard to have any input or any understanding of what's been going on. I'm saying with a presentation of prior input on data, you're going to have something to discuss to. Or about. And without that I think it's rather difficult across the board. I think in particular cases, no, but generally yes.*

Greg *Manny—Is there a second to the motion? There's no second to the motion.*

Manny *I presume everyone has prior knowledge.*

Greg *Well, Manny, I think/*

Manny *That's my only presumption, because I think without it it's hard to get into anything.*

Greg *You, you—unfortunately you've missed some meetings, and there perhaps are some people here who don't know everything that's gone on either, but we have reached certain areas where we're getting into some of the nitty-gritty problems. And they have broken down into smaller groups and discussed specific things separately. And Joanna is really better informed at this point than I am, because she's attended many of these smaller group meetings and is in a good position to give us a report. And there's others who I hope will add to what Joanna has to say. What we're trying to see—we're trying to have a little discussion and get some input from the council members here as to what they think we should do now. One of the things that we are talking about doing, is inviting Dr. Stein here, possibly for a full day to go into some of these problems in detail with him. We want to know exactly what to discuss with him when and if he comes. And so we want to get the input.*

Manny *The only presumption that I'm going on, that there's common knowledge. And if there is common knowledge, then I stand as an exception, and I/*

Greg *Well [pause]*

Manny *I take my request back, but I want to know, is there common knowledge? So that we can discuss as a unit/*

Greg *There's common knowledge among those who have/*

Joanna *Some have more than others.*

Greg *Yeah.*

Joanna *Some have more than others.*

Manny *In other words, most people in this room have attended or are partaking in discussion—[cough], right? That's my real question.*

Maria *How many people in this group are actually on the negotiating committee?*

Manny *Or in some way participating in it?*

Maria *Not too many.*

Greg *Or, or—*

Maria *We've attended meetings where we've got reports, that stuff.*

Greg *Those who have either been on the negotiating team, in meetings, or who have heard it discussed here, raise your hand. Let's do it that way. All right. [pause, laughter] That's your answer. I [pause]*

Manny *I would say most of the council members. Not counting staff.*

Maria *Greg. I think it's worthwhile to make a comment, though. I think that what Manny has done, you know, Manny has been missing from [inaudible] But you know, the level of knowledge is different among those of us who raised our hands.*

Greg *Yeah.*

Maria *And I just think it's appropriate that maybe Manny is drawing attention to the fact that many discussions, or many presentations that are made here [inaudible] background other people haven't participated in, and could be one of the reasons why council members/*

Greg *Well, Manny, unfortunately the MHD negotiating meetings have all been during the day, in working hours, and it's hard even to get some of our people to go to those things even if they wanted to—sit in on 'em, you know. And it's even hard for me to make all of them, and I haven't, and I think Judy has missed a couple lately too. One. All right.*

Rita *You were at—*

Greg *So—*

Rita *He was asked to participate in an administrative—*

Greg *I know. Manny, I think, was invited too. Mary.*

Mary *Well, the purpose of having the negotiating team is because all of us can't get there all the time. This is not a final report that we're getting on the negotiations? Right?*

Greg *This is just a progress [inaudible] this is just where we're at. This is no summation or anything—*

Manny *What I'm saying is it would be beneficial for the council as a unit [inaudible]*

Ellie *It certainly would be.*

Mike *[inaudible] to get a compilation of the data and the proceedings that have occurred.*

Ellie *All right, I'm not—*

Manny *[inaudible] so that, so that when you do have it/*

Ellie *You didn't let me finish.*

Greg *All right.*

Manny *You can, quietly. Talk to it, and that's the basic point.*

Ellie *All right, but [pause]*

Manny *And I think that [inaudible]*

Ellie *[inaudible[let me finish.*

Manny *(inaudible) Mary put up a good point.*

Ellie *But let me finish. And that is that I didn't, I would prefer, you know, it would be nice if we could get a written report on this, but I know exactly what would be involved in that. A lot of work. And these people are already deep in work because they're attending all these meetings. I personally don't have the nerve to ask them to do it at this point. If they have—I would expect a final report in writing. But I would not have the unreconstructed gall to ask them to do it [laughter], because I know how hard they're working.*

Greg *And I think Judy would even bear me out if I said that by the time you wrote up the report and got it out, it would be obsolete. That's how fast things are changing.*

Maria *I think that we [inaudible]*

Greg *Within their department even.*

Chapter 7

History, Boundaries, and Ideological Conflict

The Council Meeting and the Training Meeting

So they went up to the Mock Turtle, who looked at them with large eyes full of tears, but said nothing.

"This here young lady," said the Gryphon, "she wants for to know your history, she do."

"I'll tell it her," said the Mock Turtle in a deep, hollow tone. "Sit down, both of you, and don't speak a word till I've finished."

Lewis Carroll
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865:126)

At Midwest, everyone remembered his or her history by placing events in the context of what was viewed as a particularly important meeting or series of meetings:

> Well, by the time I came to work here [it] was after the investigation committee. I was on the investigation committee as a council member, it was after that craziness, that's about all that was after, everything else came after that.

Or

> See I kind of date things from the beginning to the investigation committee. The investigation committee is of April '73, if I remember right, and then you've got the investigation committee to the whatever you want to call it, the contract squabble, beginning which is roughly May, June '74, and then you've got the contract squabble which is May, June '74 to January '75. Then you've got the era of Paul Chase which is now starting to fall a little bit more into place and everything was pretty much hunky-dory up to the investigation committee.

Many of these meetings were in response to the variety of conflicts that occurred at the center, and this seemed to tie reports of crises and meetings together for participants. This should not be taken to suggest that individuals were in agreement about their history, and especially what went on in these meetings. Like everything else, history was a subject of debate, dispute, construction, and reconstruction. There was general agreement as to *how* history was reported (by crises and meetings); there was no agreement on *what* was reported.

In this chapter, I suggest that meetings provided individuals with a grid that they used to interpret their histories to each other and to the researchers, and as they did this, they also generated the major structures of organizational life that participants then perceived as controlling and constraining their activities. It will be argued here that it was the act of meeting and the establishment of particular meeting histories and traditions that crucially shaped and influenced the form which Midwest would take as an "organization," the boundaries that would be drawn between "it" and the "outside," the participants that would be attracted to this system, and the nature of participants' ideologies and ideological conflicts. As I use the term *ideology* here, it refers to participants' views and values about the practice of "community mental health" and ways of living out these values in an organizational context. I could also use the term *culture* to describe what is meant by ideology in this chapter, and I have on other occasions used this term (see Schwartzman, Kneifel, and Krause 1978, Schwartzman, Kneifel, Barbera-Stein, and Gaviria 1984), but I use *ideology* here because it is the more common term in the literature that I discuss in this context.

The confusion and ambiguity that was a commonplace occurrence at Midwest does not seem to be captured or understood very well by our traditional theories and ways of thinking about organizations, as March and Olsen (1976:9) have observed. Perhaps this is so because research attention has not really been focused on the everyday and the commonplace in organizational settings (see Zimmerman and Pollner 1970:103). I believe this is also true because researchers generally seek to clarify ambiguity and to order any disorder—after all, this is what theoretical explanations are supposed to be about.[1] For the most part, ambi-

[1]The interesting study, *Laboratory Life* (1986), presented by Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, is a good example of an approach where the research goal is to examine "how social order is constructed out of chaos" (p. 33), recognizing that there are always multiple readings of these processes and that observers and researchers are engaged in the same process of order construction. Their account of the social construction of facts in the Salk Institute, and specifically R. Guillemin's laboratory where workers were "in neuroendocrinology," is guided by the assumption that "despite participants' well-ordered reconstructions and rationalizations, actual scientific practice entails the confrontation and

guity, confusion, and disorder are seen as stumbling blocks toward theoretical or methodological clarity and not as potential theoretical resources. One of the purposes of this book, and especially the next three chapters, is to understand how individuals and the researcher both constructed and also attempted to understand the ambiguity and confusion that seemed to swamp their lives. It will be argued here that meetings were important for both *generating* and sometimes *clarifying* the ambiguity of history, the fuzziness of boundaries and the conflict in ideology that participants experienced. What is important to note here is that I am suggesting that meetings were a source of both order and disorder in this setting.

A History of Gatherings: The Meeting Grid

Midwest participants did not need to be reminded by anthropologists and historians that people make up history, invent traditions, and reconstruct events.[2] This was the nature of everyone's historical understanding, and it was everyone's expectation. In fact, this was one of the reasons why the research team's project became valued because while distrusting their own accounts, informants believed that we would make sense of conflicting events and reports and learn "the truth." For a while we shared this belief in our "powers" and set about constructing a chronology of significant dates and events in the center's history (from meeting minutes and interviews). Eventually we saw that this did not capture or even come close to characterizing the production of history and the importance of histories that influenced our informant's actions. It was the recurrence of the meeting form, already illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6 and the regularity of particular meetings in conversations and interviews that helped me to realize that I could only portray the center's history *through* or *with*, the same meetings that informants were using to make sense of their lives.[3]

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negotiation of utter confusion. The solution adopted by scientists is the imposition of various frameworks by which the extent of background noise can be reduced and against which an apparently coherent signal can be presented. The process whereby such frameworks are constructed and imposed is the subject of our study" (pp. 36–37).

[2]Renato Rosaldo's (1980) work is an excellent example of what can be learned by bringing "history into anthropology." His ethnography succeeds, in my opinion, because he is able "to bring their [Ilongots] history into focus" (p. 27). And because he illustrates how the Ilongots "received traditions . . . are not mere survivals, inert remnants of a bygone past, but instead [how] they constitute an active force in the lived-in present" (p. 23).

[3]Rosaldo's (1980) use and interpretation of Ilongot stories suggested this particular characterization of my use of meetings here. He suggests that "Ilongot stories not only contained but also organized perceptions of the past and projects for the future. In other words, the only way I could apprehend Ilongot lifeways was by looking through (not

Key Meetings

In order to use meetings as a guide to the construction of history, boundaries, and ideology at the Center, it is first important to recognize that, whereas the meeting as a social form was very important to participants, the significance of specific meetings or meeting contexts did change over time. In order to document these changes, I examine the development of what are referred to here as "key meetings." Key meetings in this sense are somewhat like key informants, except that they are contexts of action, not individuals. Key meetings at the center were events that became significant because of the special status accorded them by individuals in the organization. This special status derived in part from who attended the meeting and what was discussed. At Midwest, special status was given to meetings that were open to a great variety of people (compare with Bailey's arena committees) and that encouraged discussion of a wide range of topics. Special status was also given to almost all "spec" (special, emergency, crisis) meetings because they were always perceived as contexts for important action, that is, resolution of immediate conflicts, crises, or problems. Key meetings were also significant because they distilled the significant events of a specific time period for individuals at the center, whereas they also seemed to provide everyone with a forum (it often seemed like a stage) for commentary on their relationships to each other.

These were the meetings that people seemed to use repeatedly for marking historical periods or significant events. As key meetings, they became the central focus for characterizing what was happening at any particular time, why it was happening and what could/should have been done about it. It is particularly important to emphasize here that individuals made these "what, why, could/should" judgments depending upon the set of meeting traditions and groups in which they were located. This meant, for example, that staff and board members saw their organization and their tasks, goals, and desires in very different terms. To explain these differences in terms of the different roles that individuals occupied in the organization does not help us understand how these differences were experienced and generated in the daily actions of individuals in this context. I am suggesting here that staff and board members saw the organization and their actions differently be-

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somehow around or directly behind) the cultural forms that they used to represent their lives to themselves" (p. 17). Of course, the work of Geertz (1973), especially his interpretation of cultural forms such as the Balinese cockfight, "as a Balinese reading of Balinese experience, a story they tell themselves about themselves" (p. 448) has also been very influential in my interpretation of Midwest meetings in this and subsequent chapters (see especially my discussion of the relationship between meetings and stories in Chapter 9).

cause they were seeing events and trying to understand and interpret them, *through different meetings*. Council members and early organizers ("the founders") both saw and created "their" organization in *council meetings* and related organizing meetings, whereas staff members constructed and experienced "their" organization through *training meetings* and related center activities. When problems developed between these groups, in terms of different expectations about the nature of the organization and its activities and purposes, individuals turned to meetings, *committee meetings* (such as the infamous "investigation committee") as the place to resolve their conflicts. However, these meetings exacerbated the problems as much as they resolved them, and so new meeting arenas were created, the *board meeting* and the *staff meeting*. These new contexts became the place for the discussion of issues and the resolution of problems at the center, but, as will be seen in this and the next two chapters, the problems were old and continuing ones. In general, the problems were related, although there were always treated as separate instances of issues and conflicts, including: (1) conflicts about where the center's boundaries could properly be drawn (who was "the" community and who was "staff" and how, or could, they be differentiated from clients or patients); and (2) conflicts about ideology, treatment, and governance (what is the best form of community mental health treatment, who is most qualified to provide it, and how do we make decisions about what we do).

A resolution of these problems was attempted toward the end of our fieldwork by staff, by the formation of *union meetings*. These meetings were at first held in secret in the initial organizing stage and later held openly as the issue was brought to a vote and the union (an AFL-CIO union local) won the election. This appeared to be an attempt to reintegrate conflicting parties at the center by recognizing their differences as legitimate conflict between management and workers. However, shortly after the election was held, many key union supporters quit. As a symbol of resistance, therefore, the union and union meetings were quite effective, but ultimately they were not effective as a mechanism for resolving the center's problems.

In a very broad sense the development of key meetings at Midwest follows the pattern of social dramas outlined by Turner (1974:37–42), including creation of rules, breach of rules, mounting crises and conflict followed by redressive actions, continued conflict and attempted reintegration of groups. Although recognizing that this remains an outside characterization, it does provide a useful way of portraying the meeting grid (see Figure 7.1) that individuals seemed repeatedly to use in locating their own activities in the past and in explaining events to themselves and to the researchers in the present. In the next section, I move

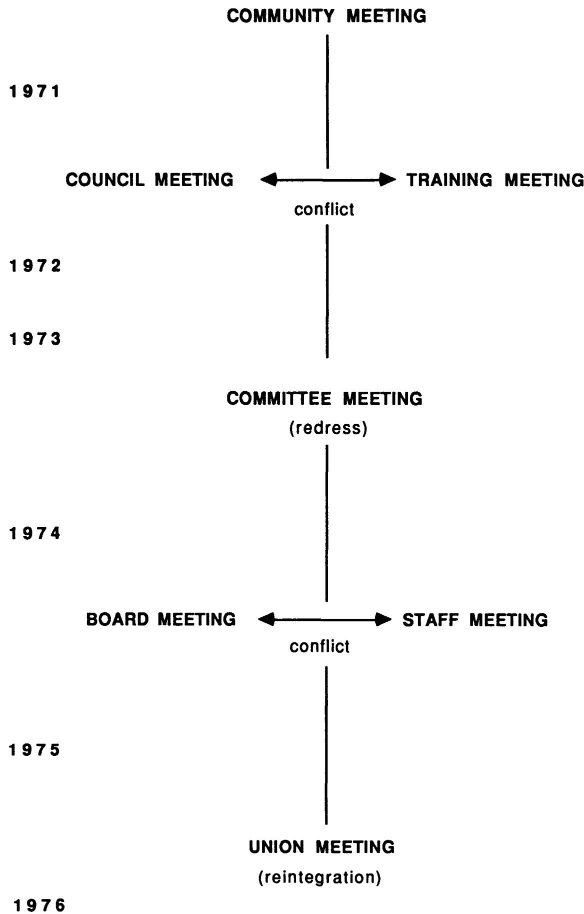

Figure 7.1. Evolution of key meetings.

to more specific accounts of history and histories at the center, and to my interpretation of how history, structure, and ideology were constructed by and through the meeting format.

Issues, Solutions, and Resources: The Early Meetings

It now seems obvious that it would be meetings that would be the form for the generation of organizations as well as conflicts and differences between groups and organizations in West Park. This was the medium of the larger community, as it is, in fact, of American society in

general. The individuals who become involved with the development of the center were well-versed in the "art and strategy" of meetings as they symbolized and mediated political struggles and controversies in the community of West Park. It is important to emphasize here that individuals' accounts of meetings in this early time period emphasized how participants' controlled and/or manipulated specific meetings, meeting knowledge, or meeting groups. It was only later, following the investigation committee and subsequent "squabbles," "fights," and "fusses," that individuals began more and more to portray meetings as either "out of control" or as "controlling them."

It was a common and necessary practice in this context to create community boards (advisory councils, etc.) in order to be eligible for and/or secure and funnel grant monies to organizations and programs,[4] but it was also possible to disband or transform boards when it was felt that the they were being used and manipulated or ignored and discounted. A former Model Cities Community Council member describes how this programs' federally mandated community board used meetings and meeting knowledge to challenge Model Cities' operations when individuals felt that their input was being ignored:

> So one night we had a meeting and we voted ourselves out of existence, just voted ourselves out of existence. That absolutely blew Dick Sawyer's [Model Cities Director] mind because now he's in violation of the federal guidelines which say you have to have a community board. He's got a community board that's voted themselves out of existence, and we got big press—we invited the press and everything—this went on for weeks. We used to use *Robert's Rules of Order*. No one really knew them that well, but the parliamentarian was more or less on our side, so we would bone up on a whole bunch of quick routines before the meeting, and we'd come in there and do things like "I move that this meeting be postponed to a particular date and certain things are nondebatable." Someone else would get up and second it, and the other group would want to talk and we'd say, "rule of the parliamentarian," and she'd say, "It can't be debated." We'd ask for a vote quick, and zacko, we'd be adjourned, before the others knew what happened!

Midwest was developed by individuals who drew on a range of issues, solutions, and resources as topics for discussion *in meetings* (see March and Olsen 1976).[5] In the early 1970s (see also Chapter 4), individuals recognized a range of problems that in their view needed immedi-

[4]Citizen participation in community advisory and program boards began to be mandated by federal, state, and local laws beginning in the 1960s. Since this time, a number of studies have been conducted examining the advantages and disadvantages of "community control," the purpose of structures such as citizen boards, and the accomplishments of such boards (e.g., Kupst, Reidda, and McGee 1975; Meyers *et al.* 1972).

[5]March and Olsen (1976) is the best resource for a general analysis of the mixing of issues, solutions, problems, participants, choices, and pleasure.

ate attention. These problems included poverty, mental illness, child abuse, juvenile delinquency, jobs and worker exploitation, health care, and it was often very difficult for individuals to separate these issues. At the same time, a range of actions and programs were continually discussed as potential or actual solutions to these problems, including political action solutions (e.g., labor organizing efforts, tenant organizing and rent strikes, and specific political action groups such as the "Youth Collective"), alternative service delivery settings sometimes established in conjunction with a political group such as the "Youth Collective's" health clinic or self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous or mental patient right's groups. There were also a variety of city, state, and federally supported programs already in existence in the community (e.g., a mental health clinic that was part of the state mental health department, city-run health and mental health clinics, and a variety of Model Cities programs) along with several programs sponsored by religious groups (e.g., Catholic Services, Methodist Social Services, and individual church programs for the needy, indigent, migrants, immigrants).

In order to fund these programs, individuals and groups drew on a range of funding and granting sources, including individual contributions, local business contributions (especially a local insurance company and local banks), private foundations, city and state service and health programs, and federal money that was dispensed by a variety of agencies such as NIMH, Department of Education, Housing, Model Cities, and so forth. Individuals differed greatly in regard to the issues that they recognized, the solutions that they advocated, and their knowledge of resources. For example a brief list of some of the early participants in the founding of the Center:

- Mark Evans was a shelter-care owner in West Park with a desire to upgrade mental health services in the area and a means, position, and obvious interest in coordinating social and pychological services to patients. Mark was knowledgeable, given his position as owner–operator for several years of a sheltar care home, of city, state and federal guidelines and grants for mental health services.
- Michael Snow had been an SDS member and was a community organizer who had arrived in West Park relatively recently; his interest was in alternative social services as an approach that would overcome fragmented services and provide more humane and less oppressive service to individuals in this area. Through friendship ties, he had connections to the state mental health department, but his interest was in political and social action pro-

grams and especially alternative and nonbureaucratic programs in all of these areas.

- Ellie Marsh was a long-time community resident and mother of four with a particular interest in school issues and social services for children and adolescents in the West Park area. She was a school-board member and ultimately became the representative of West Park High School to the Midwest Council.
- Joanna Curtis was also a long-time resident, community organizer, and activist with a particular interest in developing alternative education programs. She was familiar with the variety of alternative programs already established in the West Park area, having helped to establish many of them.
- Kenneth James was a professional psychologist with an interest in alternative mental health centers and familiarity with regulations and guidelines for preparing staffing grants to secure community mental health funds from NIMH. He was particularly intrigued with the Lincoln Hospital Model of mental health service delivery as developed in New York.

The ability to draw on particular resources depended on an individual or group's knowledge of the source, network relationships and connections, being in the right place at the right time to hear about funding opportunities, expertise in grantsmanship, as well appropriate political connections. This was a time period in American society when, as described before, funds were available from a variety of sources for initiating and/or continuing innovative as well as more traditional social service programs. In West Park, during this time period, there was a great deal of experimentation occurring in the structuring of programs that lent a sense of excitement as well as urgency to all discussions about social services.

In this context, it was very adaptive for issues, solutions, and resources to not be matched in any predetermined or given way. Instead individuals brought them together, repeatedly, and often with a great deal of commitment and excitement, *in meetings*. Meetings provided individuals with a flexible organizing unit that could respond quickly to a rapidly changing and difficult-to-predict resource environment (granting and funding agencies and programs). Individuals gained their most current information about resources and personnel in meetings, whereas at the same time making new connections and learning about who could be "counted" on as a friend or an enemy (who came to meetings and what they did and said). However, as individuals brought issues, resources, solutions, and themselves together in meetings, it was never possible to predict how (and in what way) they would be joined and

affected by the meeting as an event. This makes it essential to consider the meeting as much more than a passive form in shaping the boundaries of the organization as well as the ideology and practices of the variety of individuals and groups that ultimately came to call and recognize themselves as the Midwest Council and Center.

Individuals involved in the very early planning discussions for the center traced development of the organization to early conversations between community and agency people about the "problem" of fragmented" services. Michael Snow recalls some of his earliest meetings:

> I'm talking about how you get the runaround from agencies. You go to one place for service and they say, "Well, we don't provide quite that service here, you go down the street here, and they'll take care of you," you know how the story goes: agencies only served left-handed, blue-eyed, Mongolians with catatonic schizophrenia, or some of that categorical bag. So I started going to West Side Mental Health Board meetings. I was active in a number of community organizations. . . . and my boss at "Workplace" and I and Al Fried started to talk . . . and we decided to try to put together a consortium of local agencies; we were trying to get the state to provide the funding to take care of the rent and the basics, and we wanted to train community paraprofessionals to run a multiservice center that would give people "one stop shopping" so that they could come there, and if we couldn't provide the service directly, then we would put them with one referral in contact with the people who could provide the service.

These early discussions helped to develop a network of individuals who were in frequent communication with each other about what they believed were the crucial issues affecting the West Park community. It was the necessity of being willing to meet or go to meetings "at the drop of a hat," however, that structured and activated these networks. In fact, it was only through meetings that networks were made *visible* and individuals could learn about who was or was not "really" involved with particular issues and solutions. Michael Snow makes this point:

> That's an important thing—that there was a network of people that was relatively constant over a broad range of interests and some would have more involvement in one issue than others, but you kind of got a sense of who your allies were and who your enemies were and a real extensive network of different people and agencies and community organizations that you could just go down your little book and call up people and say, *"Hey, the Board of Health just announced blah, blah, blah, we're going to have a meeting."*

The possibility of creating a community mental health center gave those individuals with a general as well as specific interest in mental health and coordination of services something to meet about, which became more interesting to discuss when it became known that NIMH funds might be available. This discovery, which occurred *in a meeting,* created a challenge for individuals and also more opportunities to talk, according to Mark Evans, one of the center's "founders":

Mark It was the middle of August 1979 when we met. Also at the meeting was Eric King of the City Health Council. . . . Previously this group had submitted to them [NIMH] a grant request; it was a construction grant request to provide mental health services in the area and Hancock [NIMH staff person attending the meeting] threw the grant back at him [Eric King] and said this is unacceptable in its form, in its content, we will not accept a grant from this group; in this instance we want a community group to be the applicant. Don't even bother to rewrite it.

Helen And he did that in front of you?

Mark In front of us all. Well, we came out of that meeting, held a small caucus, and decided that a couple of things had happened. One, a kind of gauntlet had been laid to us, to put up or shut up, and secondly that we were the possessors of some information about how to help our community, that we could get together and write a grant, that we could do something to help the community and if we chose not to, we ignored the task, then we all ought to move out of West Park. So we decided to do it.

What is interesting about this interpretation of the center's early history is the centrality of meetings, as a place for both discovering information (e.g., about funding opportunities as well as relationships between groups, the NIMH evaluation of the City Health Council) and as a place for figuring out what was happening and for generating action. What was happening was not self-evident and neither was what should be done about it. It was necessary, as argued in this book, and as suggested by this informant, to meet in order to make sense of what was happening and what to do about it.

Born in a meeting, as the center seemed to be, it is not surprising to find that the center's borders and boundaries were constantly changing and being redefined. These changes and transformations were a part of the center's earliest history when, in order to become eligible for NIMH staffing grant funds, it became necessary to transform one mental health board into the Midwest Mental Health Center Board. One of the original board members describes "that little transformation":

> I became involved, because by that time I was the vice-president of the West City Mental Health Center Advisory Board, and the president was out of town most of the time, so I had to run the meetings where we transferred the West City Mental Health Center Board's charter to Midwest. Now, I don't know if you heard about that little transformation. Well, the NIMH requirement was that any mental health center group, any group wanting to apply for a mental health center grant, had to be in existence for at least 2 years. Now the Midwest thing had not been in existence for 2 years, but West City

> had been in existence for several years, so they just took their articles of incorporation and suddenly West City Mental Health Center Advisory Board became the Midwest Community Mental Health Center Advisory Board. They changed their name, changed their officers slightly, and reincarnated themselves as 3 years old.

In this way, what began as informal meetings became formalized and began to be responded to as "real" and ultimately as a legal and legitimate organizational entity. In this way meetings enabled individuals to talk themselves into (as well as out of) boundaries that were then responded to *as if* they were matter of fact, objective entities. In this way meetings also became the primary sense-making form for individuals to use to discover what "it" (i.e., their goals and actions) was. Therefore, the meetings that were the occasion for most of this talk became crucial forms for defining boundaries and for generating ideologies that individuals used to make sense of what it was they were doing and saying to each other (see Weick 1977:195). From the beginning, this meant that the center's environment was construed in flexible, shifting, and sometimes disappearing terms. From the beginning, this also meant that the center's environment was also constructed in ideological terms.

Meetings, Boundaries, and Ideology

In order to understand the ambiguity of environment as it will be described here for Midwest, I discuss the work of Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch, *Organization and Environment* (1967). This book is significant in the history of organizational research because of the clarity and synthesis that it offered to conflicting studies of organization/ environment relationships. This theoretical synthesis, which is known as "contingency theory," asserts that "the effective operation of an enterprise is dependent upon their being an appropriate match between its internal organization and the nature of the demands placed on it by its tasks, its environment and the needs of its members" (Burrell and Morgan 1979:164). One of the significant results of the research tradition that is associated with contingency theory has been to underline the importance of drawing boundaries between organizations and environments. Adopting this approach, it is assumed that an organization "faces" its environment, whereas an environment places "demands" on the organization (see Lawrence and Lorsch 1967:16). Although this approach is significant for moving researchers to examine the "external" environment of organizations (which had been neglected in many earlier studies), the organization and its environment are typically construed as

structures that exist objectively in the world as concrete "things." The nature of the theoretical model and methodological procedures that this approach endorses continually affirm and reaffirm this assumption, whereas they examine and challenge specific relationships between organization/environment variables (e.g., stable versus uncertain environments and particular organization structures) (see Burrell and Morgan 1979:164–181 for an extensive discussion and critique of this research approach).

A number of organizational researchers have begun to challenge this standard conception of organization/environment relationships (e.g., March and Olsen 1976; Starbuck 1982; Weick 1979; Westurlund and Sjostrand 1979). Karl Weick (e.g., 1979) specifically uses the work of Gregory Bateson (1972) to conceptualize ecological change and its relation to organizational environments. Bateson's concepts are particularly relevant here because he emphasizes the fact that it is relationships and context that evolve and not "things." Weick's (1979) concept of the enacted environment emphasizes the importance of seeing the environment as well as the organization as a product of continual construction and negotiation of participants:

> Enactment is to organizing as variation is to natural selection. The term enactment is preferred over variation because it captures the more active role that we presume organizational members play in creating the environments which then impose on them. Enactment is intimately bound up with ecological change. When differences occur in the stream of experience, the actor may take some action to isolate those changes for closer attention. That action of bracketing is one form of enactment. The other forms occurs when the actor does something that produces an ecological change, which change then constrains what he does next, which in turn produces a further ecological change, and so on. . . . The enactment process itself segregates possible environments that the organization could clarify and take seriously, but whether it actually does so is determined in the selection processes. Boundaries between organizations and environments are never as clearcut or stable as many organizational theorists think. These boundaries shift, disappear, and are arbitrarily drawn. (pp. 130–132)

In Weick's terms, individuals in organizations are engaged in constructing both "the" organization and "the" environment that they then interpret as imposed on them. When viewed from this perspective, it becomes difficult to separate conceptions of the environment from organizational ideologies. This relationship has been specifically explored by Starbuck (1982) in a case study of Kalmar Verkstad, a workshop for the repair and construction of rolling stock for the Swedish railroads. Starbuck's interest was in examining relationships between ideologies, perceptions of problems, and environments. Kalmar Verkstad is a particularly interesting example of an organization that faced a serious threat to

its existence, when in 1963, the Swedish government announced that it would terminate all subsidies to rail transportation and told its suppliers that this would drastically curtail purchases of new rolling stock. The company was thrown into an immediate state of crisis with this abrupt change in its environment, but Starbuck's analysis illustrates how this "environmental" crisis was related to the "perceptual filters" or ideologies held by the management of the organization:

> For example, Kalmar Verkstad perceived its basic market to be the railways within Sweden. The firm never saw opportunities to sell rolling stock outside of Sweden. The firm's narrow concept of its market made purchases by Svenska Jarnvag [the Swedish nationalized rail system] so important that the announced termination of those purchases threatened Kalmar Verkstad's existence. . . . One of . . . [the important] ideological reorientations at Kalmar Verkstad was the realization that railroads exist outside Sweden. (p. 6)

In order to account for differences between cultural and scientific images of nature, Roy Rappaport (1979) has developed a contrast between what he refers to as "cognized models" and "operational models." In these terms cognized models represent a people's knowledge and beliefs about their environment, whereas operational models describe the same ecological system according to assumptions and methods of science and particularly ecological science (p. 97). In fact, this contrast can best be viewed as one between informant's views of the environment (the cognized model) and researcher construals (the operational model),[6] but what is most important about this approach for the purposes of this chapter is the relationship that it stresses between cognized models and cultural values and ideologies:

> All cognized models encode values, but all do not value the same things equally, and we may inquire into the adaptiveness of different sets of evaluative understandings. A model dominated by, let us say, the postulates of economic rationality would propose that an ecosystem is composed of elements of three general sorts: those that qualify as "resources," those that are neutrally useless, and those that may be regarded as pests, antagonists, or competitors. In contrast, the Ituri Pygmies take the forests encompassing them to be the body of God. These two views of the world obviously suggest radically different ways of living in it. (p. 101)

The idea of a cognized model can be used to examine the assumptions that individuals at Midwest held about where the borders of their organization could properly be drawn. In this context, it was a common practice for borders to expand and contract and appear and disappear in relation to the way that issues, solutions, resources, and participants were brought together in meetings.

[6]See Schwartzman (1978b) for a discussion of the emic/etic debate in these terms.

Organizing the Organization

The early organizing meetings, which involved the participation of numerous individuals representing a variety of groups and organizations in the West Park community, were interpreted by the "founders" as exemplifying the type of participatory organization and community that it was hoped the center would be:

> We . . . wanted to make sure that this would be an open organization, but because many of the people involved were veterans of the Model Cities' wars, they were very suspicious about what the city might do. You know, try to pack the council or something like that, take over one way or the other. So they wanted to write bylaws that would make this impossible. So we had this great big meeting at, I think, Central Methodist Church. At that time, we were meeting there quite a bit because that was in the center of the community and it's a nice big room. We had at least 100 or 150 people in there, and the West City Mental Health Center Advisory Board sat around in the center at this table, and everybody else was around that, and we had our meeting. We would be discussing a section of the bylaws, and then the meeting would be thrown open for everybody to talk, and they would say what they thought about a given article and how it should be changed this way or that way, and then it went back to the Advisory Board, and they voted the final version of it. This went on for 2, 3 hours. *It was really great!* Everybody got a chance to say what they wanted to say in an orderly fashion. Howard Davis and I chaired the thing together because it really took two people to control that meeting, and, in the end, we wound up with a pretty good set of bylaws. At least for the purposes at that point and I really enjoyed it tremendously because it really was a democratic procedure yet it was going along in an orderly process.

It was this process of meeting to hear and incorporate viewpoints, ideas, and the like that would be used to formulate and legitimate a "comprehensive model of community mental health care" to provide services to the West Park community. As stated in the introductory paragraph of the staffing grant submitted to NIMH:

> The Midwest Comprehensive Mental Health Council, a not-for-profit corporation representing a cross-section of the residents of the West Park communities, proposes to organize and operate a system of comprehensive mental health care. This Council is the grant applicant. The plan is to construct a system based partly on a consortium model with policy decisions vested in the Midwest Community Mental Health Center Council with staff employed by the Council to carry out policy decisions. The Council and its central office staff will not be housed in nor primarily affiliated with any existing agency or institution in the area. Various autonomous agencies in the state mental health department planning area . . . will join together to organize a new system of continuous patient care so that any individual residing in West Park can receive that mode of mental health service best suited for his situation. Agencies involved include outpatient mental health centers, a hospital with in-patient psychiatric beds, hospital emergency room facilities, day cen-

ter programs and consultation and educational services for both the professional and lay communities. (p. 2)

The work in terms of the time and energy of organizing the center was done in the process of writing the grant. This process occurred over approximately a 4-month period as a more or less marathon meeting and endurance contest. One of the center's "founders" remembers this process:

> The period of time from the Sunday after October 20 to February of 1971 was probably the most exciting part of my life—the whole process of the grant being put together, specifically to December 5th, when we got the first draft over to the MHD for their approval. The grant was written in this building in the community room and it wasn't heated . . . we had just cleaned it up and subsequently put in an electric base-board heating. I don't know why I didn't do it then, but people slept in shifts, huddled, covered on the floor. Several nights we worked right through and every weekend—that was par for the course. . . . And the instruction the group was given was write the grant as though the money would come and you've got everything you want, all the in-patient beds you need, all the staff you need, all the money you need—write the grant to really meet the needs of the clients. We proceeded to do this in an all-night session at my house. I was the coordinator of the committee to make sure that they were working and getting the documents in, where we put it all together. Each committee was reported in, and we had a big blackboard, and we wrote down the beds that were needed and the money that was needed, the staffing that was needed for each component. . . . [and] there were accountability sessions every Sunday. We advertized in the local paper that wherever we could that we were going to disclose to the community everything that had been done the previous week from Monday through Saturday, disclose it on Sunday for feedback and direction. We had 30, 40, 50 people in the room listening to reports of committees on the progress of the week. Not only did that provide some accountability and visibility of the process, but it was a way of putting pressure on the committees that there was going to be an accounting on Sunday and you better be at work.

In the process of these marathon community meetings and writing sessions, the "grant" was written that developed "the Center" by articulating its ideology and structure. The structure that the founders seemed to have the most "faith" in was the meeting, as a place to work, to "put in time," to demonstrate "interest" and, most importantly, as an occasion that could document commitment. A speech by one of the organizers at an early grant-writing community meeting illustrates this view:

> Look, a lot of what we're doing is on faith. You know, 40 people sitting here today is a lot of faith, and we're putting a lot of time in. We have a lot of the community with this [the grant], and you know it. *We have minutes, we have meetings, we have community organizations, we have interest.* There have been a lot of people working a long, long time. (Statement from a community meet-

> ing recorded in a preliminary report of the grant committee, emphasis added)

The first meeting group that this process formally established and the meeting that came to symbolize the center in this time period was "the council meeting" and the 42-member "steering committee" that constituted its leadership structure. When the grant was approved for funding, and money finally awarded to the Midwest Council, a major meeting effort was launched to advertise and select the first executive director. In keeping with the marathon meeting tradition already established, one that it was felt would insure the most input, feedback, and response from as many people as possible, the final selection of the executive director was remembered by an early council member as one of the finest moments in the center's history:

> The meeting [of the steering committee] started on Monday night, and it was a 3-day meeting, and it was really a magnificent meeting. . . . I don't think we ever reached the heights that we reached at that meeting for group dynamics. It only adjourned for Tuesday because that was an election day, and some of the people were working on the election. So it went Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. . . . It adjourned at night. That meeting adjourned at night at a reasonable hour, like 11:00, and then we would continue the next night at 7:30 P.M. and adjourn at 11:00 P.M., and we finally, on the third day, we selected Dr. Fred Hart.

When staff began to be hired by Fred Hart and his assistant director, Paula Gray, however, they began to participate in a series of "training meetings" that Paula conducted. These meetings began to establish the style, values, and beliefs of staff as they also served to differentiate staff from council members. Training meetings became important as quasi-therapeutic events as individuals were encouraged to "express their feelings" and emotions about all issues, often in very dramatic ways. An early staff member remembers:

> The way Paula would teach is everybody would lay out their whole number on the table and people would have psychotic breaks that people would put together in the room with different people around. I mean she would allow, in the teaching, for regressive experiences that blew people away, but it was a good learning experience, but mainly it was intense.

What happened in this process was that staff and council established different meeting traditions, styles of meeting, and expectations about meeting talk and action. In conjunction with this differing ideologies about what constituted proper mental health treatment and specifically beliefs about who could be considered as proper therapists and patient/clients were developed. These beliefs led individuals to draw very different distinctions between "the organization" and "the community." In this context, at least two conflicting cognized models, as

discussed before, may be identified: the staff model and the council model.

The Staff Model

All staff accepted the mandate that the purpose of the center was to treat the community. In order to do this, they added the principle that staff members must be community individuals. This was most obviously seen in the requirement in the grant that community individuals should be hired as mental health workers (the paraprofessional staff) and in the pressure put on new staff to live in West Park. It was also believed that these workers were *the* true representatives of the community. All staff participated in training meetings, and it was the "encounter-group" quality of these meetings that illustrated the nature of treatment to the trainees and that also heightened their sensitivity to their own and other's actions, feelings, and reactions. These workers came to believe that they represented the community in its whole panorama of social characteristics and problems. This view was legitimated for them by the staffing grant that by now had assumed "biblical" status in terms of participants' views of it:

> Every effort should be made to include applicants [for the position of paraprofessional] of both sexes, from all age groups from teenage youth through the elderly. A variety of life experiences should be covered so that the applicants include ex-drug users, recovered alcoholics, mothers and ex-state hospital patients. . . . Each mental health worker will participate in the activities of the neighborhood such as weddings, funerals, parties, etc. Throughout his life, the type of individual to be hired as a worker will have acquired knowhow in dealing with the problems of the poor. He will have a style that enables him to work with the poor because it matches the client's style. (Midwest Grant, p. 28)

Because the training process itself was a therapeutic event and the workers who participated in training were believed to be the most representative of the community, it was possible to conclude that the community was being treated, even before other clients began to be seen by these workers. From this perspective, staff saw themselves as the *true* representatives of the community (as revealed to them in training meetings) and therefore the embodiment of the organization as articulated by the grant. A staff member interprets Paula's view:

> Paula really did seem to think . . . that the base of the Center was the workers, more than anybody else, and the clients, and I don't mean to forget them. Sometimes I think of the workers and the clients together.

The council, from this perspective, became seen as an intrusive, ignorant, and, most importantly, nonrepresentative group of individuals with no commitment to "community mental health" but only "vested interests" in their own activities. A staff member criticizes the council in an interview:

> It is real clear that the council has nothing to do with what . . . was the spirit of the grant, nothing to do with community mental health, nothing to do with being innovative. . . . In no way is the council responsive to the community *and that was the original design of the council,* that would be what community control was. Community control is not a phrase that gets used every time you want to make the staff jump by telling them that you're not community—that is community, we live here, we're working here because this is our fucking community. The minute we would hire people because they lived in the community and had roots in the community and the moment they began to work here, they lost that identity, they were no longer viewed as community. If you're not on the council, you're not community; clients aren't community and staff aren't community. . . . Our council is no more up front with the community than any random group in North City [a middle-class suburb] knows anything about West Park. . . . It's a small clique of folks who have vested interests in maintaining control, and this is becoming more and more of a standard mental health operation. They feel more comfortable working with professionals, while they talk about the concept of the paraprofessional worker. They don't like most of us, we're not polite, we don't give them the proper respect, we don't talk right, we make trouble.

The Council Model

Members of the community board, many of whom were responsible for writing the initial NIMH staffing grant, also assumed that the purpose of the center was to treat the community. However, their conception of training and treatment led them to assume that the client community existed *outside* the confines of the center (e.g., the ex-mental patients, alcoholics, and drug abusers, *on the street*). It was assumed that some staff would be hired from the community, but it was thought that the process of training would transform them from community symbols into service givers. It was the judgment of board members, however, that the training meetings had become "sensitivity sessions" that were functioning as therapy for staff who were not considered to be proper clients, and not really very representative of the community. One of the center's founders argues this point:

> I couldn't understand why we could not agree because we had a project here. It had to be carried out somehow. You had to have people to do it. I never at any point, how would I put it, felt that there would be any kind of discontinuity between me and the paraprofessionals; simply because we had differ-

> ent jobs didn't mean that we had to hate each other. But this had to be an "in" group and the rest of the world was an "out" group. . . . Fred was organizing paraprofessionals, he was not organizing the council or the community people in the council. In fact, he rejected the council. He seemed to have some idea that the paraprofessionals were the community representatives and the council was not. This surprised me greatly because I certainly knew that the paraprofesionals were supposed to be community people. Many of them were not—they lived all over town, except in West Park, some of them had moved in for purposes of getting the jobs, but they were recent arrivals so this cast doubts on Fred's concept of the paraprofessionals as the real community representatives. Meanwhile a lot of people who had been working with poor people for a long time were simply frozen out because they were council members, and so he didn't accept them because he couldn't control them.

From the perspective of the council (as the process of council meetings revealed to them), the council represented the true community, and therefore was the embodiment of the organization. Staff were hired to implement the council's conception of community mental health, but by blurring boundaries between themselves and clients, they began to be seen as external and in many ways inappropriate participants in the organization.

Meetings as Models

Several characteristics of the council meetings and the training meeting may be identified as they served to generate and reflect the two "cognized models" described before. The dimensions of contrast that seem particularly relevant here are the setting for the event, degree of formality of speech and action, public/private and open/closed presentations, the type of speech expected and encouraged, nature and relationship of speakers, the products produced and participant expectations about the purpose, and goal or outcome of the event.

1. *The setting.* Training meetings were always held in the "ed room" (see Figure 5.2 in Chapter 5) that was given this name because it was the site of the early education/training meetings. This was a room that was appropriate for closed as well as open discussions. Council meetings were typically held in the "hub" that was the large open and very public meeting area of "the Barn."

2. *Formality.* Council meetings were held in a public area and conducted as relatively formal meeting events, with a meeting chair, the use of modified *Robert's Rules of Order,* prearranged agenda and topics (see agenda and minutes for a council meeting in Chapter 5), and a hierarchy of meeting groups (council committees) reporting to the steering com-

mittee and council. The expectation of clearly differentiated roles and relationships between individuals that could be formally structured and represented by a hierarchy of officers and participants was illustrated by the organization of the council and the process of speaking at the meetings. The chair would begin each meeting with a gavel calling the meeting "to order," followed by the approval of the minutes, voting and seconds, reports were "received" from individuals and committees, and then discussion of issues would ensue. Individuals and issues were supposed to be clearly marked (although this was certainly not always the case) and ordered by the nature of the discussion and the imposition of the meeting format. The council adopted a majority vote decision rule although there was often pressure for consensus.

In contrast, training meetings were conducted by Paula, but they were said to be "facilitated" not "led" by her as she might initiate discussion about a topic (in no particular order or sequence but as merited by a "case" or past discussion, as reported by participants), and then the development of the discussion was dependent on "the group." The personal experience of participants about issues, problems, feelings, and so forth was used as the guide for discussion that sometimes followed a pattern of personal confession, acknowledging the confession, questioning and more discussion, integration of confession with other issues, and identification and sharing of "feelings" and "experiences" with other participants. Voting on the issues discussed in training meetings would have been unthinkable.[7]

3. *Open/closed.* Council meetings were open (except for executive sessions) to all council, community, and also to staff members. Council meetings were definitely in the public mode, whereas training meetings were only open to staff and, in practice, only open to paraprofessional but not professional staff. Training meetings were exclusive and often treated as very private and confidential occasions, underlining their similarity to therapy sessions.

4. *Type of speech.* Council meetings encouraged relatively formal speech requiring some prior knowledge of, and familiarity with, formal meeting talk, "Do I Hear a second?" or "OK, let's vote on that," and experience with technical mental health jargon and names. Training meetings, on the other hand, encouraged discussion of personal issues, expressions of emotions, love, hate, rage, anger, tears, and so forth but very little formal discussion (see comparison of speech in Chapter 5).

[7]In analyzing meetings as models of formality, it is possible to suggest that individuals were trying to use two different forms of democratic government in the same organization. Using Mansbridge's (1983) distinction between "adversary" and "unitary democracy" it may be said that council meetings were built on an adversary model whereas training meetings were built on a unitary model.

5. *Speakers.* The relationship of council members to each other was as representatives of organizations to the council (this was the formal structure although not always the case), and then as individuals with particular roles in the council (president, president-elect, secretary, treasurer, committee chair, member). Individuals were not required to speak in meetings unless they were giving a report or had a formal role in the occasion. In fact, not surprisingly, individuals with the most involvement in the center operations, for example, officers, were the most frequent speakers in the meetings. The relationship of training meeting participants was initially as new staff members, especially those hired as paraprofessionals, but eventually members assumed different roles outside the training meeting (e.g., as a unit director, or as a worker in the Native American outpost, etc.), but the continued desire in training meetings was to relate to each other "as individuals and persons, not as roles and structures" as reported by participants in these events. As individuals, everyone was expected to have feelings, experiences, and so on that they would share with the group, and so there was the expectation that everyone would speak at meetings, although as reported by participants, some people spoke more than others, especially those who were particularly able to speak in public and seemed to enjoy this process.

6. *Purposes and products.* Both meetings produced talk in abundance, but the participants' interpretation of the significance and point of this talk as well as what the talk was believed to produce differed greatly. The training meeting was assumed to produce feelings and emotions and ultimately "training," and no other formal documentation or records of this process or its products was undertaken. The council believed that the purpose of the council meetings was to conduct "business," take action, make important decisions (leadership, budget, policy setting, etc.). A variety of records of this business were produced in the process, including meeting announcements, agendas, minutes, reports, tapes of meetings, and the like. The council believed that what occurred in training meeting was the "inappropriate" provision of therapy to staff. Staff believed that council members were nonrepresentative of the community and also incompetent in their abilities and comprehension of the important issues in community mental health and therefore "inappropriate" as leaders for the "business" of the organization.

Conflict and the Enactment of Environments and Ideologies

When staff and board fought, they typically fought about the borders and symbols of the organization. Could staff represent both the

treating community and the client, therapist and patient? Or was the client (and therefore the recipient community and the proper environment for the organization) always "out there," outside the center, clearly defined as separate from staff? During the first year of the center's operation, the issue of training and training meetings was raised repeatedly by council members. The culmination of this issue was the formation of an "Investigation committee" charged with "resolving all of the center's problems and strife." This "training crisis" consumed hours of meeting time for both staff and board, approximately 65 hours according to an estimate made in the final report of the committee. This report illustrates in detail how participants interpreted their conflicts (over ideology and environment) to each other, as it also documents the role that meetings played in generating these conflicts as well as their attempted solution. An excerpt is included from this report:

> Report of the Midwest Community Mental Health Council, Investigation Committee on the Problems of the Center and the Council.
>
> The first recommendation of the committee concerns 2-A of the agenda for the June meeting. This is entitled:
>
> *Recommendation to Center Director, Does Service Philosophy Coincide with the Paraprofessional Worker Concept, and are our Paraprofessional Workers Members of the Staff and/or the Community?*
>
> The committee is unanimous in its concern that as each of them individually and collectively view the meaning of the philosophy of the grant, they are uneasy about how it is currently being implemented by the staff of the center. This concern runs a gamut which includes that paraprofessional workers are losing their credentials as authentic community participants by virtue of obtaining their salary from the center, to the view that Paula Gray in her supervision of the clinicians on the center staff, and particularly the paraprofessional workers, makes it even more difficult for workers who would try to implement the "social action" philosophy of the grant by not only attempting to educate to what might be called an "interpsychic model of conflict and disability" but by depreciating the paraprofessional worker as being too much like the person he is trying to treat. And one consequence of this, as Paula's supervision is reported in the committee, is that the paraprofessional worker, in order to avoid being depreciated by his or her supervisor, Paula Gray, must accept a point of view which a number of the members of the committee feel is not in accord with the basic philosophy of the grant.
>
> An extension of the material in the foregoing paragraph is that the committee majority believes that a paraprofessional worker, or other staff, who are not able to accept the supervisory concepts described in the previous paragraph are subjected to what the committee feels is an unwarranted degree of pressure beyond the reasonable boundaries of the implementation of an educational philosophy about treatment. That is, the committee senses that social sanctions and potentially the extreme job sanction may ensue from the worker, or other staff, taking a position contrary to the one that Paula stands for. This represents the views of nine members of the committee.
>
> There is a minority report of three who disagree with the preceding paragraph in regard to the majority's view of the depreciating aspects of

Paula's educational procedure. The minority holds that her educational techniques can be justified and have been seen by them to be productive within a recognizable, educational context.

There is a technical advisor's report to the following effect: The technical advisor's view of the foregoing is the following: "I do not believe that anybody has a better way to know whether or not their philosophy of the grant is being implemented than to hear in detail a case reported by all the people involved with the case, potentially even including the patient." A reference to the literature is available from the technical advisor who has written an article describing this method.

A majority of the committee believes that there is a problem such that some paraprofessionals feel that their input as community people is not valued by the council, presumably because once they accept a salary from the center they must be considered staff not community. However, this majority on the committee believes that such a feeling on the part of the workers is not an accurate reflection of how the vast majority of the council indeed feel, but instead reflects a point of view which has been told to the workers by staff members above them in the center. The foregoing material expresses the view of 10 of the 12 committee members.

Two of the committee members present believe that there is not sufficient evidence for the majority view that staff are orienting workers to the belief that the council is not seriously interested in their input.

The unanimous consensus of the committee was that a report by the mental health field workers should be on the regularly published agenda of the Council and/steering committee meetings, separate and distinct from the report of the mental health center director.

A majority of the committee wishes to recommend to the council that Fred's statement in the "staff meeting minutes" of . . . [date] be taken as a very serious error in judgment on his part in the context of the council's effort to make it extremely clear to the mental health workers that their input is valued highly. (Investigation Committee Report, pp. 1–2)

Sense Making in a Key Meeting

There are, of course, a number of ways to interpret a cultural text such as the preceding. I have chosen to see it as a by-product of a long (approximately 6 hours), loose, and searching discussion conducted within the frame of what was an important key meeting (the investigation committee process) for the center. From this perspective, this is an after-the-fact statement of the sense-making processes that I assume were taking place in this meeting (however, I have no direct records of the actual meeting discussion). The investigation committee demonstrates how a series of meetings became key meetings, as defined before, in the historical consciousness of participants. It was the investigation committee process that provided participants with an occasion to struggle to make sense of the multiple crises and problems that had

occurred and accumulated during the center's first year of operation, including the process of the investigation committee itself. The charge to the committee was "to investigate the differences and internal strife of the center and also the relations between the Center and the community at large and to present the findings of the investigation for resolution within 60 days" (Midwest Mental Health Center minutes). As the committee composed of 20 council members interpreted its task, it set itself up as both judge and jury for the center, calling and hearing the "testimony" of "witnesses" over an 8-week time period, ruling on the appropriateness of evidence, and deliberating over this "evidence" for approximately 3 weeks to develop solutions and recommendations. Each "witness" was asked to speak to four questions when addressing the investigation committee:

1. What do you see as the problems?
2. What do you see as the causes of these problems?
3. How do the problems affect you in your area of work?
4. What do you think are the solutions to the problems? (Investigation Committee Final Report, Introduction, pp. 1–2)

Paula and Fred refused to participate, in a formal sense, in these proceedings, but they did attend several of the open meetings. Before the end of the committee deliberations, Fred presented a lengthy written report to the committee that lambasted the entire proceedings and attempted to challenge the purpose, motivation, and personal competence and credibility of many council members. The first paragraph of this statement presents his position:

> The problem as I see it: Almost from the beginning, people outside the center have been criticizing things about which they had no first hand experience. They were criticizing in response to some people's hurt feelings rather than in response to what actually happened. I do not remember any comments about the end product but rather view it as a "choosing up sides." Let me remind you that one of the reasons we are here at all is that folks were critical of the ways existing agencies were functioning—that they were not providing quality services to those in need and that those in need were angry. In the beginning, we expressed that anger. We have been concerned—perhaps, obsessed— with doing a better job, of training our paraprofessionals to provide high quality direct services without losing their community ties. I will make a blanket statement that those professionals who have left did not share this belief nor were they able to give of themselves to provide the needed training and supervision. It is curious but understandable that some of them hang around nipping at our flanks, seeking revenge for their wounded pride.

In attempting to make sense, in the elevated format of "committee deliberations," participants seem to have made several assumptions (perhaps meta-assumptions) about problems, causes and solutions, al-

though the validity of these assumptions was never the subject of debate. All of these assumptions, it seems to me, are crucial for understanding how this process produced the sense of "an" organization for participants and also how it ultimately led to a redoubling of meeting efforts by staff and council.

1. First, and perhaps most importantly, everyone assumed that there was a basic "philosophy" guiding action at the center and that there was some way to document agreement among all parties as to what this philosophy was, or should be, and whether or not it was being met at the center. This assumption was articulated and acted upon as "true," whereas at the same moment the committee process itself documented wildly differing and incompatible views of the organization, roles of individuals in the organization, and philosophies and practices ("social action" vs. "interpsychic model of conflict and disability," staff as members of the community, staff as nonmembers of the community, staff as clients, staff as nonclients).[8]

2. In relation to 1, the assumption was maintained that whatever differences existed were a matter of implementation and or interpretation and could be assessed by counting agreement and disagreement (see the majority and minority report style) and changed by having those in authority (e.g., the council) note where differences were inaccurate (e.g., "the majority of the committee believes that there is a problem that some paraprofessionals feel that their input as community people is not valued by the Council. . . . However, this majority of the committee believes that such a feeling on the part of those paraprofessionals is not an accurate reflection of how the vast majority of the Council indeed feel. . . .").

3. It is assumed throughout this excerpt (and throughout the entire document) that the problems which have beset the center are problems that stem from *individuals*, especially Paula Gray and Fred Hart, and not contexts or situations. This is a crucial assumption, and as it appears in this document, it illustrates how specific practices, events, and records of events, both *create and support* beliefs and values. However, researchers continue to interpret such statements as reflections of more abstract ideological or cultural values (e.g., the value of individualism) when, in fact, these values do not and cannot exist outside such events (see discussion of this issue in Chapter 2).

4. Although it is assumed that problems stem from individuals, it is

[8]The ability of individuals to make sense even of situations and responses characterized by randomness and nonsense has been examined by various social scientists (see especially Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, 1967) and, more recently, the work described before by Latour and Woolgar (1986).

also assumed that solutions stem from meetings. This belief, as generated by action/responses in the past, was responsible for the genesis of the investigation committee itself as the solution "to all of the differences and strife at the center." The first recommendation specified in this report is an attempt to use speech in meetings as a way to solve problems, as it requires the delivery of *separate* executive director and mental health paraprofessional reports to all future council and/or Steering Committee meetings. The relationship of meetings and conflict will be discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter, but it is important to note here that this fourth assumption set the stage and supported the meeting/committee response to all subsequent problems that occurred at Midwest, especially those having to do with issues of leadership and power (this will be discussed in Chapter 8).

Implications of the Council Meeting and the Training Meeting

Rappoport's description of cognized models has enabled me to identify two conflicting ideologies about mental health treatment and the work of March and Olsen, Weick, and Starbuck highlights the relationship between ideology and environment in illustrating how these cognized models may be used to enact "organizational environments." It has been necessary to turn to the phenomenon of meetings, however, to examine the role of conflict and its relationship to issues of environment and ideology as generated in a system such as Midwest. Two meetings in particular have been identified here, the council meeting and the training meeting, that require us to reconceptualize our understanding of these relationships. The models of participants at Midwest, as well as most researchers, share the general Western and American cultural tendency to see meetings as operating *in the service of* ideology, as the "natural" result of particular environmental relationships or as a necessary context for conflict resolution (e.g., a group's commitment to consensual decision making requires small face-to-face meetings to accomplish this goal). In this view, ideology, environment, or conflict are all somehow "things" that may be examined as independent of meetings (see discussion in Chapter 3). For this reason, as I have suggested here, the central role of meetings in generating and producing ideology, environment, and conflict has not been emphasized.

The assumption of a tight connection between ideology and action is very common in organizational theory as March and Olsen (1976) remind us, but it does not necessarily depict what actually happens or is experienced in organizational systems:

> Most organization theories begin with some kind of presumption that individuals and groups pursue objectives and that organizational outcomes reflect that pursuit in some fairly self-evident way. Thus, we are directed to discover who the participants are, what their intentions, beliefs, and resources are. We are encouraged to see revealed preference techniques for identifying intentions or resource distributions techniques for identifying power not as definitional tautologies but as reflection of structure underlying an intentional process. To the extent to which the underlying process is not intentional, the meaning and utility of such procedures shifts, as does our metaphor for understanding events. (pp. 20–21)

The alternative metaphor that I am suggesting here is to shift attention from ideology, environment, and conflict to meetings and to reconstrue relationships between these issues and meetings. This can be illustrated by examining the relationship between meetings and conflict. In the social science literature, meetings and conflict are intimately related, but they have been related in such a way so as to always place the meeting in the background. For example, meetings are generally seen as (1) a place for conflict resolution (e.g., the literature on negotiations, also on social dramas, and conflict functionalism); or (2) related to the preceding, meetings may also be viewed as a place to display conflict and bring tensions to a head, with the idea that releasing tensions publically will solve problems and "clear the air"; or alternately, that this will mobilize differences and conflict between groups, as groups achieve awareness of their common, generally oppressive, experiences (consciousness-raising use of meetings, also labor organizing, conflict theory, etc.); or (3) finally, many researchers have noted the tendency for small, face-to-face meetings to suppress conflict (studies of participatory democracies, studies of conflict in small groups, and/or small communities where individuals are linked by "multiplex ties," see Mansbridge 1983; in anthropology, see Foster 1965; Frankenberg 1957; Gluckman 1963; and more recently Yngvesson 1978). In these examples, meetings play a role as a background structure for the resolution, regulation, display or suppression of conflict.

For the most part, researchers have not been eager to reverse these relationships; however, by placing conflict in the background and meetings in the foreground, it is possible to suggest that conflict serves the interests of meetings just as much as meetings serve the varying interests of conflict.[9] Conflict, it will be suggested here, is particularly

[9]Of course, this is still a form of reasoning similar to that employed by conflict functionalists. However, by reversing these relationships, an important aspect of how meetings are produced and reproduced in social systems is suggested. Benjamin Zablocki (1976) presents a very interesting analysis of the value of crises for societies and as a control mechanism for leaders; however, crises are interpreted broadly here, and so their ability to activate and generate meetings appears to be assumed and is therefore unexam-

important in a system such as Midwest because the inevitable conflicts, struggles, fights, and crises that absorbed participants, guaranteed an unending stream of meetings in which individuals might participate. Although everyone was unhappy about these "endless" meetings, I have argued and attempted to demonstrate here how these events became crucial sense-making forms in this context. At Midwest, participants attempted to use meetings to resolve conflicts, but these occasions were extraordinarily unsuccessful at producing resolutions *or* in suppressing conflicts. At the center, meetings seemed to be most successful for displaying conflicts as well as for generating more conflict, as they activated group and individual relationships. This generation of conflict produced two important things for the center: (1) more meetings, and (2) a sense of excitement attached to certain occasions "where anything might happen."

The production of meetings and excitment should not be regarded as trivial accomplishments in an organization such as Midwest where participation in meetings could not be guaranteed and was difficult to predict (see March and Olsen 1976). From this perspective, if there were no meetings, or no or few participants in meetings, then the organization would be unable to reproduce itself in the talk that when framed as a meeting became evidence of the work of the organization. If there were only therapy sessions between staff and clients, then individuals could continue to interpret themselves at work as therapists, but they would not be able to interpret themselves at work in an organization, Midwest Community Mental Health Center. In order to constitute and reconstitute Midwest to themselves as an organization, it was essential for individuals to participate in meetings as discussed here, but it is important to recognize that these meetings and this participation cannot be taken for granted.

In fact, researchers have recognized that there is an ebb and flow of excitment and boredom in group settings (especially alternative organizations). For example, Swidler (1979) suggests in her study of Group High and Ethnic High:

> The core dilemma of group life involves regulating the intensity of member's involvement: If collective life is too intense, it explodes, and individuals are propelled apart by the heat of their emotional conflicts. Yet if collective life is milder, individuals easily slip away from group control—into apathy or into other, more satisfying relationships. (pp. 95–96)

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ined. The perspective that I am suggesting here argues that it is this meeting-generating ability of conflicts and crises that may be their most important value, as it makes possible the more general functions that researchers such as Zablocki have identified. However, we cannot assume that the processes whereby this occurs have been well-documented or that they occur in any straightforward fashion.

However, priority continues to be given to the idea that ideology is a major means of control and coordination, and conflict a major source of problems, in these groups:

> What I have . . . called group situated ideological discussion and what others call criticism and self-criticism involves the use of ideology in a group setting to explore and resolve conflicts, to forge shared goals, and to bring individual conduct and thought into line with group decisions. Here ideology is a critical tool for translating collective feeling into collective control. Such forums can also provide the occasions for the socialization of affection—for making private ties group property and making collective attachments primarily for all members of the group. All of these techniques of collective control are legitimated by ideology, and ideology provides the central link for transforming the treacherous advantages of group sentiments into the more effective tools of collective social control. (Swidler 1979:108)

But if, as March and Olsen suggest, ideology cannot be assumed to clearly guide action, then it will not be a very good "tool" for collective control, at least, not unless it is examined in the contexts in which ideology and action are typically *mixed* (to use the March and Olsen term). This means that it is essential to give meetings priority in our analyses (rather than, for example, ideology or, as will be seen in the next chapter, decisions). In making this shift, it becomes possible to use the concepts of history, environment, ideology, and conflict to understand what meetings may be seen to accomplish for individuals and organizations, and to examine how meetings reproduce themselves over time in specific contexts and come to have particular meanings for individuals in these settings.

Summary

At Midwest, individuals came together because they needed to define the organization and create boundaries, but it was the process of meetings that accomplished this. The rallying cry for assembly in the West Park community was commitment to community mental health, but what did this *mean?* It was in meetings that individuals developed, elaborated, and interpreted the meaning of community mental health ideologies for themselves. The council meeting and the training meeting at Midwest were the important contexts that generated the differing ideologies and the continuing conflicts, crises, and so forth that came to dominate the lives of individuals in this setting. It was the recurrence of conflict that guaranteed the appearance and reappearance of meetings and that also produced the excitment as well as the confusion and frustration that individuals reported. The council meeting and the training

meeting have specifically been used in this chapter to question traditional theoretical construals that give precedence to history, environment, ideology, and conflict as theoretical topics and explanatory concepts for understanding what happens in organizations, while neglecting to consider the role of meetings in constituting these concepts and conflicts for researchers as well as for participants. In the following chapter, I continue this approach by using the committee meeting and the board meeting to examine relationships between meetings, decisions, and power.

10:30 P.M.

Maria *I put together the final reports of all the committees. I did not really edit them very much. And that's about 20 pages I think. And that perhaps would suffice in terms of something the Council wanting to read through that material. And I think it went in the mail today.*

Ellie *To summarize it for the council, I think, becomes an absolutely impossible task.*

Maria *It operates on the/*

Greg *We could send out those things like we have had at the negotiating meetings. Namely the reports of the various committees and so forth.*

Maria *The final reports summarize it better. I think if you send out the minutes, you're going to get into a lot of—*

Rita *[inaudible]*

Greg *Yeah. I think [pause]*

Mary *I'd like to know what Joanna has to say.*

Greg *Yeah.*

Maria *Let's hear what she has to say.*

Greg *Manny, we'll try to get out something, though, in answer to your [inaudible] It's a perfectly valid [inaudible] Joanna.*

Joanna *I think two things might be said [inaudible] Manny's motion which could help to clarify it. This has been going on for 3 months, and we have had reports. Progress reports prior to this one at council committee meetings and at steering committee meetings. So that there have been these reports which have been sent out to everybody, and the other thing is in our attempt through our subcommittees, we've always tried to have reports specifically around the delivery of services that are pertinent to*

every given committee. For instance, Family Services, in their subcommittee has always had a progress report. So we tried to use, I think, both of those lines of communication and they are progress reports. But I did want to make the report that the detailed minutes are on record. And if anybody wants to get into the detailed reports, they [inaudible] What should be kept in mind, though, is that as this is a negotiating team, there has been a lot of argument. A lot of things have been said before conclusions are reached. And that give-and-take we find in the detailed minutes. And it has been like that. [Pause] I think one of the most exciting parts of the bargaining—[background voice] really has been the people from the council, from our staff, and from the line people from the Mental Health Department, and the supervisory staff have a lot of give-and-take, and as we have begun to make progress, trying to solve some of the nitty-gritty problems, it has been people to people getting to know each other and appreciate the different roles of responsibility, the differences in the staffing patterns and the methods of supervision, and as we get into this, and try to bargain through some of it, the real honest to God open-mindedness of talking through some of the problems has been an exciting thing to be part of. And we have made a lot of progress.

There really were some strained, difficult feelings at first. From people who felt insecure about their jobs and insecure about who was going to be their boss, insecure about, especially about our position, and the importance of our paraprofessionals. In three months time, we really, I think, talked through a lot of that stuff, and we really cleared the air. And that is one of the most favorable things about the negotiating that I would say. We have, at this point, come to conclusions from everyone, reached conclusions for every one of the subcommittees. [cough] [inaudible] Family Services, the inpatient services, the community residential homes and the [inaudible] services. These were the subcommittees. We've reached decisions about what the staffing pattern is going to be, what the problems of space are going to be, and problems in relationship to the treatment philosophy. And in administration, [inaudible] iron out the sharing of records and some of the nitty-gritty [inaudible] problems about funding. There has been one big hurdle from the very beginning and that was something that we talked about in both steering committee and council meetings, and we're not sure how many staff from the Mental Health Department we were talking about. What was the total number of personnel that was going to be integrated into our center? And what we did decide to do, I think [cough] at this point about 6 weeks ago, was to write Dr. Stein requesting this information. And that, as I would express it, ended with some meetings which included Michael and Judy to try to talk this problem through. [text deleted]

Chapter 8

Decisions and Power

The Committee Meeting and the Board Meeting

Oh give me your pity!
I'm on a committee,
Which means that from morning to night.

We attend and amend
And contend and defend
Without a conclusion in sight.

We confer and concur,
We defer and demur,
And reiterate all of our thoughts.

We revise the agenda
With frequent addenda
And consider a load of reports

We compose and propose,
We suppose and oppose,
And the points of procedure are fun;

But though various notions
Are brought up as motions
There's terribly little gets done.

We resolve and absolve;
But we never dissolve,
Since it's out of the question for us

To bring our committee
To end like this ditty,
Which ends with a period—thus.

Anonymous

In the West, everyone ridicules and disparages committees. In many ways, committees have come to symbolize what Americans and West-

erns dislike most about meetings: inefficiency, cumbersome procedures, unfruitful discussions, and so forth. In his excellent book, *Government by Committee* (1955), K. C. Wheare examines the role of committees in the machinery of the British government. He suggests that their prevalence in the government must be examined as he cites Winston Churchill's complaint during a moment of exasperation during World War II as he exclaimed: "We are overrun by them [committees], like the Australians were by the rabbits" (p. 1). In examining the phenomenon of "government by committee," Wheare demonstrates the general approach that researchers have taken toward meetings and meeting groups, such as committees and boards. First, he classifies these groups based on the tasks that they are asked to perform, and so he compares and contrasts committees to advise (e.g., panels, councils, working parties), committees to inquire (e.g., royal commissions, select committees of the House of Commons, departmental and interdepartmental committees), committees to negotiate (e.g, committees engaged in settling questions of hours of labor, wage rates, and conditions of work in central or local government service), committees to legislate (e.g., standing committees of the House of Commons), committees to administer (e.g., committees used by local authorities of the country), committees to scrutinize and control (e.g., select committees of the House of Commons—of Public Accounts, on Estimates, and on Statutory Instruments) (p. 2). In the case of each of these six different types of committees, Wheare examines the effectiveness of the committee based on whether or not they accomplish their designated task, which in general means whether or not they "decide something":

> If we are to judge whether a committee is doing its work well, we must have in our minds certain criteria of success, which we must attempt to formulate in advance, however, vaguely. In the first place it can be said that it is the job of a committee to come to a conclusion, to decide something. Its decision may be a finding of fact or a recommendation to its parent body or an administrative order or an appointment or a proposal to defer consideration. Whatever its function, however, it is its job to take a decision upon the matter before it. If it fails to do that, then it is not doing its work. It may seem absurd to assert so self-evident a proposition, but it has to be asserted because committees have been known to fail to perform this task. (p. 10)

Wheare's approach underlines several assumptions and associations that I am attempting to challenge in this book. In particular, the idea that decisions are what meetings are about and the assumption that decisions reflect power as localized in individuals and groups are both examined in this chapter by presenting an analysis of the committee meeting and the board meeting at Midwest. As a preface to this analysis, it is necessary to briefly, and very generally, describe my understanding of the way that notions of organization, decisions, power, committees, and meetings are currently entangled in the literature. Turning to the

committee meeting and the board meeting and meetings in general at Midwest, I suggest some different links between these concepts. In presenting this analysis, I attempt to illustrate how theoretical concepts must be situated in a cultural and historical context and how such an analysis may reveal important but taken-for-granted assumptions about concepts and associations.

Decisions and Power

Wheare's approach exemplifies the task-focused orientation of most researchers that has already been discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. His book also illustrates the tendency of many studies to foreground decisions specifically in analyzing meeting behavior while recognizing that many of these events "fail to perform their tasks." This study is significant, in the context of much research in this area, because Wheare realizes that committees may be accomplishing a variety of things in government. However, he does not attempt to challenge th cultural premise that the primary purpose of meetings/committees is decisions, nor does he ask why individuals are invariably frustrated by the committee process. These issues are taken up in this chapter.

Committees are the most obvious of institutionalized group meeting forms in the West, and a form that by definition is "given" a specific task (it is "referred" or "committed" to the committee) (see Wheare definition). It is probably for this reason that committees are the most ridiculed and frustrating of meeting forms for Westerners and especially Americans.[1] This also makes committees, especially in American soci-

[1]The range and number of jokes, parodies and cartoons about meetings is enormous and is most evident in books like *I Hate Meetings* (Baker 1983) as well as the variety of "how-to-make-meetings-better" books briefly discussed in Chapter 3. These jokes frequently focus on the inefficiency of committee forms and activities, for example, the well-known definition of a committee as "an aggregation of the unwilling appointed by the incompetent to do a task that is unnecessary" (Carnes 1980:61). The Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) was an early observer and sometimes critic of committee activities as the following verse from "Twelve Months in a Curatorship (by one who has tried it)" written in 1883 (1965) makes clear:

> Four frantic Members of a chosen Committee!
> One of them resigned, then there were Three.
> Three thoughtful Members: they may pull us through!
> One was invalided—then there were Two.
> Two tranquil Members: much may yet be done!
> But they never came together, so I had to work with One. (p. 955)

Dodgson's experience with, and interest in, committees and especially elections and voting procedures also led him to prepare a series of papers and pamphlets on these subjects. Several of these works are reprinted and analyzed in some detail by Duncan

ety, a likely place for ambivalence about group activities to be expressed in the continued characterization of committees as examples of ineffective, ridiculous and time-wasting group activity.[2]

Although it is frequently assumed that committees are inefficient and incapable of making a "good" decision, or, indeed, any decision at all, the assumption that decisions are a defining feature of organizations and that they are one of the major purposes of meetings is pervasive in the organizational literature. Decision making has come to be seen as "*the* organizational activity" (Pettigrew 1973:5; also Barnard 1938; Simon 1957), or, at least, as the defining organizational activity. Herbert Simon,

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Black in his book *The Theory of Committees and Elections* (1958) that is also an attempt to present the logic of committee decisions and elections using mathematical reasoning. In a more humorous vein, Bruce Old (1946) presents a "mathematical analysis" of committee functioning and concludes his report by noting the puzzling finding that "the peaking of efficiency of output of a committee versus number of committee members . . . [is] seven-tenths of a person. Obviously one must conclude that either further research is required or that people are no damned good" (p. 134). One of the most insightful as well as humorous commentaries on committees is C. Northcote Parkinson's essay "Directors and Councils or Coefficient of Inefficiency" that appears in his well-known book *Parkinson's Law* (1957). In this essay, he suggests that more attention should be paid of the science of "comitology," and in order to encourage such a science, he presents the first and tentative coefficient of inefficiency:

> Prolonged research at the Institute of Comitology has given rise to a formula which is now widely available (although not universally) accepted by the experts in this field. It should perhaps be explained that the investigators assumed a temperate climate, leather-padded chairs and a high level of sobriety. On this basis, the formula is as follows:
>
> $$x = \frac{m^{o}(a-d)}{y+p\sqrt{b}}$$
>
> Where m = the average number of members actually present; o = the number of members influenced by outside pressure groups; a = the average age of the members; d = the distance in centimeters between the two members who are seated farthest from each other; y = the number of years since the cabinet or committee was first formed; p = the patience of the chairman, as measured on the Peabody scale; b = the average blood pressure of the three oldest members, taken shortly before the meeting. Then x = the number of members effectively present at the moment when the efficient working of the cabinet or other committee has become manifestly impossible. This is the coefficient of inefficiency, and it is found to lie between 19.9 and 22.4. (The decimals represent partial attendance; those absent for a part of the meeting.) (p. 43)

[2]This ambivalence is expressed in the research literature on individual versus group problem solving and work group effectiveness (see Yetton and Bottger 1982 for a brief review). Researchers have claimed that groups are superior to individuals in solving problems (at least certain types of problems), but some researchers have begun to question this view. The work of Janis (1972) and others (e.g., Swap 1984) specifically examines what is viewed as the destructive effect of groups on individuals, and many researchers have suggested that groups fail to reach their full potential because of "process losses" and "affective reactions of group members" (Birrell and White 1982; Guzzo and Waters 1982; Rohrbaugh 1979, 1981; Steiner 1972).

who is well-known for his work on decision making in organizations, illustrates this approach in the following definition:

> An organization can be pictured as a three-layered cake. In the bottom layer, we have the basic work processes—in the case of a manufacturing organization, the processes that procure raw materials, manufacture the physical product, warehouse it and ship it. In the middle layer, we have the programmed decision-making processes, the processes that govern day-to-day operation of the manufacturing and distribution system. In the top layer, we have the non-programmed decision-making processes, the processes that are required to design and redesign the entire system, to provide it with its basic goals and objectives, and to monitor its performance. (1971:201)

There are a number of theoretical approaches to the study and analysis of decision making, and the research literature in this area is immense (see Chapter 3 for examples of the types of studies available). Pettigrew (1973:5) suggests that there are two general classes of decision-making theories: normative-mathematical approaches such as the game theoretical work of von Neumann and Morgenstern (1954) and behavioral theories such as March and Simon (1958) that focus on "satisficing" instead of "maximizing" and the simplification strategies that individuals use to approximate real decision situations (see Steinbruner's 1974 discussion of analytic and cybernetic paradigms as applied to the study of decision making in political situations).

In *Ambiguity and Choice in Organizations* (1976), Olsen identifies three general types of decision-making theories. *Rational models* assume that a rational agent or agents selects from a series of predetermined alternatives the alternative whose consequences rank highest in terms of his or her goals and objectives (e.g., to maximize profits). The agent is always assumed to seek to maximize specific values or preferences. This model assumes a unitary, rational decision maker who is completely informed and who knows what he or she wants and has the knowledge and power to get it. This approach assumes a tight connection between the desires of decision makers and organizational events (p. 82).

Rational models are certainly the most common in the literature, and this is not surprising because they are grounded in, and continuously validate, important cultural assumptions about the value of rationality.[3] The centrality of decisions in the organizational literature is clearly related to these cultural assumptions, and this in itself makes it possible to understand the ubiquity of meetings as the context for decisions. In American society, meetings assume great significance because

[3]John D. Steinbruner (1974) presents an excellent description and analysis of the assumptions that ground the rational or analytic paradigm in decision theory; see also Fjellman (1976) for an anthropological critique of decision theory in general and concepts of rationality and "rational man" in specific.

they are a major setting for displaying the cultural value on the use of reason and logic in the development of decisions and policies. In his review of political language studies, Parkin (1984) suggests that in the Western world "we aspire to decision making through what we perceive to be calculated reason because it seems to us to be the best way to control our destinies" (p. 356; see also Bailey 1981). An interview with John C. Whitehead (at the time deputy secretary of state in the United States) illustrates how these assumptions affect American descriptions of the decision-making process in organizations. In this case, Whitehead is commenting on the similarities he sees between decision making in investment banking and foreign policy:

> "A problem arises," he said. "You quickly get together who is most expert on the subject in the organization—and this building is filled with experts who are very good, very dedicated and very knowledgeable—and you pick their brains in a very short period of time and you make a decision and clear the decision with all the people around who are affected by it, just as you would in business."
>
> "And then," he continued, "you put it in effect and you try to carry it out as efficiently and sensibly as you can, and that whole process is not much different from the business process." (Gwertzman 1986:16)[4]

The fact that many decisions do not get made in this way and that many meetings do not accomplish this end does not seem to diminish individuals' beliefs in the value of meetings for reasoned discussion and debate in the formulation of decisions. Meetings, however, may be most important in American society because they generate the *appearance* that reason and logical processes are guiding discussions and decisions, whereas they facilitate relationship negotiations, struggles, and commentaries. (However, these struggles are not secondary to, and/or reflective of, the practice of power, structure, etc.; they *are* the practice of power, structure, etc.) It is this process that can make meetings such frustrating occasions because they appear to be doing one thing, whereas, in many ways, they are accomplishing something entirely different. When viewed from this perspective, it is possible to see why meetings are so common as well as so maligned in American society.

The second model characterized by Olsen is the *conflict resolution model*. This model also assumes a close connection between the desires of decision makers (although it recognizes that desires may conflict) and organizational events. Here the organization is seen as consisting of rational individuals and subgroups with different interests, perceptions,

[4]Ironically, this statement was made during a time period when, as we know from the recent (1987) Iran-Contra hearings, the opposite of this decision-making process was being utilized by a number of high officials in the United States government.

and resources. It is assumed that decisions are made based on bargaining, coalitions, and compromise between individuals and groups that have different interests but are willing to trade, bribe, and compromise to get what they want or some approximation of it (Olsen 1976:83). A focus on maximization is replaced here by an emphasis on power and interest differentials between individuals and groups (see Pettigrew 1973). This approach continues to highlight decisions as the topic of study, but in this case it is because decisions are the place where individuals and subgroups rationally argue, bargain, differ, and coalese and compromise their varying desires and interests in order to get some approximation of what they want (Olsen 1976:83).

Decisions are important because they indicate who does and who does not have the power to get what he or she wants. This view is built on another important cultural assumption that sees power as stabilized in specific individuals or groups as a "thing" that produces control, domination, and subjection because it gives individuals the capacity to impose their choices on others.[5] This view has led researchers to search for "direct evidence" or "reliable traces" of both power, control, and decisions in organizations. For example, Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret (1976:248) make this point while discussing Chester Barnard's view of decisions in his early and now-classic analysis *The Functions of the Executive* (1938):

> Not the least of the difficulties of appraising the executive functions or the relative merits of executives lies in the fact that there is little direct opportunity to observe the essential operations of decision. It is a perplexing fact that most executive decisions produce no direct evidence of themselves and that knowledge of them can only be derived from the cumulation of indirect evidence. They must largely be inferred from general results in which they are merely one factor, and from symptomatic indications of roundabout character. (pp. 192–193)

This search for direct evidence has been frustrating and unproductive for the most part (see Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret 1976), and I suggest that one way out of this impasse is to shift research attention to a consideration of meetings as opposed to decisions. March and Olsen, although still focusing on choices and decisions, have already laid the groundwork for this shift in their discussion of the third category of decision-making theories, *artifactual or non-decision-making models* (these models may be compared in some ways to what Steinbruner 1974 designates as cybernetic models, but there are important differences as well).

[5]Clifford Geertz (1980) presents a valuable analysis of Balinese notions of power and politics that questions, at many levels, Western and American views and especially the idea that "real power" can somehow be contrasted with symbolic expressions of it.

In Olsen's terms, artifactual models are characterized by the assumption that organizations are not, primarily, a vehicle for the production of decisions and the idea that decision outcomes are an unintended product of certain processes that have dynamics of their own. Decision events, from this point of view, are not the realization of individual or group purposes. Instead, the sense of a "decision" is

> a post factum construct produced by participants or onlookers. Events happen, and if they are afterwards described in a systematic fashion as decisions, it expresses more man's ability to form post factum theories of his own behavior than his ability to make goal-oriented decisions through established structures and processes. (1976:83)

March and Olsen's (1976) *garbage-can model* of decision making is an example of an artifactual model. As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the primary assumptions of the researchers is that the relation between the decision process and organizational action or outcome is loosely coupled. This approach was developed specifically to characterize the types of decision processes occurring in organized anarchies (see my specific discussion of organized anarchies in Chapter 4). A choice situation from this viewpoint is:

> a meeting place for issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they may be aired; solutions looking for issues to which they may be the answer, and participants looking for problems or pleasure. (March and Olsen 1976:25)

Any decision can become a garbage can for almost any problem from this perspective. The issues discussed, and the decision result, depend less on the nature of the problem than on the timing of the joint arrival of problems and solutions and the existence of alternative arenas (other choice situations) for exercising problems (March and Olsen 1976:26, 252).

This model supports the view developed here, which suggests that decisions are not only, or even necessarily, what meetings are about. Unfortunately and surprisingly, March and Olsen revert back to a focus on choice making in their research as they continue to see decisions as the topic of their study. I believe that it is crucial to shift this focus away from the dominant task-focused approaches so that it is the meeting as a social form, and not the presumed task, that becomes the subject of study. I also believe that it is the form of meetings that facilitates and generates the mix of issues, problems, solutions, participants, and feelings that is central for understanding the loose connenction between individual and group intentions and organizational action that March and Olsen's model specifies.

I have already suggested in Chapter 5 that it is the meeting frame that transforms the behavior of individuals into organizational action

(March and Olsen suggest that it is the decision process; see 1976:11). The meeting form performs this transformation because, as a social form, it frames the behavior that occurs within it as concerned with the "business" of a group or organization. In this case, meetings and meeting talk as objectified in minutes, reports, and so forth become the major evidence of organizational action, results, decisions, and control. From this perspective, talk is not expressive or reflective of action, power, control; it *is* action, power, and control. Gronn (1983) suggests this in his study of how talk is used among Australian school administrators:

> What all the structured observation studies [of school administrators, e.g., Mintzberg 1973, Wolcott 1973] do reveal is that *talk* is the work, i.e., it consumes most of an administrator's time and energy. The next step is to make clear the circumstances under which talk *does* the work, that is, to show how talk is the resource that school personnel use to get others to act (Austin 1975). To see talk is such terms is to view it as an instrumental tool (Hodgkinson 1978:204) for performing actions like influencing, persuading, manipulating, and so on. (p. 2)

The idea that meeting talk may be synonymous with organizational action requires questioning the standard view that meetings exist as a facilitating form for making a decision or other tasks such as formulating a policy, solving a problem, or resolving a crisis. In contrast to this view and following the recent research on political speech and meeting behavior discussed in Chapter 2, I have suggested that decisions, policies, and problem solving are *not* what meetings are *about*. An alternative view suggests the possibility that *meetings are what decisions, policies, and problems are about*. From this vantage point, tasks such as decisions and problems such as specific conflicts and crises occur *because* they produce meetings and in many social systems, such as Midwest, it is meetings that produce "organization," although it is much more common to assume the opposite.

In this way, meetings may become one—if not the—major social form that constitutes and reconstitutes the organization or community over time. This is no small accomplishment, especially in social systems characterized by egalitarian relations and/or extreme ambiguity in organizational goals, technology, and authority relationships. However, it is exactly this function (or result) of meetings that has been ignored (or taken for granted) by researchers who have chosen to focus on the analysis of specific meeting tasks such as decisions. In this chapter, I attempt to reverse this approach by using a series of decisions at the center (those related to the hiring/firing of the executive director and assistant director and the selection of a replacement) to examine how these specific decisions became the means by which participants constituted the sense of "an organization" for themselves, activated new

relationships as well as old hostilities and divisions, solidified groups, and provided everyone with a reading of their current status in the frequently shifting social system of Midwest. Before turning to this analysis it is necessary first to discuss the relationship between meetings, power, and leadership that existed at the center.

Charting the Organizing: Leadership and Power

The shift from a view of language as a transparent to a constitutive medium, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, is crucial for understanding the relationship between power and meetings presented here. The literature on political speech and meeting behavior discussed in the previously mentioned two chapters suggests that meetings are an important social form for both the generation of social relationships (producing a sense of organizational and/or community identity) as well as for the reproduction and validation of social relationships. In fact, this literature seems to turn on these two notions as researchers emphasize the power of speech for either the production or reproduction of social relationships (see the different emphases of Paine 1981 versus Bloch 1975).

The central importance of meetings for understanding the production and reproduction of the social structure of Midwest can be illustrated by comparing a typical organizational chart (see Figure 8.1, which was constructed by informants during one of the center's many reorganizations) with what is referred to here as a meeting organizational chart (see Figure 8.2 that was constructed by the researcher). Figure 8.1 reflects the commonsense view that a hierarchy of individuals, or individual "offices," is "running" or controlling the organization. In fact, individuals at the center spent weeks, sometimes months, meeting to organize and reorganize themselves into different boxes and charts. In doing this, they followed the assumption that these charts reflected power (who had "it" and who did not), but they ignored the recurring context in which power seemed to be generated.

In contrast to this view of the locus of power, it is important to remember that Midwest was characterized by a high staff turnover, and therefore its membership was quite fluid. In this case, the participants changed, as did their offices (because of repeated reorganizations), whereas the meeting contexts remained. Therefore, it is argued here that a more useful depiction of this organization is presented in Figure 8.2, which illustrates the hierarchy of meeting contexts as opposed to individuals. Power, in this context, did not flow as much from individuals, or from individual offices, as it did from particular meeting contexts or groups. This suggests a different understanding of the

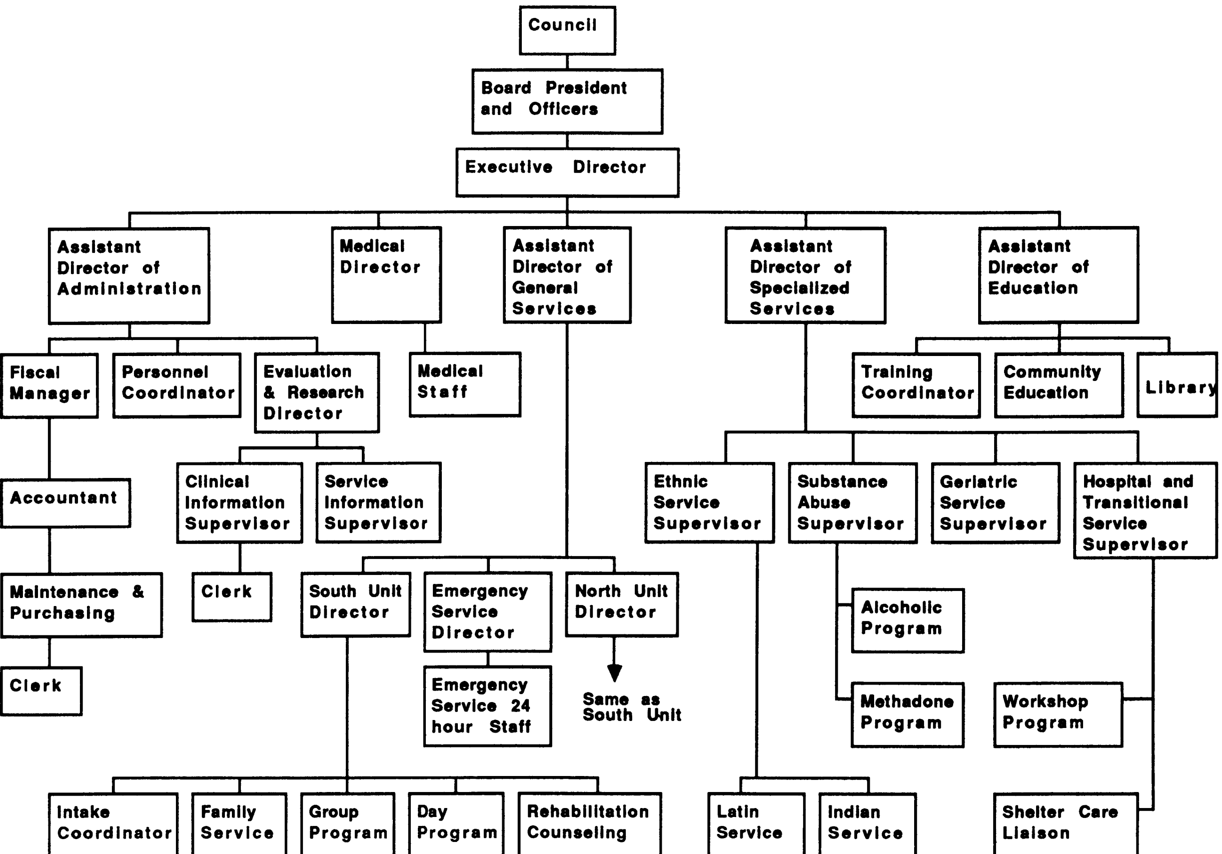

Figure 8.1. Individual organizational chart.

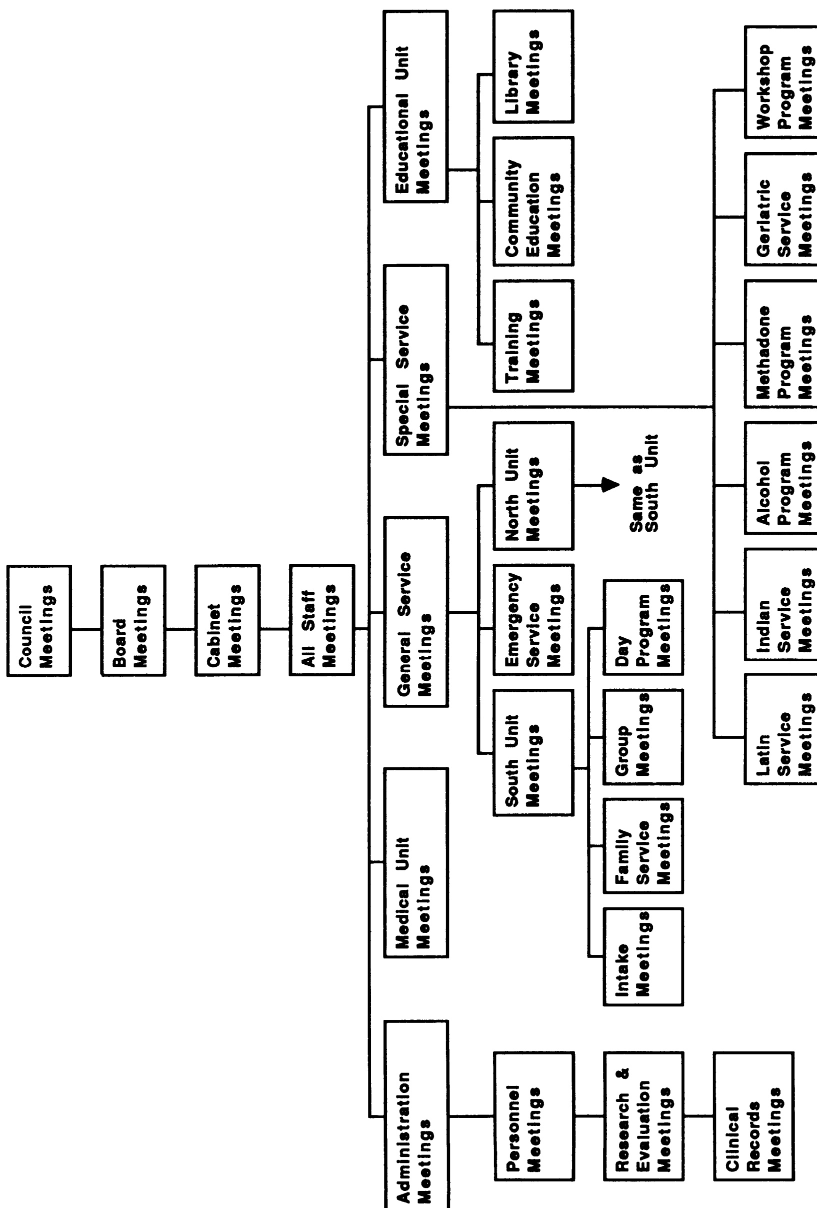

Figure 8.2. Meeting organizational chart.

nature of power and authority than is typically found in Western theories of bureaucracy and leadership. In this case, I follow Frankel's (1973) suggestion that power must be conceptualized as a "relational property rather than a commodity or thing" (p. 234).[6] At Midwest, both material and symbolic power relations in Frankel's terms were constantly being negotiated between individuals in the organization.[7] Therefore, an individual with a presumed power base (i.e., a base for social control) in one context could easily be without it in another setting. Because the majority of settings in which power displays as well as negotiations took place were meetings, I have chosen to depict power relations as a hierarchy of meeting contexts as opposed to individuals.[8]

In doing this, I do not mean to suggest that individuals, especially certain individuals, were unimportant or without power at the center. What I do mean to suggest is that it is very difficult to separate individual power relationships from the meeting contexts in which "power" was either displayed or generated. Fred and Paula derived their considerable charismatic power from the meetings that became "theirs" (e.g., the early "training meetings" were seen as "Paula's" meetings; see the "bullets-in-meetings" story in Chapter 9).[9] In the continual conflicts that

[6]There is a voluminous literature in the social sciences on the subject of power. In anthropology, I found Frankel's (1973:227–332) discussion of this concept to be especially useful because she applies this approach to her study of Eagleville, a treatment community with several structural and cultural features in common with Midwest.

[7]This process is revealed most clearly in studies of non-Western political systems and especially bureaucracies (see Conkling 1979, 1984).

[8]John Thompson and Arthur Tuden (1959) suggested some time ago that pyramidal conceptions of authority and hierarchy that are centered on individuals are inaccurate:

> The typical conception of the corporation as pyramidal in form, with ultimate authority peaking in the office of the president, is thus misleading. It would be more descriptive to think of the corporation as a wigwam, with a group at the top. (p. 213)

Karl Weick (1979) has more recently suggested a recharting of organizational charts that focus on variables that highlight "what is salient about each of [the people/positions typically included in an organizational chart] in the cause map of someone who has to deal with them" (e.g., variables such as hesitation, assertiveness, compliance, delegation of authority) (p. 251). In Weick's terms:

> Whole persons aren't contained in the boxes on organizational charts. But managers forget that, which is why organizational charts are never the way things work—even though people invest enormous time in drawing, reviewing, pondering, and worrying over them. The essence of organizations is to be found in variables, connections, and positive and negative signs. The variables include recurrent styles, behaviors, and interpretations associated with each position. These variables have a durability because they represent behaviors that are "pulled" from all occupants by the job description for the position, the roles that are sent to it, and the expectations that are imposed on it. (p. 252)

[9]The idea that charismatic authority must be examined as it is produced by, and exists within, specific contexts; as well as the idea that this authority only exists as a relation

occurred between the board and the executive director, the conflict frequently related to how, or whether, the board could understand and/or control the speech and writing of the executive director *in meetings*. As is illustrated in the example presented in Chapter 5, which presents the different speech expectations that occurred between board and staff, staff members wanted board members to talk like they did, (Tracy screams at Greg Stone the board president: "But you don't say it, Greg! That's the whole point!"). At the same time, board members wanted staff (and especially Fred Hart) to talk like them:

> I feel very strongly that the reason attendance has fallen off . . . is that Fred turned so many people off that they stopped coming. They would get a lot of double talk and the executive director's reports were very wordy and a lot of vocabulary that people didn't understand and you never really knew what was going on at the Center, you just didn't know.

According to this individual, speech is clearly a major form of control for Fred. Another board member comments at length on Fred's speaking style in meetings:

> Statistics regarding service were almost nonexistent. We got some once in awhile, but they really never meant too much. We had a hell of a time getting an executive director's report out of him in writing. We finally passed a motion that he had to give us an executive director's report in writing once a month. That way we could get it because otherwise he would give us a long harangue at a meeting, and it wouldn't mean much to us. . . . He refused, or was unable to put . . . [problems], in terms we could understand. His vocabulary is hopelessly large, and he prefers the more technical terms. My feeling is that he learned English as a second language, but where he learned it is what I wonder. It sounded like he learned it in a think tank somewhere and just never learned to speak ordinary English. So we never did totally understand him and we kept telling him, "Fred, we do not understand what you are saying," and then he would say, he would refer to people, for instance, officials or psychiatric or psychological thinkers of various sorts and he would refer to them by their names without any explanation. Well, of course, you know what do I know about what such and such school of psychology teaches and the same is true for most of the council people. So he just went "whew" way over our heads, and we sat there looking at him, listening hard, trying to make out what it was all about, and not really succeeding too well, and this was very frustrating. So it didn't exactly build the bridges that he theoretically hoped would be built when he talked to us. It made it more difficult than anything because by that time we had sat through a couple of hours of it and were kind of angry.

One of the first things that changed when it became clear that Fred would leave the center, following a difficult year of contract negotia-

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between leader and led has been discussed in several ethnographies; see Fabian's (1971) analysis of the Jamaa movement in the urban and industrial centers of South Katanga (Zaire).

tions, criteria committees, evaluations, and more meetings (this process will be described later), was that he stopped talking to staff, and they stopped talking to him. Carol Winter recalls this process:

> When it became apparent that he was definitely going to leave, I just stopped talking to him. I almost wouldn't even say hello if I saw him or passed him in the crowd or something. I guess I just couldn't deal with him leaving. . . . Towards the end it was almost like if he talked to anybody it would just keep reminding him . . . so he didn't really, the last month that he was here it was a different Fred. . . . [He] did come back in January for about a week . . . but he just did things administratively and budget wise and planning wise. . . . That was prearranged, and he just walked in the door and was in there doing it all, [he] *did not have anything to do with anything else that was going on in terms of people or meetings or whatever.* [Emphasis added]

This move from conceptualizing the locus of power as a "thing" *within* individuals to a feature of relationships between individuals and groups that must be considered in the context of the specific speech and social forms in which it is generated, is related to past anthropological discussions of this subject (see Brenneis and Myers 1984; Bloch 1975; Frankl 1973; M. Rosaldo in Brenneis and Myers 1984:8). It is important to emphasize here that cultural bias in theoretical work on American organizations has led researchers as well as participants to assume that formal power and authority relations can best be depicted in organizational charts that locate power and authority in individual offices. In fact, one of the most prominent topics in the field of organizational research is a direct reflection of this focus on the individual.

The study of leaders, leadership behavior, leadership effectiveness, and so on (e.g., Curtis, Smith, and Smoll 1979; Drory and Gluskinos 1980; Fiedler 1967; Konar-Goldbank, Rice, and Monkarsh 1979; Schriesheim 1980) is premised on several assumptions congruent with American cultural premises.[10] One of the dominant concerns in this area is the relationship between leader traits, leader behavior, and leader and group performance. This approach assumes that there are, in fact, discrete traits of effective leaders (as well as characteristics of specific situations) that can be discovered and isolated by research, and once understood can be used by individuals wishing to improve themselves and the effectiveness of the groups that they lead. Campbell, Daft and Hulin (1982:42) note that interest in leadership studies in the general field of organizational behavior continues "almost unabated," although the results of this research have been extremely disappointing. Researchers appear to be asking a recurring series of questions that have changed

[10]See Schwartzman (1986) for a detailed analysis of cultural assumptions (and especially ideas about the individual) and their impact on recent studies in the area of work effectiveness.

very little over the last 20 years: Do leader behaviors influence subordinate behaviors, or vice versa, or both? How much of the variance in leader performance can be explained by leader traits, or leader behavior, or the job/task, or organizational structure? (Campbell, Daft, and Hulin 1982:42–43). In my view, this leadership research continues "unabated" because it validates an important cultural belief, that is, that individuals (especially certain individuals) and their actions determine what happens in group settings.[11]

When we move beyond the individual bias of most organizational theories, it is possible to see how a social form such as a meeting may create and control the structures of everyday life along with the influence and authority of specific individuals in organizations. At the same time that meetings are accomplishing this, the structures and productions that individuals generate in these settings are interpreted and experienced as objective entities that are external and unrelated to these actions and occasions. In this way, meetings have been pushed out of the picture when, in fact, from this perspective, they are responsible for creating it. In the following section, I discuss the process whereby decisions make meetings, and I examine how meetings provided individuals with a place for making, remaking, and sometimes unmaking the organization.

Decisions Make Meetings: The Committee Meeting and the Board Meeting[12]

The decision that initiated the series of committee and board meetings that will be examined in this section was a decision that no one knew he or she had to make. However, once the *need* for a decision was generated, these meetings became crucial contexts for center staff and board to use to interpret their relationships to each other and, in the process, to transform these relationships and the center's leadership. Mary Kassen remembers how in 1974 she discovered, on reading the center's bylaws, that it was necessary to initiate a contract review not

[11]See Hall (1983) for an extensive critique of the concept of individualism and its impact on applied behavioral science.

[12]The information in this section was taken from interviews and documentation of committee and board activities available in minutes, memos, and other records of meetings held before the research project began, and it is also based on my participation in the final selection committee process and the final meetings of the board to decide on a permanent executive director.

later than 6 months prior to the termination of the contracts of all administrators earning $15,000 or more per year. She brought this to the board's attention in the following way:

> As sort of the guardian of the bylaws, what I did was a thing I'd often done in the past, I would get excerpts from the bylaws pertaining to the point, print them up for everybody, distribute them at the meeting so that one person can't hold the bylaws and say this is what they say, everybody had an equal chance to look at them. I summarized the bylaws because they were a little bit confusing as regards to the whole procedure. I gave them a step by step summary of exactly how the bylaws said you were supposed to handle the renewal of the executive director's contract starting with the first question you had to ask, "Does Fred want to renew?" This is where you start, and then I went from there and mimeographed the thing and gave it to everybody at the meeting as part of the personnel committee report. The reason for that was that I went to the PC and said "Hey, this is coming up, do you want to do anything about it?" And they said well, no, it's the executive committee's job to do the hiring of the ED. They're the ones that have to make the move. So I said, "Okay, as part of the PC report at the next meeting, can I include some information about this?" and they said "fine" so I handed them [the executive committee] this, and they were a little startled at first. "Okay, we will have to do it obviously because this is what the bylaws say." So that's how the whole thing got going. . . . So, of course, chaos kind of broke loose at that point. Fred, I think, was completely nonplused when he realized that the board was actually going to evaluate his performance.

At the May meeting of the board, Mary Kassen distributed the procedures, which she refers to in the previous quote, to the board members and moved that the board begin renegotiating the contract of Fred Hart as executive director. A five-member Contract Negotiating Committee was immediately established and charged with the task of initating this process and reviewing Fred's performance and reporting back to the board. This action precipitated a process that brought staff and board together in a series of committee and subcommittee meetings that became key meetings for the center. The need to make a decision about the contract of the director once again raised all the issues concerning Paula Gray as an associate director, the issue of the center's goals, training philosophy, the relation of the center to the community, and so forth. After 1 month of deliberations by this committee (four meetings), confusion and chaos (as Mary Kassen suggested) did indeed seem to have been produced. As reflected in the minutes and memos of the board and council, this process produced: (1) a recommendation by the Contract Negotiating Committee not to renew the contract of the director; (2) the resignation of the director because of his feelings about the way the committee was doing its job; (3) a demand and petition by staff that Fred reconsider his "impetuous" resignation; (4) an apology by

Fred written in the form of a memo to staff and the board for his resignation and his agreement to remain for 1 year as a "consolidation year"; and (5) the creation of a joint staff and board "Evaluation Committee" to develop "clear, objective and comprehensive criteria for evaluating the performance of executive staff." This committee was also expected to implement an evaluation of the five senior administrative staff that included, Fred Hart, Paula Gray, and Paul Chase as education director, Rodger Barnes as clinical director, and John Dante as business office director.

These actions initiated a 4-month meeting process that lasted from June to November as the Evaluation Committee composed of 15 staff and 15 board members began the arduous process of establishing "objective evaluation criteria" for administrative staff. The need to decide on these criteria provided individuals with an important topic to use to discover as well as assert differences between groups (staff accused board of being incompetent and not objective, whereas the board accused staff of being biased and crazy). This process led to an exacerbation of the differences in perspective and orientation that already existed between board and staff, but by having a common topic to discuss and by engaging each other in a meeting, these occasions also provided individuals with an important opportunity to assert the existence of the organization. This occurred publicly and continually in the meeting process that began to consume everyone's time. Although attempting to accomplish the task of developing "evaluation criteria," this committee process accomplished what in many ways was the more difficult task, the continued creation of the organization.

This process produced, lengthy, laborious as well as exciting and dramatic discussions, and participants planned and strategized as to how they would conduct the meetings and direct discussion. Carol Winter remembers how the committee was established and her role as co-chair (with Greg Stone) of these meetings:

> So it was 15 board members, and then we picked 15 staff people. They allowed us to pick the 15 staff people, but even then they were concerned that, I remember Mildred Rose is always concerned that the staff is going to overrule the council. "What if all the board members can't be here, what if there's only 2 of us and there are 15 staff people?" I said "Well, if 15 staff people can come, 15 board members can come for heavens sake, it's not our fault that you people don't show up." Every close dealing I had with them made me furious. . . . They didn't want us to have a vote. We could be a committee, we could have input, but we couldn't vote on decisions. And we said, "Why are you so worried, this is only a committee. When you're here, you're part of a large committee, you're not board members having a board meeting of the council." And it's real hard for them to get to see that dif-

> ference. . . . So we made the criteria. So it was me and Greg [as co-chairs of the committee], and it was really hard work. I enjoyed myself at first because Greg would sit by me. The man could never sit anywhere but at the head of the table, even when he wasn't being the chairman, and I wanted to sit on the side where I was sitting but everybody demanded that I had to sit by Maria, the secretary, because that's where the chairman sits. . . . Greg would be sitting there and talking to Ellie or Mildred or somebody and I even tried the strategy like I would tell the staff representatives to sit between the board members so they can't talk to each other. I used to tell Andrea to go sit between Mildred and Ellie because Mildred sometimes doesn't know which way to vote and you will tell her how to vote, [so] I said sit between them. Then my strategy was Greg would always sit by me, and he would be talking to Ellie or somebody over here and I would say, "Mr. Stone would you please pay attention to the meeting," and he would say, "Oh, sorry." Then pretty soon he would start again, and I said "Really, I can't listen." Mildred got offended because I was doing that and I said, "Well Mildred I'm trying to listen to what people are saying but Greg is talking in this ear and I can hear it and I can't listen to both," and I said, "We're trying to do important business here and if we keep having side conversations we can't all go at the same pace, at the same time, or we have to keep backtracking or we miss pieces or whatever," and he would kind of laugh. Maria got me by the coffee room one day and she said "Carol you're wonderful, I like the way you tell Greg to shut up cause you do it so nicely, they can't get angry with you."

After 4 months of meetings, a series of criteria were established that were sent out in questionnaire form to affiliated organizations (most of these organizations refused to fill out the form saying that it was up to the center to evaluate their own staff), to community individuals and organizations (minimal response), and to board and staff (most response here). The results of the evaluation produced no surprises; Paul Chase, Rodger Barnes, and John Dante were given good to adequate evaluations, and Fred Hart and Paula Gray were given more negative evaluations. Finally, in a special board meeting held in November, the decision was made to renew the contracts of Paul, Rodger, and John and to extend the contracts of Fred and Paula only to the end of December. A motion was also made at this time to allow them the option to resign.

This decision immediately created the need for another decision—a temporary replacement for the director. Once again, a committee was established of board and staff, and this group was charged with the task of deciding on procedures for selecting an acting director, and with evaluating the three "in-house" candidates who applied for this position. The result of the final meeting of this committee was the elimination of all but one candidate (Paul Chase) as viable applicants. In this way, a decision by default was made that resulted in the selection of the one individual whom a number of staff did not want. One staff member

(who was a member of this committee) explained the decision to himself and others as follows:

> There's the dynamics of the meeting that leads you to a certain decision and people on the outside wonder, "How in hell did you decide that," and if you weren't at the meeting, you really can't appreciate how it was done.

Participants interpreted the process and significance of this meeting to each other by telling stories about "the 4:00 in the morning meeting" that emphasized that this was one of the few committees "ever" to make a decision and take responsibility for it. James Ratner (one of the board representatives to this committee), interprets the significance of this meeting by telling a story about how Rodger Barnes (one of the staff members who had applied for the acting director position but who had been ruled out as ineligible in this meeting) reacted to this event:

> He wasn't at all pleased with what we said about him, but he thought that it was really one of the high points of the center's history that here was a committee that had taken a stand and had accepted its responsibilities and acted on it as they saw fit and made everyone aware of what they were doing and so he was very pleased with that. He said he had it framed and hanging in his kitchen, and he said that he could agree that the decision that was made was the right one, but he still didn't like the way it was put.

In the process of making this decision about a temporary executive director, staff and board found it necessary to reconstitute their alignments as these discussions created an uneasy agreement between groups that were frequently in conflict with each other. But this was an agreement, in my view, that could only be supported by continued and continual meetings and the need to select a permanent executive director created this opportunity. Once again a Selection Committee was established, composed of members of staff and board. This committee met over the course of a year, first establishing procedures, then soliciting applications for candidates and, during the late summer and early fall, inviting four candidates to interview for the position, along with Paul Chase. The Selection Committee met during as well as at the end of this process, and the final meeting of the board that selected Paul Chase as permanent executive director is described in detail here. When this decision was announced, everyone spoke of it as if the decision had already been made before the meeting began. As a participant in this meeting, I initially accepted this interpretation, but as I examine what happened in this event now, it is no longer clear to me that a decision to select Paul Chase had been made before this meeting began. Instead, this meeting now illustrates to me how the need to make a decision created a context for individuals to talk themselves into the organization

as they talked themselves into a decision. It turns out that at this moment in time Paul Chase was the best vehicle for this talk.

The Meeting

The final meeting to decide on the permanent executive director was held in the home of Greg Stone, the board president. I arrived at 9:00 A.M. and was greeted by Greg's wife. She was obviously used to meetings and had prepared coffee cake, donuts, and coffee that were arranged in the center of a large dining room table that became the meeting table for the day. Individuals began to filter in between 9:00 and 10:00 A.M. as the meeting began approximately at 9:30 A.M. with the announcement that Sheila Jones, a member of the Selection Committee, wanted to personally address the board. The report of this committee was presented first, and their evaluation of the four candidates interviewed was described. The committee eliminated two candidates immediately and presented only Paul Chase and Walter Ellis as viable candidates. It was reported that two votes had been taken regarding these candidates, and, in each case, a draw had been produced. It was also reported that two staff members had resigned from the committee and that this confused the results.

Discussion then centered on the two candidates, and a summary of their pros and cons was offered. Walter Ellis was said to have organized a community advisory board even though he was not mandated to do this; it was also said that he had good administrative skills. Paul Chase's ability to "deal well" with external administrative agencies was evaluated positively, and he was also said to have budgetary skills and good relations with the community, but not with the staff. At this point, Michael Snow, a "founder" of the center, spoke at length about the pros of Walter Ellis. He said that he was very impressed with him and that he had talked to a number of people who knew him when he had worked in the western suburbs. Michael thought that he was harder on himself in his discussion with staff than staff were with him. It was reported that his staff saw him as a hard worker, a good supervisor, and someone who did exist well in conflict. The reference with whom Michael Snow spoke said that of all the administrators he knew, Walter Ellis would be the one he would choose to lead Midwest. He was said to be proactive and not reactive in raising and dealing with issues and that he had a good ability to deal with staff and a lot of experience in organizational development. Michael Snow then said that he thought Paul Chase was not capable of dealing with the organizational situation at Midwest

given the past 3-year history of organizational chaos. The weaknesses of Walter Ellis were said to be that he had no proven track record in an organization of this size, but Michael Snow said that he was confident that this would not be a significant issue. The key factor, from his perspective, would be the delegation of authority and the ability to monitor well.

Sheila Jones was allowed to speak to the committees as this point as a staff representative of the Selection Committee. She reported that, if Paul Chase was hired, she felt that several staff would leave. She felt that the problem with the center was not the staff but the administration, especially Paul Chase and his "style," which, in her terms, meant that input was not used or wanted, and it was the case that "whoever gets there latest with the mostest gets what they want." The theme of accountability recurred throughout this meeting, as Sheila Jones stated it; the cabinet did not hold each other accountable, Paul Chase did not hold the cabinet accountable; and the board did not hold the director accountable. In keeping with this theme, Sheila Jones raised the issue of who was in charge of the center, and she criticized Paul Chase for "cowtowing" to funding sources, but she also suggested that the current saying at the center was that Paul "had the board in his back pocket." She also criticized the fact that there was no staff input directly into the board. Mildred Rose and James Ratner responded by saying that it was impossible to know what was happening at the center. And Greg Stone told a story that illustrated how difficult it was for members of the board to know what was going on on a daily basis at the center. This story was also an elaborate commentary on how frequently people (people presumably like Sheila Jones) changed their alignments, likes, and dislikes:[13]

> Let's just go back, way back. I used to walk into the center and I used to hear all kinds of complaints about Paula Gray and when I mention the name don't even tell me. Everytime I walked in the door there was another Paula Gray story. Finally we had a showdown with Fred and got to do away with Paula Gray, and you know what happened, it seems that all of the staff criticizing her dried up. Either staff didn't want to stand up, we don't know what the final outcome will be, maybe they should just keep it inside. Nevertheless, we as council or board members were left out on a limb, and we thought that we were trying to do something to help the center, and we really didn't know whether we really had the staff behind us or not. All we could go by were all the things we heard in the past. [After this] Toni Michaels was hired. I come

[13]This story was first recorded on tape in an interview with Greg Stone, but according to my notes it is essentially the same story he told at this meeting. Stories, and story-telling, were a common occurrence at the center, and I analyze the significance of this activity in detail in Chapter 9. This particular story was a favorite of Greg Stone's, and he told it on several occasions with only minor variation in detail.

> walking in here one day and oh, Paula Gray is back again. If I heard it from one person, I heard it from five people. That was somewhat resolved, but now Toni Michaels has submitted her resignation. There are letters from people in support of her not leaving, some of those letters are from the same people who said, oh, we have another Paula Gray here. You know, let's face it, the council and board people are not here every day, the wind blows one way one day and one way another day.

This story produced discussion and criticism of Toni Michaels and her training philosophy and the suggestion by Mildred Rose that the family systems approach that she advocated was not in keeping with the center's philosophy. Sheila Jones attempted to defend this approach, but Mildred Rose was not listening to her. Sheila left the meeting shortly after this discussion, and a shift in focus occurred as the question was asked, "what's our next move?" Blanche Wright asked if we should get more information on Walter Ellis because there was only one reference report. At this point, Charles Parsons suggested that "The strengths of Paul Chase are his relations with financial sources, external agencies, and this is good. The negative side are his people relations that seem to be Walter Ellis's strengths, but are these necessarily strengths?" He pointed out that "a good person always steps on people's toes." (This became a recurring transition theme introduced by Charles Parsons throughout this meeting. "Is Walter Ellis good enough to replace the known quantity of Paul Chase?" It was this argument, which was introduced repeatedly by Charles Parsons, that more than anything else seemed to direct discussion and became the "rhetoric" that individuals used to convince themselves of the appropriateness of selecting Paul Chase in this meeting.)

Mary Kassen followed this statement by presenting the report and evaluation of Paul Chase by cabinet members. This evaluation also included an evaluation of Toni Michaels as Paul and Toni were posed against each other as leaders. The evaluation prepared by Bill Tinley (the medical director) but presented by Mary Kassen illustrates these statements:

> Mary reported that Bill Tinley could not support the other candidates and that he had heard about Walter Ellis and was not impressed with what he had heard [however, he did not elaborate on this]. Bill said that he did support Paul Chase, although he recognized that he had a communication problem and that you needed to ask him to repeat himself and clarify points and also that he would say different things to different people and that he modified stands. According to Mary, the point that Bill stressed was that it was easier to say bad than good about Paul Chase. Bill also suggested that Paul had a problem with democratic decision making but that, "given the reality of decision making at the center," he did not necessarily think that this was bad. In fact, Bill felt that some staff were "out and out crazy," and he said that he would fire 30% of the staff for this reason. Bill said that some

> staff were upset about the "anarchic situation," but this was not Paul Chase's problem. A new person would, in his view, have to be very strong. In evaluating Toni Michaels, he said he felt that she "was rigid and not empathic" and that her treatment approach was "too narrow, with a middle-class orientation which did not relate to people in West Park." There was already a problem with staff dumping difficult clients, and Toni Michaels's training philosophy further encouraged this in Bill's view. He was glad she was leaving.

Bill Tinley's statement led to a brief evaluation of the role of the psychiatrist at the center and the view that the psychiatrist should have more input than Bill had typically had. This led to a bried evaluation of Bill Tinley. Greg Stone said that, when Bill Tinley came to the center, he had an "adolescent attitude and a power-to-the-people approach," but Greg felt that he had "grown up and changed and realized that this is not the appropriate approach," and he was the only staff with guts who said that Paula Gray should leave. Greg Stone said the staff almost "tarred and feathered Bill for this."

At this point, 11 people were participating in the meeting, and it was 11:30 A.M. and sandwiches and more coffee replaced the donuts and coffee cake. Individuals periodically stood up, walked into the living room, stretched, and engaged in private conversations, while the meeting continued in the dining room. When I returned from such a break, three types of skills had been written on the mandatory flip chart:

Administrative skills
Community skills
Clinical skills

The group was now discussing ground rules for making a choice and rating candidates according to the three skills. Once again Charles Parsons introduced a series of questions: "Is Paul Chase functioning effectively?; do we want to replace him, do we want to fire him? is Walter Ellis good enough to replace Paul Chase?; do we want to change from something good to something unknown?" Mildred Rose suggested a variant of this point by saying "We may not like what we have, but is it worth it to replace him?" Ellie Marsh asked what structural changes could be made to improve the ability of the Executive Committee to control and run the center. She said that she thought that the board had lost contact with the center: "We gave up, we threw our hands up in horror and gave up." At this point, the idea of selecting Paul Chase "with riders" was suggested by Mary Kassen, and this appeared to be seen as a possibility.

Individuals now turned to the "three skills chart" and began to define the various criteria. Administration was defined and divided into:

budgeting, relations with funding agencies, affiliate relations, and staff management and delegation. (Training was later added to this category.) Discussion proceeded around the table with each participant suggesting a percentage figure for how much weight should be attached to each subskill in evaluating the candidates. For example, in regard to administrative abilities, Sue Holland said, "I don't know, maybe 40%." Charles Parsons said "50%." Ellie Marsh thought "40%," James Ratner said "60%," and so on. This occurred for each skill category.

Community skills were divided in this discussion process into relationships to agencies in the community (nonaffiliates), relationships to the council, the board, and the community at large, understanding the dynamics of the community. Percentage figures were given for this category as well. And finally, Clinical skills were defined as clinical qualifications including academic training and experience. Credentials were then discussed also in terms of academic qualifications and experience, and the philosophy of treatment of the individual with the emphasis on a broad and eclectic philosophy of treatment.

After enumerating and ordering these criteria, discussion then shifted to consideration of each category and comparison of the two candidates, Walter Ellis and Paul Chase. Budgeting was the first issue to be discussed, and James Ratner spoke about Walter Ellis: "His experience is light here; he does have experience with a department but not a large budget." Greg Stone spoke about Paul Chase: "He is heavy in experience here: he took an impossible situation with the center and turned it around, although we do still have the problem of salary inequities." By the time discussion reached staff management and delegation the entire discussion was focused on Paul Chase, as everyone said, "We have no information on Walter Ellis here, his personal style seems good, but we don't know what he does with authority. We have been told he delegates well, but we don't really know." Charles Parsons suggested once again that Paul Chase was "a known quantity," and the discussion of his abilities at staff management and delegation led to a lengthy discussion of administrative and decision processes at the center, personal evaluations of a range of staff, the relation of the board to staff, and current and past history in all these areas.

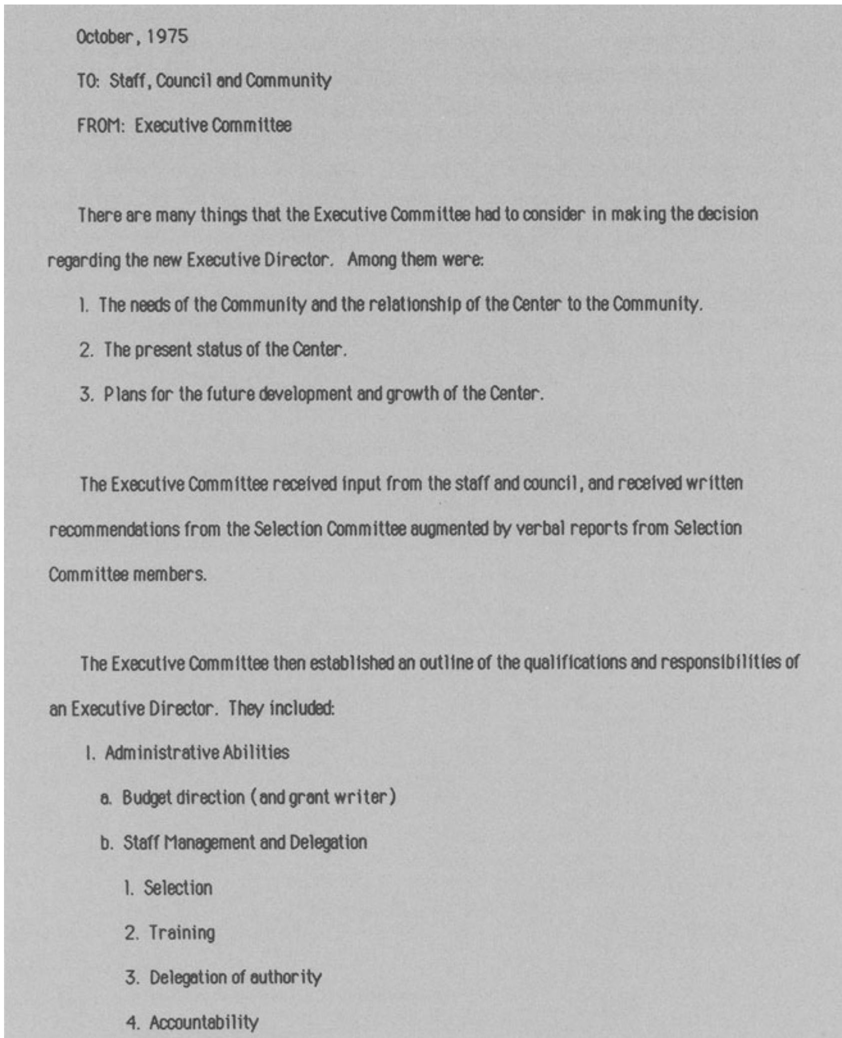
After this discussion, Charles Parsons commented, "Do the various negative and problem areas we have raised here mean that we need a new director to solve the problems, or can we help Paul Chase with this?" At this point, individuals stopped the skill evaluation and comparison of Walter Ellis and Paul Chase (and they never returned to this topic in the meeting). A long discussion of recent staff hirings, especially a new planner position (Robert Wolf) who was hired specifically to write

grants and generate funds for the center and a personnel management person (Calvin Bennett). (These individuals became a major focus for discussion in the staff meeting discussed in Chapter 9.) In this meeting, discussion centered on problems associated with the hiring of these individuals, especially the issue of salary inequities, as salaries for both positions were considerably higher than most staff received. Greg Stone suggested here that "we blew it" (meaning that the board did not handle this well) and Paul Chase was also criticized for "moving too fast" on these hirings.

At one point, following this discussion, the idea that the board should delay its decision and acquire more information about Walter Ellis as well as staff input was mentioned. In conjunction with this, the idea of waiting to make a decision until after the union election was held was also discussed (but this is the last time Walter Ellis's name appears in my notes). In the end, however, everyone felt that they *had* to make a decision today "or we will be thrown out and rightly so" (in Ellie Marsh's terms). And so turning attention to how to present their decision to staff, a motion was passed "That Paul Chase be appointed as executive director with certain conditions to be worked out subject to conditions to be defined." The vote was unanimous. It was also decided to present the decision and the process of rating candidates in writing to staff and that Greg Stone should attend the next staff meeting.

Participants divided themselves into two groups to prepare the wording of their statement. It was now 3:30 P.M. and, when everyone reassembled in the dining room, it was 4:00 P.M. and individuals began to review and critique statements of the process and the statement of "riders and conditions" that had also been prepared. Side comments at this time were made like "I can't believe it, we really made a decision," but when the list of riders and conditions was presented, Blanche Wright said, "It sounds like we are saying that we don't have any trust in the man we are selecting." The text that this process produced and that was distributed to staff as a memo on the Monday following this meeting is included here as Figure 8.3. As a text, it should be read as an example of how the board made sense of their decision process to themselves and to others (especially staff).

A phone call was made to Paul Chase at 4:30 P.M., and he came to Greg Stone's house at 5:30 P.M. while everyone was "polishing" the wording of the statement. He was informed, very solemnly, of the decision along with the issues and problems that had been raised in the discussion and the riders and condition which were presented. The statement that had just been written was read to him. He thanked the board for selecting him and nodded agreement about the statement as it


October, 1975

TO: Staff, Council and Community

FROM: Executive Committee

There are many things that the Executive Committee had to consider in making the decision regarding the new Executive Director. Among them were:

1. The needs of the Community and the relationship of the Center to the Community.
2. The present status of the Center.
3. Plans for the future development and growth of the Center.

The Executive Committee received input from the staff and council, and received written recommendations from the Selection Committee augmented by verbal reports from Selection Committee members.

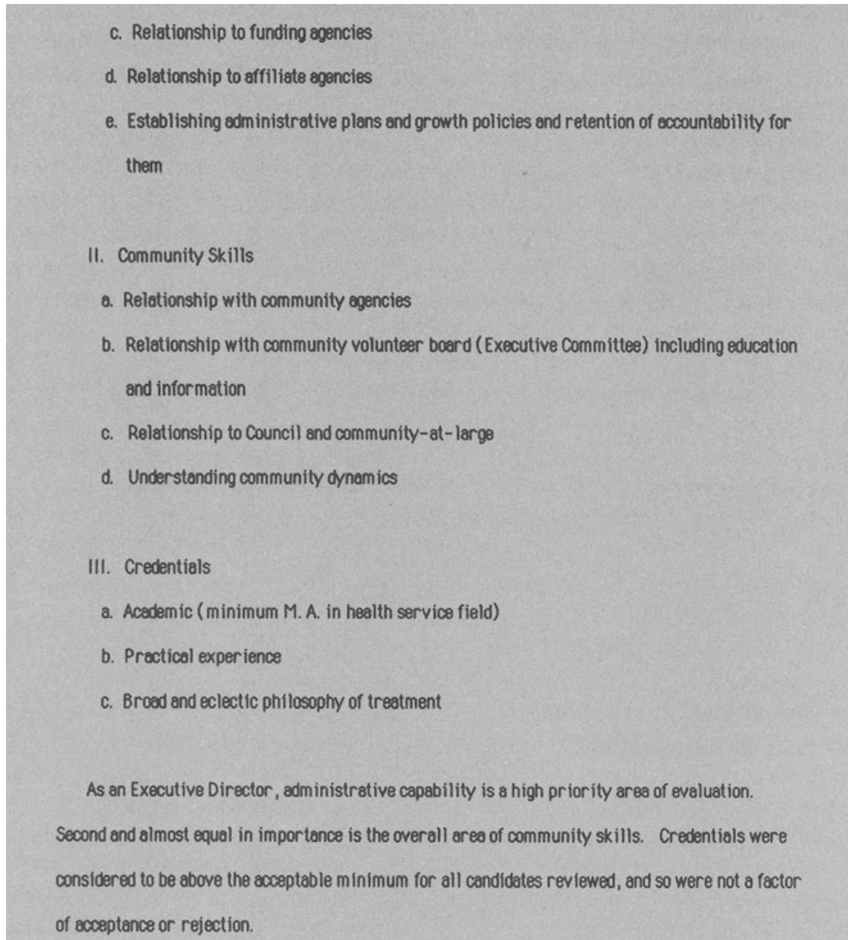
The Executive Committee then established an outline of the qualifications and responsibilities of an Executive Director. They included:

I. Administrative Abilities
   a. Budget direction (and grant writer)
   b. Staff Management and Delegation
      1. Selection
      2. Training
      3. Delegation of authority
      4. Accountability

Figure 8.3. Executive Committee memo.

was read to him. He then made his own statement about how he looked forward to working at the center as the permanent director and to resolving the problems and working toward "goals in the future."

At 6:30 P.M. when Paul Chase left, participants also began to leave, although several individuals (including the researcher) went on to a restaurant to continue the discussion and to congratulate themselves on



c. Relationship to funding agencies

d. Relationship to affiliate agencies

e. Establishing administrative plans and growth policies and retention of accountability for them

II. Community Skills

a. Relationship with community agencies

b. Relationship with community volunteer board (Executive Committee) including education and information

c. Relationship to Council and community-at-large

d. Understanding community dynamics

III. Credentials

a. Academic (minimum M. A. in health service field)

b. Practical experience

c. Broad and eclectic philosophy of treatment

As an Executive Director, administrative capability is a high priority area of evaluation. Second and almost equal in importance is the overall area of community skills. Credentials were considered to be above the acceptable minimum for all candidates reviewed, and so were not a factor of acceptance or rejection.

Figure 8.3. (*Continued*)

"the process." There was, in these postmeeting discussions, a sense of both exhaustion and accomplishment. The "fact" of a decision, more than anything else, was a major focus of comments, and it seemed a confirmation of the authority and leadership and the continued existence of the organization.

Talking Action: Results and Alternative Results

Once this decision was announced, everyone assumed that it was the only decision that could have been made, and, in fact, that it had

In all of the divisions reviewed, only one candidate had proven a satisfactory level of accomplishment. That is established success in budgeting, liason with funding agencies, community agencies, etc. We were pleased to find that a point by point evaluation clearly indicated that Paul Chase met all key criteria used, thus saving us the instability and anxiety of integrating an unknown and unproven individual into the position. It is both our feeling and the feeling of the staff, however, that there are some key areas of responsibility that both the Executive Committee and the Executive Director will have to be held immediately accountable for. (see attached [not included in this figure]) In examining many of the areas of both accountability and criticism, we have found that the Executive Committee has been taking a less dynamic role than it should have. The Executive Committee recognized the need for requesting more direct accountability of the Executive Director as well as acting in a more involved role in feedback situations both towards staff and toward the Executive Director. In order to achieve the level of accountability which we feel necessary, the Executive Committee will investigate approaches to obtain a higher level of staff feedback on a regular basis, related to those situations not covered by the existing organizational framework.

Figure 8.3. (*Continued*)

already been made before the final meeting of the board. The idea that the Selection Committee had been "set-up" to consider only "weak" candidates (see Carol Winter's views on this reported in Chapter 6), that individuals had intentionally neglected to follow-up thoroughly on candidates, and that everyone had already made up their mind dominated staff's interpretation of this decision.

In my view, this decision was not predetermined or set up, not because there were not individuals who wished and in some instances attempted to do this, but because, as has been argued in this chapter, this was not a context that individuals controlled (see earlier discussion of power and meetings). This was a context that was produced by and controlled, to the extent that it was, by meetings. If one took an individual perspective, it would be possible to interpret all of the events, beginning with the establishment of the first contract negotiating committee, as an inevitable and predictable plan and process designed by those individuals who wished to oust Fred Hart and Paula Gray and install their own replacement.[14] From the meeting-centered perspective

[14]The assumption that outcomes are the result of an individual(s) or group's intentions,

presented there, however, this does not reflect the course of events at Midwest. Adopting the approach of March and Olsen (1976) that suggests a loose connection between individual or group intention and organizational events and suggests that different circumstances could have produced different results (see especially, pp. 10–23), it is possible to see how the manufacture of the first decision (the contract negotiation decision) created a process that could have produced various results and multiple scenarios. After the fact, each of these decisions would have been interpreted as predictable and inevitable.[15] For example, Fred could have chosen to stay, and Paula could have left (this was, in fact, what many people stated that they wanted to happen). Alternately, another staff (Rodger Barnes) could have been chosen as acting director and finally, Walter Ellis could have been chosen as permanent executive director. If any or all of these decisions and scenarios would have occurred, there would certainly have been some changes in the course of events at Midwest, but it is arguable how significant these changes would have been. One change that might have occurred is that the union might not have been elected, as it was shortly after the Paul Chase decision. However, it is not clear that this would have made a great difference because most of the staff who supported the union quit shortly after the union election.

If the leadership decisions were not the major accomplishments of this process, it is important to consider what this series of meetings (and

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strategies, interests, and actions influences a number of theoretical models and metaphors in anthropology (as pointed out by Ortner 1984) as well in organizational research (March and Olsen 1976). Ortner points to the irony of the practice model that is that "although actor's intentions are accorded central place in the model, yet major social change does not for the most part come about as an *intended* consequence of action, however rational action may have been" (p. 157). March and Olsen (1976) note the tendency to assume that "what happened was intended to happen," and their garbage-can model of decision making is an example of a model that takes account of the importance that individuals attach to "their" intentions while recognizing that the decisions that occur may not be related in any "direct way to anyone's desired outcomes" (p. 19, see especially their discussion of this pp. 19–21).

[15]March and Olsen (1976) suggest that it is a mistake to assume that "differences between an observed outcome and alternative possible, but not realized, outcomes" are fundamental (p. 20).

> Substantial differences in final outcomes are sometimes produced by small (and essentially unpredictable) differences in intermediate events leading to the outcomes. Lawful processes operate subject to essentially chance variation. As a result, an interpretation of an event should include an interpretation of alternative events that could easily have happened but did not. (p. 20)

Following this advice, I have attempted to provide some alternative interpretations of events and decisions at Midwest in this chapter.

especially the final board meeting) did produce for individuals and the center, and how it was the meeting(s) that accomplished this.

The most important accomplishment of these meetings, in my view, was to assemble staff and board together during a difficult, conflictual, and transitional time period and to label these assemblies as organizational work or business. In this way, although attempting to talk about a particular decision, individuals were able to talk about their relationships with each other and also to talk themselves into, and sometimes out of, the organization. In this case, the decision gave participants something to do, whereas the meetings gave them a place to do this as well as a range of other things as well.

The final meeting of the board was particularly important as this process certified the board as the major decision-making body of the center, and board members legitimated this status to themselves by making a decision about the executive director. Participants legitimated this process to themselves also by developing what they believed to be an objective and rational series of evaluation criteria and then proceeding to evaluate candidates on this basis. This was an important legitimating process for the Executive Committee as they were frequently accused of behaving irrationally, incompetently, and subjectively. This was an important process because it allowed board members to demonstrate to themselves and to others that discussion proceeded in a rational and objective manner (see particularly the statement presented to staff, Figure 8.3, outlining the process and the criteria for the decision).

Dialogue and discussion in the final meeting frequently focused on issues of leadership, accountability, and responsibility, as Executive Committee members used this meeting opportunity as a way to reassert their position at the center (which had been considerably challenged by Fred Hart and Paula Gray). This meeting was also an occasion for evaluating the administrative and leadership skills of staff, and it also provided participants with an opportunity to instruct new, or relatively new, members in the history and ongoing construction and reconstruction of history at the center. Along with this individuals were also able to learn current information about what was happening at Midwest.

This meeting also provided individual board members with an opportunity to assert themselves as they attempted to direct or control discussion. In the case of the final board meeting, Charles Parsons, who had played a relatively insignificant role in discussions and meetings up to this point, was extremely effective in asserting himself with the theme already identified "we know Paul Chase, why do we want to try something new." This idea, more than any other point, allowed individuals to convince themselves of the appropriateness of choosing Paul Chase.

This illustrates, again, the importance of meetings and speech for affecting specific decisions/events. Charles Parsons was not a "powerful" person, by anyone's judgment, and yet in this meeting, on this day, his statements significantly influenced the course of the discussion and the ultimate decision.

In one sense, Charles Parsons's comments were most significant because they always shifted the focus of the discussion back to Paul Chase, and the discussion of Paul Chase was a perfect vehicle for generating, learning about, and "seeing" the organization. There was so much to say about Paul (it really did not seem to matter whether it was good or bad): he had a history at the center, and everyone had experience with him. When Paul Chase was the topic of discussion, discussion of a range of issues about the center flowed naturally in the meeting. In talking about Walter Ellis, there was really very little to say, except that he "seemed good" but there was "no personal experience," and so there was no way for Walter Ellis to lead to a discussion of specific issues at the center, there was no way that Walter Ellis as a topic could allow individuals to create and see the organization in action.[16] Talking about Paul Chase and talking about the organization began to merge in the "evaluation discussions" in the final board meeting, and one-third of their way into the list of evaluation criteria, everyone stopped talking about Walter Ellis and also about the criteria. Talking about Paul Chase invoked the organization for meeting participants, talking about Walter Ellis invoked abstract concepts (leadership skills, ideals about staff delegation of authority), but although these might produce a discussion about an ideal person or an ideal organization, they could never produce "the organization" (i.e., Midwest).

From this perspective, Paul Chase was selected in this long, wandering, sometimes exciting, and very exhausting discussion because his candidacy gave participants the organization, "their" organization, to talk about. In talking themselves into the organization, participants talked themselves into (or, in this case, back into) Paul Chase. However, built into this view is the assumption that it could have been otherwise. In this case, the need to make a leadership decision (a need that was itself created by the meeting process as described before) created the occasion for individuals to meet and in the process constitute and sustain the organization during difficult times. What is important to stress here is that participants did not need Paul Chase as their executive director in order to accomplish what I have just outlined; other issues, or other decisions, had they appeared at this time, would have been just as

[16]This process may contribute in important ways to the "power" of incumbency in many political systems.

appropriate occasions for these discussions. And, if these other issues, and other decisions had been assembled in (and by) other meetings, then it is possible that other decisions would have been the result.

Summary

Decisions make meetings, and meetings make, remake, and sometimes unmake the organization, although it is much more common to assume the opposite. The specific decisions that get made in this process, although sometimes believed to be momentous and historic (see March and Olsen 1976, and especially March and Romelaer 1976) are of less importance to the course of an organization than the processes that they put into place. I have suggested here, building on March and Olsen's artifactual model, that it is the meeting and how it produces and reproduces power relationships and systems of control that should be the subject of attention.

11:15 P.M.

Maria *I make a motion that we adjourn.*

Mary *Wait, there's other business here. First of all you mentioned about that building on Prospect and [inaudible] Twenty-two years ago I went to that building, I knew the owner there. Did you read that article about State Hospital, about a woman being tied on a bed 2½ days? There was a big investigation about her being . . . that the doctors thought she was [inaudible]—*

Greg *It was on the radio.*

Mary *It was in the paper too. The doctors thought she was suicidal, but the doctors had to say something whether it's true or not, whether they're right or wrong, you know what I mean.*

Greg *One other thing that Joanna asked me to bring out, which I wanted to bring out, too . . . can we have your attention for just a moment? If any of you have been reading the papers, you've noticed that the Midtown College has again asked for a change in the site for the college, and they have asked that the site be expanded to take in all the grounds up to Central.*

Mary *Back to the same old game.*

Greg *[inaudible] and they are evidently doing this to [inaudible]*

Maria *Save the community some [inaudible]*

Greg *They are using the space thing to get what they want, the site which destroys 272 units of housing, 275 units of housing. There is a coalition formed, a coalition of people who are trying to oppose the college from again going back and taking that housing, and I want to know whether Midwest Mental Health Center wishes to take the stand against or for the college in this matter. I was at these meetings, and I did not use my name as a representative of Midwest, but my name is used, was used, as*

a member of the former Model City Council which approved the compromised site and was against the taking of any additional housing. I think that Jerry Turner will be more impressed if more groups seize an opposition to this change, so I wanted to know how the council feels about it.

Ellie *I'm against it.*

Mary *I'm against taking housing, I always have been.*

Greg *Would someone put this in the form of a motion?*

Ellie *I move that the Midwest Council take a stand against the Midtown College taking extra units of housing for the site.*

Greg *All those in favor signify by saying Aye.*

Group *Aye.*

Greg *Opposed? OK, meeting is adjourned.*

Chapter 9

Expressions and Emotions

The Staff Meeting

Organizations keep people busy, occasionally entertain them, give them a variety of experiences, keep them off the street, provide pretexts for storytelling, and allow socializing. They haven't anything else to give.

Karl Weick,
The Social Psychology of Organizing (1979:264)

. . . *if I am at all fundamentally right in what I am saying, then* thinking in terms of stories *must be shared by all mind or minds, whether ours or those of redwood forests and sea anemones.*

Gregory Bateson
Mind and Nature (1979:13)

Until recently, as has been argued in this book, the existence of organizations has been taken for granted, and the behavior that occurs within them has been thought to be dominated by rational, goal-directed, and instrumental behavior (it is work, after all, not play). Almost all of the models that researchers have constructed to explain organizational behavior accept this objectivist view. But the stories that researchers, as well as organizational actors, tell about their experiences in organizations consistently contradict these models. This chapter challenges these models and starts with the stories, everyday stories, that in most contexts would have been easy to ignore, but at Midwest, it was necessary to account for their presence and prevalence. I specifically use the phenomenon of stories and their relationship to meetings at Midwest to challenge the instrumental/expressive dichotomy that has been so influential in directing or thinking about organizations and communities.[1]

[1]Brown (1984) presents a useful description as well as critique of this dichotomy especially as it has affected anthropologists' interpretations of magical texts. He argues that, in

Talking Work: Meetings and Stories

Organizations such as Midwest are created out of and only exist within the context of a world of words. In the traditional sense of an organizational "product," Midwest offered talk—for talking and communication were the major means of therapy as well as the vehicle by which almost all work was transacted. Occasions for talking were therefore the major evidence of organizational action. The role of words and speech in this context, however, can be overlooked if language is viewed as a *neutral* instrument of representation instead of as constitutive of social systems and as a form of action in and of itself.[2] When language is viewed as more than a "passive reflector of reality" (Myers and Brenneis 1984:5) then it becomes important to examine the relationship between talk and the social forms that structure it.

At Midwest, as has already been discussed here, the social form that structured a great deal of talk at the center was the meeting, and

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anthropology, "there has been a curious reluctance to challenge the validity of the expressive/instrumental distinction in a direct way" (p. 547). He presents his analysis of magical hunting songs used by the Aguaruna of Amazonian Peru in order to illustrate how these songs "are part of a general ordering process that encompasses the strategic use of thoughts, speech, objects, and acts to achieve practical ends. In Aguaruna thought the expressive imagery of magical songs is an instrumental tool that shapes events in the performer's world" (p. 545).

[2]This issue has been discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3, but here it is worth repeating the point made by Stoller (1984) that many people believe that the *sound* of words itself can be a carrier of powerful forces (p. 569).

> Sound gets filtered out within an *episteme* which considers language, among other things, a neutral tool of information gathering and representation. More specifically, most anthropologists use the sound of language and music as a means to gather information with which they "construct" the culture of the Other. We take the sound of language for granted. The Other, however, may consider language not as a neutral tool of information gathering and representation but as an embodiment of sound which practitioners can use to bring rain to a parched village or to maim or kill their enemies. Should we as social scientists take these notions seriously? (p. 569)

An excellent example of the need to recogize this view of language and sound in order to even conduct research and understand and interpret the significance of the speech of one's informants is found in Favret-Saada's (1980) analysis of witchcraft and how "words wage war" in the Bocage in western France:

> To talk, in witchcraft, is never to inform. . . . 'Informing' an ethnographer, that is, someone who claims to have no intention of using the information, but naively wants to know for the sake of knowing, is literally unthinkable. For a single word (and only a word) can tie or untie a fate, and whoever puts himself in a position to utter it is formidable. . . .
>
> In short, there is no neutral position with spoken words: in witchcraft, words wage war. Anyone talking about it is a belligerent, the ethnographer like everyone else. There is no room for uninvolved observers. (pp. 9–10)

even though participants were often frustrated by their lack of accomplishment in these settings (the "all-talk-and-no-action" view), everyone assumed that meetings were a form for instrumental action. In the history of the center, meetings became even more important as primary contexts for instrumental action when the features of therapeutic speech and action began to be merged with meeting speech (see the discussion and illustration of this in Chapters 5 and 7), as exemplified by the training meetings and later by staff meetings.

The important role of meetings for structuring interaction and for providing individuals with a way to interpret, in a group format, their work experiences to each other has already been discussed but will be illustrated in this chapter using the example of one specific staff meeting. Here, the role of stories in providing participants with a form to use to individually interpret, construct, and reconstruct events will also be specifically examined.[3] Like meetings, stories were recognized as a pervasive activity in this context, but unlike meetings, participants' assumed that the stories that they repeatedly told each other were "merely" expressive representations of events. In this interpretation, Midwest participants follow a long line of researchers in the social sciences who have assumed that actions may be divided into those that are instrumental versus those that are said to be expressive. For example, Leach (1976) defines instrumental or technical actions as those "which serve to alter the physical state of the world out there—digging a hole in the ground, boiling an egg"; and expressive actions as those "which either simply say something about the state of the world as it is, or else propose to alter it by metaphysical means" (p. 6).[4]

Only a few ethnographers and folklorists have pointed to the significance of storytelling in work settings or during work activities. For the most part, these researchers have used the previously cited distinctions to examine stories as expressive activities that are thought to relieve the tedium of work (especially manual labor). For example, the stories that accompany the performance of tasks such as harvesting, herding, and especially spinning and weaving have been collected and analyzed using this framework (e.g., Newall 1980; Pellowski 1977). Recently, however, the role of stories in contemporary organizational settings has come to the attention of a few researchers in social psychology

[3]I would like to thank Don Handelman for suggesting the distinction between meetings as a format for group interpretation and stories as a format for individual interpretation to me.

[4]See Brown's (1984:547–548) critique of Leach's (1976) use of this dichotomy. Bailey (1983:80–100) also appears to adopt this distinction in his analysis of persuasion and play in committees (especially university committees) and this is surprising because, in many ways, his book is an attempt to challenge the expressive/instrumental dichotomy.

and organizational behavior (see particularly Clark 1980; Martin 1980; Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitken 1983). Although, in many ways, these researchers continue to assume that stories are expressive media for participants, there is a growing recognition that stories may also serve to constitute organizational reality for participants. Recent work, especially by Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982), has focused on now stories typify organizational experience for actors by weaving an historical texture into the organization that participants come to recognize and reshape in their continual narration (pp. 125–126).

In keeping with this developing approach in the literature, I argue in this chapter that stories were an important interpretive form for individuals at Midwest that could generate (as well as comment on) organizational activity and also transform the work experience for participants. Furthermore, I suggest that a systemic relationship existed specifically between meetings and stories as both provided participants with a way "to talk in order to discover what they are saying, [to] act in order to discover what they are doing" (Weick 1977:195). The validity of the distinction between instrumental and expressive behaviors collapses when examined in this context. In order to illustrate this relationship, I turn first to the phenomenon of staff meetings at Midwest and to one staff meeting in particular. This staff meeting was recognized and interpreted by participants as a key meeting, and the stories that appeared in interviews and conversations following this meeting allow me to document and illustrate the systematic relationship that existed between meetings and stories for "talking work" (see Comaroff 1975 and Gronn 1983) in this context. In this way, the staff meeting, stories about the staff meeting, and the phenomenon of storytelling in general are all used in this chapter to challenge traditional conceptions of the role of expressive behavior in organizational settings.

A Staff Meeting: Text and Context

Almost midway into our research project, we attended a staff meeting that came to viewed by participants and researchers as a key meeting for formulating and illustrating many of the major issues of this time period. This meeting also became an important event that was interpreted and reinterpreted after its occurrence in the storytelling process that it will be argued here, is crucial for understanding how individuals constituted an organizational reality (or realities) for themselves and for researchers.

The meeting began at 10:30 A.M. in the "hub," the day after Paul Chase, the acting executive director, was selected as permanent executive director for the center. This was a controversial announcement (as

the discussion in Chapter 8 should already have made clear) and the president of the board (Greg Stone) was attending this meeting to answer questions about this decision. Two key program directors had also recently announced their resignation (Tracy Brown and Toni Michaels), but were attending this meeting along with approximately 60 staff members and three members of the research team. Paul Chase and several key program directors were also attending this meeting, and the seating arrangement that occurred in this context specifically illustrates old as well as newly developing alignments and also animosities (see Figure 9.1). Paul Chase and staff who aligned themselves with his leadership sat around one edge of the table, whereas other staff and the researchers

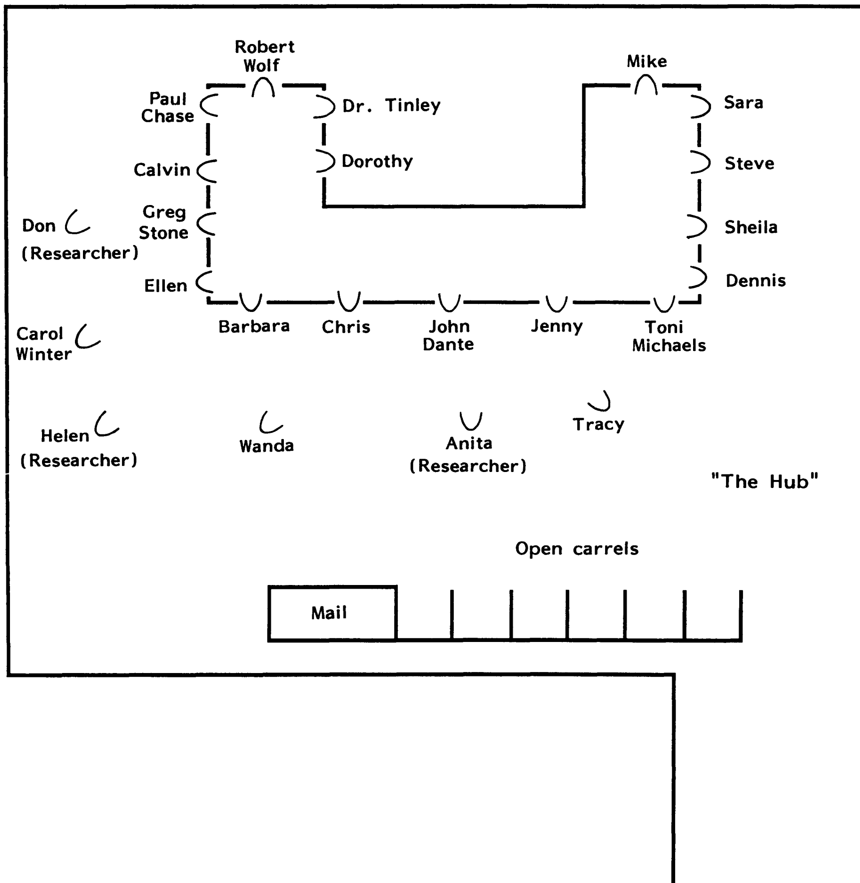

Figure 9.1. Staff meeting in "The Hub." The symbol U is taken from Duranti (1984:220) and indicates direction of the pelvis and therefore eye gaze.

dispersed themselves around the main meeting table and the room. (All participants at this meeting are not included in Figure 9.1.) One staff member tape-recorded this meeting because she was certain that it would be important and "heavy," and we were able to make a transcript of the meeting from this tape.

A Warning Note and Feelings

The meeting began with the introduction of a new staff member, Robert Wolf, who began to give a presentation on grantsmanship. This individual was a controversial new staff member, and his presentation precipitated a great deal of discussion about how and why he was hired, what he would do for the center, and also why he had already received a "warning" note in his mailbox created out of magazine letters, saying "Boy, are you off on the wrong foot." An excerpt from this meeting illustrates how the introduction of this new staff member and participants' reaction to his behavior became the means by which individuals engaged each other in a lengthy and sometimes wandering discussion as they attempted to interpret a wide range of issues, controversies, and conflicts that were occurring at this time. This excerpt begins with Robert explaining the type of information he will need to prepare a series of grant applications:

> Robert What this is going to require, at this level, however, is a great deal of cooperation from most staff people who are responsible for intake records, record keeping and for any kind of information that you can provide to help in demonstrating what we are doing. I think that may clarify what I am about, at least what I'm doing here and why I have asked you the kinds of questions that I have asked in the week and a half that I have been here. I am operating against the clock. One of the applications has to be in by the end of November, one of them has to be in by March. We were talking about time; that certainly imposes some constraints upon me. I think it is important also, to, have all of you seen this? [He holds up the magazine note.] It says, "Boy, are you off on the wrong foot." I received this in my mailbox sometime between when I left here Monday at 5:05 P.M. and when I came back at 7:50 P.M. Well, it reflects some imagination, it certainly does not enhance our ability, whoever wrote it, to communicate. I don't think it's an effective form of communication.
>
> Jenny I do think it is more helpful when you explain what you are going to do and then do it rather than go on asking ques-

tions and then, after the fact, so to speak, come and explain what you are doing.

Steve It's the center's responsibility to explain why they hired you in the first place and clear the way for a stranger. . . .

Jenny I hear what you are saying, Robert. Maybe people around here are overreacting or whatever because they don't know what you are doing. I think I feel uncomfortable by your tone, in a way that maybe tells people that you are/

Chris I think to add to that, there is something about this place maybe that makes a person, you know, that bugs people a lot [laughter]. You know, people feel like wow, so many times you passed by here, you say you are not checking up on us, and so you know I was wondering, maybe, are you checking up on us?

Robert I think Dr. Tinley is probably more an authority on why you see it that way than I would [loud moans and boos from participants].

Chris Well, you are checking up on us.

Robert No, I have no need to.

Chris I'm telling you this because that is the sign that I get.

Jenny I think people would be more comfortable if only they would see things more. All I am saying is that their experience, and again I say I would be comfortable, more comfortable, to hear your own that when you came on/

Robert Let me say this then. I am a very aggressive individual and that is because of the nature of what I am into and a number of other things. I hope you, none of you have been offended, and if you have been I feel uncomfortable about that.

Dorothy I think Jenny, too that certain people feel that way by the way other people react to change. So I think that all the way around we all need a little help. You know, I think that most of us were waltzing along, working with each other, treating each other [inaudible]. I think personally I can say that if anyone who worked with me was so terribly immature to write this ransom-type little note, it certainly tells me that they are not capable of working as adults.

Tracy Dorothy, I agree with you on one level, but I wonder what caused someone to get to that point, and I think that is really not looked at around here. As I look around the room, I pick up a lot of anger and hurt from people and that is really being ignored, and it bothers me. It bothers me a lot. We try to talk to each other, and a part of me just wants to start crying because Chris was just put down and Jenny made an effort and you [Robert] apologized, but there's a lot of feelings going on in this room.

There is a lot of people feeling inadequate and helpless and hurt, and it continues to be overlooked, and it makes me so sad because I remember a time when I saw a group of people who were idealistic and wanted to do something together, and now we're like this [she starts to sob], and we are going to continue going farther and farther away from each other. This makes me so angry to listen to these discussions and to see the feelings continually be ignored and to see that we are supposed to be people who go out and help other people, and we put each other down, we ignore each other's feelings, and I just can't take it, it makes me sick. You know it made me sick, but what made me even sicker was the realization of how somebody got there, working here for 2 years and being able to understand how somebody might get to the point of sending you [Robert] that kind of note that I can intellectually understand that.

Dennis I see what you are saying. I came in this morning feeling really bad. I must be thinking about the number, the caliber of the people that we have been losing, Dr. Ross, Gary, Tracy. I don't know now many people are just disappearing and it really worries me and makes me feel bad.

Tracy What makes me feel worse is that it doesn't seem like anybody really cares. If you can invest so much of yourself in the place and you leave nobody, even cares. It seems to me that it's just another crazy person who couldn't make it, and it's sad because the numbers are increasing, and it depends on what you want, and I think that people who are sticking around have to decide what they really want. You know I agree that we need to become more professional, and one of the ways that we can become more professional is doing the types of things that you're saying, Robert, but I don't think intellectually or emotionally that any of those things are ever going to happen if people continue to feel bad about themselves because I consider myself an extremely efficient and organized person, and I can intellectually buy everything you're saying, but I don't have the energy left to do it, and until I as a person can feel more appreciated, I am not going to have the energy, and I think that is a feeling that a lot of people around here have, and it keeps getting dealt under the table, and it keeps getting labeled as incompetency and that is not fair, that's one side.

Sara I feel very strongly about that, and I think that until we show a change in our approach to one another, it's going to be the same way. When Robert and Calvin [another relatively new staff member] can't get acquainted with anyone in the group here that have been here awhile and [I] maybe understand why Chris felt that way because the atmosphere here doesn't allow people to grow and be themselves. Therefore, we cut off so

much of ourselves, so much of what we could do for the community by withdrawing. . . .

Claire I would just like to add something to what Tracy said about people who are leaving, the quality of the people who are leaving or some of the people who are leaving. I would like to add Toni Michaels to the list of people that was run off because its become real clear as people leave that we have less and less ability to do something, to make a change around here, or to make a change that should have been made back before the doors of the center were open. . . . I think we lose people with spirit around here, those are the people who leave, the people who could do something, but it's not worth it to stick around and mold yourself into the woodwork or whatever we have to mold ourselves into. I think that's real unfortunate and that at this staff meeting as we find out more about the people who are leaving, or the impact of those who we found, that it becomes real clear that we have, we are able to do less and less about changing this place. I think that's the realization of the staff who are still sitting here and haven't turned in their resignations yet have to recognize. . . .

Dorothy I would like to respond to some things that have been said. I don't share your pessimism. I know things feel like they have been going downhill for a long time, and they have, but I don't think that is irreversible. It seems to me that there is a new spirit among more and more people here to fight against that.

Claire I think there is a new spirit, but I am not quite sure if it isn't just that we are all at the end, as far as believing that we can actually constructively work with each other and so that there is some kind of defiance and there is some kind of I'll get a piece for myself. I'm not sure, but I think certainly there are many of us and with the new resignations and the decision by the executive committee and the way it came down that there is a spirit, but I am not real sure it is going to be real constructive to the Midwest Community Mental Health Center. . . .

Barbara I think that it's appropriate that today we have a discussion like this because it's a new administration, that's something that's settled . . . and I do feel that we went from one extreme [in the expression of feelings], and we are beginning to go the other. . . . There have been many casualities in the process of the center and I also feel that there have been successes. I think that we have spoken so often of the casualities, we don't see it but there has been growth, there has been another [inaudible] . . . I know I still have areas in which to grow, and I'm hoping that all of that will be here, it may not be here, I don't know.

Mike I think that's really interesting. I think that a lot of people

feel that they don't have areas to grow, and that they're aren't places where they can go to. People feel that they're branded *x*, and they have to remain here, and they can't go somewhere else.

Barbara Well, then I think the point is can the center provide that for people? Is that one of the goals of the center? And I think it ought to be clearly stated; or, is that not one of the goals? Does that mean the person has to go somewhere else for it?

Mike According to the grant, that's not our goal. . . .

Barbara And I would hope that somehow we could resolve this and make it clear—what the center is about. And I think that's really the issue of treatment here, a program where people can feel their anger out, not that there is no where else for them to go and well what articles of treatment are there?

This excerpt illustrates how therapeutic and emotional speech were an expected part of the meeting discussion (I hear you, I feel that, I want to share this, I wish you would own that, etc.) as it became the vehicle for discussing a range of issues and problems, including confusion over the goals of the center, the issue of communication and what was and was not considered to be appropriate communication, recent executive committee decisions, recent staff resignations, and issues of accountability, authority, and representation.

A Confession

About half way through this meeting, Carol Winter took the floor. As has already been discussed in Chapter 6, Carol was a staff member who occupied one of the management roles as director of educational services, and she was one of the very few "paraprofessionals" to have moved up the hierarchy. Carol was symbolic to many staff of what the community emphasis of the program was supposed to be and what it had been in the early days of the center. (Carol was one of the first staff members hired and had been a participant in the training meetings conducted by Paula, and therefore was representative in this sense of the Fred and Paula period.) It was felt by Carol and many other staff that she was being "edged out" by the new administration. Carol took the floor at this meeting and made a long and very dramatic speech, interspersed with sobbing and tears, which concluded with her revelation that she now wanted to leave the center but felt that she could not because "she needed the money." In this way she became an example of individuals, discussed earlier, who felt trapped by the center.

Carol For those people who are interested in hearing me, here I am. I have a lot of criticisms, and I agree with those people who said that we should try to proportion it out. So I have criticisms about the way Paul relates to the council; I told him about this and the thing about the training coordinator. . . . I don't talk to people because I don't want to be viewed by Paul as a negative component of the staff. I am told there are no positions for my program, and I like Calvin Bennett [the newly hired staff member along with Robert Wolf, Calvin was also the husband of Dorothy Bennett]. I almost hired him, but all of a sudden after being in cabinet meetings for 6 months, there is no money for personnel administration, but when my positions are cut we hire Calvin Bennett. I was not even made aware of the training coordinator position and the whole concept of vacancy allowance. I had to learn about that from a public announcement and that is a violation of my contract that everything relating to my department was to be made clear and approved by the council committee. I explained that I did maybe handle it in the wrong way because I wrote a memo to the cabinet members, and I said I feel like I've been lied to but please help me deal with it. Paul gave me the simplest explanation which I think I'm smart enough to absorb but that was not the issue beforehand, and Paul answered it to me with a memo the next day that what I did was a flagrant violation of administration. No mention of how it was going to change, that lines of accountability were going to hold.

I have criticisms of the cabinet. They start late, they end late, they do not follow through the agenda items. We discuss something one week, and we don't finish it till the next week. We never review whether it's been accomplished, and I think we all share in that and I'm including myself in that. Now if Paul has not made the directors, or whatever the hell they are, accountable, then how can anybody else be accountable? The general staff, about the Search and Screen Committee. I was elected to be a representative to the Search and Screen Committee, and I tried to work with them. That was impossible. I said that there were significant numbers [of] people for Paul, and there were significant numbers of people who were against Paul, and there were a significant number of people for Walter Ellis [another candidate], but I had nothing to show in terms of paper and numbers of opinions written down to substantiate two of those categories. The only category that came through on paper were those that were for Paul. So there again the staff failed me . . . so we failed there.

I have not spoken at meetings because sometimes there have been 10 or 15 people here, and I've been to a meeting once

where there were 10 people here and it lasted for 15 minutes. Now I feel apathetic and disappointed, but either we make the decision to leave or we can find alternative ways to do something about it, because my biggest criticism about myself is that I think I sat in my little office complaining and obsessing about how terrible things were around here, and I didn't do some of the things that I could have done, and I'm trying to change that now. I've done a month of MD 202s [staff activity report forms for the state], and I've tried to call a council committee meeting. We even tried to make it convenient so that it was at 7:00 P.M., 1 hour before the council meeting was already scheduled. Two people showed up. What am I to do? I feel like I cannot produce. The council is making poor decisions, but if I don't give them information to help them make a decision, I can't even make that opportunity happen. I'm very disappointed, but I'm not giving up. I will fight it for as long as I can and see what happens. . . .

As an administrator, I feel very much in the middle and whether you like it or not I'm trying to share with you everything that I feel that I have gone through and the discussions and the arguments that I've put up with. Last week I spent a whole half hour questioning Paul about hiring Robert. I empathize with John [John Dante, the budget administrator] because Robert is doing something that is a kind of function that fits under his jurisdiction, but Robert is given a special label so it's out of John's jurisdiction. To me that would be a slap in the face that I was incompetent for that job even though it was my job to begin with, but I can't fight John's battles if he doesn't want to himself.

Everything that is not direct service comes to me, libraries, students, volunteers, in-service training. I'm even doing training for political functions, and I need the council committee to help me through this cause I feel very alone against 140 people and I'm not blaming anyone, I'm just trying to say where it's at right now and that's why I need the council committee to say to Paul, to say to the center, we [Educational Services] are a valuable service, and we could be doing something but when we're constantly pulled in one direction and then the other and we try to start something and then get stopped because there is no support. . . . I feel very hopeless, but I want you to know that where I feel very bad is that I do want to leave this place now. My patience [inaudible] is just about gone. I don't know if I have any energy left, but I cannot afford the economic change and that makes me feel terrible that I cannot leave and so unjust. I don't earn $7,000. I earn a lot more money, but I need it and I could not get a comparable job any place else [Carol has

been crying and sobbing at this point]. Thank you for listening. [applause]

During the latter portion of Carol's speech, many participants in the meeting appeared to be crying (including the researchers). Jenny was the first to respond to Carol:

Jenny I appreciate how difficult that was to do, what you just did and [inaudible] I now have a tremendous respect for you and I just want you to know that I share many of your feelings.

Greg Stone also tried to respond to Carol's discussion by listing several of her points and questions and responding to them:

Greg In regard to Calvin Bennett. Calvin was in a position that we of the executive committee had for a year. One year ago, we saw the need for this kind of position; I don't know what we called it at the time, but the term is not important. . . . In regard to Robert, I think if he does his job he could bring new money into this place that will allow us to do many of the things that the staff wants, give some upward mobility to a career ladder and so forth. He needs your help to bring this about. If he doesn't do it, then we definitely will have to think about letting him go cause we don't pay $18,000 to someone unless he can produce, but if he produces, he will more than make up the salary and a hell of a lot besides to get the center back on its feet. I also think in response to Carol I cannot answer all of the things that she brought up. I think there are explanations why a position can be filled in one kind of a center and not in another kind and it goes to our budgeting process. It would be very hard for you or me or for anyone to understand and the case goes that there are certain areas where you can't pass staff and certain areas where you can and just because you hire one person over here doesn't mean that that money for his salary came out of somebody else's pocket. It just doesn't work that way.

At this point, Tracy took the floor and began to chastize Greg for his response to the recent resignations and especially to Carol's plea and discussion in this meeting:

Tracy Greg, I would like to say one other thing to you. You've known me for a long time, and you've known Carol for a long time, and when you hear Carol standing up I don't know how it isn't tearing you apart [Tracy is crying] to see that the only reason she's staying here is because she's trapped. I mean, I've known Carol a long time and that tore me up inside and I felt guilty because I'm not trapped. I felt good on one hand but really guilty on the other and when you hear me leaving I can't

understanding that that doesn't upset you. I can't believe it! You don't say things like that!

Greg I don't want to see you leave, I don't want to see Carol leave.

Tracy But you don't say it, Greg! That's the whole point! [Tracy is screaming and crying.] Don't you see how people leave feeling like they could disappear in the night and it doesn't even matter! I've been here 2½ years, Greg, we've had a lot of conversations and you don't even address them.

This interchange summarizes the important but unrecognized differences between staff and board speech expectations (already discussed in Chapter 5) as the attempt to discuss issues and problems in a meeting, both displays as well as generates the very problems that are being discussed.

New Staff, Old Staff

This particular meeting concluded as it began, with a discussion of the source of money for the new staff member, Robert. Several staff made accusations that Robert's and also Calvin Bennett's salaries were coming from Carol's department, as Carol (representative of the paraprofessionals and the "community" approach to mental health) was posed against Robert (representative of the new and "more professional" approach to mental health and center administration). Sheila Jones illustrates this juxtaposition by accusing Greg of being naive about his understanding and reporting of the budgetary process, especially as it involves the salaries of Robert and Calvin:

Sheila The other thing that scares me though, Greg, is when you say something that sounds to me like extremely naive. When you say, listen if you don't fill jobs in one department that doesn't mean that the money coming from that is paying for these other positions. And you know I've been around a long time, and I know that part of the budgetary thing is that you rob Peter to pay Paul. And I know that that's true and if the council can't see that that is true and that is what's been happening here then I don't have a lot of hope for any recommendations.

Greg That is what we have been doing. We have been robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Sheila But you stood up there 5 minutes ago and said that that isn't necessarily true when it is *categorically* true.

Greg It was done, but it was done wrongly, and we're paying for it now.

Sheila You're paying for it right now, right this minute, and that's just what I heard you deny.

Greg Okay.

Sheila It's happening! You cannot tell me that Carol's staff is not Robert Wolf and Calvin Bennett. I will not believe it because I know that that is what happened!

Shortly after this interchange, the meeting ended at approximately 12:30 P.M. with the announcement that individuals had begun meeting in General Services and in the Crisis Services Unit:

Doug I have an announcement, there is a General Services meeting for those people that are interested in continuing this discussion, and it's still going on. I also hear that there are a lot of people meeting over in the Crisis Services Unit so if you want to brown-bag it, that's where people are.

Stories about the Staff Meeting

This was a staff meeting that people remembered and discussed for quite some time. It marked, among other things, a number of important personnel transitions (the selection of Paul Chase as permanent executive director, the resignation of Toni Michaels, Tracy Brown, and Gary Chatham), and it also posed, in a very dramatic way, the "new" administration with the "old" approach, although individuals had varying interpretations of what this meant. Some people, like Dorothy, thought that a new spirit was in evidence, whereas others like Claire thought that it was not the spirit of a community mental health center that she could support. As a cultural text, the meeting was interpreted in a variety of ways by individuals, by what was said and also by what was *not* said. The following story illustrates this point:

> I remember that one staff meeting, and what was really interesting was that Paul did not say one word in that entire meeting except at the end and he said, "I will come up with some recommendations." What he did was he took apart what people said, and he came out with some concrete short-run solutions instead of all he had to do, if he would have just said, "You know, I feel the same way you do, and you know there are days I come into this place, and I want to go home." If he could have just been human. . . . See I think the way he copes is by looking strong, and I don't think someone who copes that way should be an administrator, that's my bias of management.

This staff meeting marked a turning point and ultimately a change in the role of staff meetings as key meetings at the center. As Carol Winter commented in her discussion, staff meetings had already begun to be sparcely attended, "only 10 or 15 people," and they only lasted "10 or 15 minutes." During the next 6 months, following this staff meeting, these occasions were no longer "the place to be." "Nobody comes now [to staff meetings]—I guess it's not exciting enough," in Dorothy's terms. In September of 1976, shortly after we left the center, one informant reported, "You'd really be surprised at the center now . . . staff meetings are really short, and it's not heavy like it used to be, it's much more positive. Maybe people have negative feelings, but they keep it to themselves."

This extended example of one staff meeting and later interpretations of it in stories illustrates in detail how meetings became sense-making forms for individuals at the center and how they continued to function in this way even after their occurrence. Meetings, especially dramatic meetings, became part of the story repertoire of participants, and, in this way, they also became a means for individuals to use to interpret their experiences to each other. The important role of stories in this regard, and their relationship to meetings at the Center, is examined in more detail later.

Stories and Storytelling

I did not intend to study stories at the center, any more than I intended to study meetings, although I must admit that one of the reasons I wanted to study the organization was because of the stories I had heard about it. My research, as already indicated, was designed to investigate the center's implementation of a community paraprofessional model for the treatment of chronically mentally ill patients, but it was hard to miss the fact that in interviews my informants always discussed their activities by telling stories. "Tell me about your work as a paraprofessional?", I would ask in an interview, and invariably I would be told a story—about specific events or happenings (frequently a meeting) about individuals, and about the organization in general. My observations suggested that staff members told themselves the same stories, over and over again. The stories that everyone told were stories about a group of people out to save the world (or, at least, West Park) who became locked in a deadly battle where each side was convinced the other was "incompetent" or "crazy" and in any case should be eliminated. There were good guys, bad guys, heroes, and heroines and a particularly "evil" (from the point of view of one group) "villainess."

Storytelling, in fact, was much more than a pastime at the center, for stories both shaped and sustained the staff's image of the organization and their work within it. In this context stories, like meetings, became an important form that individuals used to interpret their experiences of work at the center to each other. In the process, stories (especially certain stories) played an important role in constituting an organizational reality for all participants.

At Midwest, stories made their appearance in conversations, interviews, informal discussions, and so on in a variety of ways. A story in this setting could be an account of something that happened in the distant past or only a few minutes earlier. It is important to remember that these stories were always situated in ordinary turn-by-turn talk. In general, something was said in a conversation that reminded a participant of a specific story, and the story was then introduced into the conversation by a variety of techniques that signaled the start of the story and also attempted to display a relationship between the story and prior talk (Jefferson 1978:220). For example:

Jan How long are they going on? [referring to a meeting]

Bill Don't know.

Jan I remember one time [story].[5]

In general, these stories were presented as if they depicted real events, and they were heard and repeated as representations of real events. In some instances, however, the stories were more elaborate and appeared in conversation as more obviously "storied" descriptions. The presentation and style of these stories made it clear that they were depicting imaginary events.

Four specific features of the stories at Midwest should be mentioned. First, the storytellers were often the stories' heroes, heroines, victims, and villains. Second, the story texts invariably described behavior that was the inverse of expected and "proper" organizational (often therapeutic) behavior. Third, the stories treated everyday organizational events as momentous and sometimes life-or-death issues. And fourth, the stories were almost always used by tellers, and heard by listeners, as illustrations of the "crazy" (a favorite term) nature of the organization and/or individuals in the organization. I classify the stories into three general types: (1) stories about meetings, (2) stories about individuals,

[5]The part that the story form plays in everyday discourse is something that very few researchers have investigated. This topic is specifically considered in several of Harvey Sacks's unpublished class lectures and Jefferson (1978) builds and expands on this work. I use her format for presenting an example of the appearance of a story in conversation here.

and (3) stories about the organization. Obviously these are arbitrary divisions, but they are based on the teller's emphasis in relating the story to me or to someone else.

Stories about Meetings

Stories about meetings were extremely common as might be expected, because meetings were ubiquitous at the center. The dozens of meetings that occurred during any given day at the center—staff meetngs, unit meetings, cabinet meetings, supervisors' meetings, board meetings, etc.—were a constant source of material for stories. In one sense, the meetings themselves were like stories in that the format allowed participants to engage in a type of collective storytelling (like Geertz's Balinese cockfights, see 1973), where they were both the subjects and objects of the event. The participants had their own term for this process as they referred to this activity as "dancing" (see Schwartzman 1978a, 1981). Dancing involved a complicated system of saying one thing in terms of something else in order to define "reality" in one way or to comment on or redefine a situation. According to a staff member:

> Dancing is like . . . fencing—I'm sure that you have your agenda and I have my own but I'm not about to lay it out unless I get you to lay out yours first . . . so I'm going to dance . . . It's almost like the old nineteenth-century, eighteenth-century court dances that are very complex. . . .
>
> [In a dance] it takes you hours to figure out that in reality they haven't told you anything, but they may have, in fact, *acted* in such a way that you assumed they knew more than they *really* did, and you told them a whole bunch. So if you put two or more people like that together or one person who is like that and one person who can at least recognize it, then you get a dance.

Meetings facilitated this process because they were a context where one set of subjects (e.g., the social relationships of the participants) could always be talked about in terms of another set of subjects (e.g., the ostensible purpose of the meeting). In a meeting, in which dancing took place, specific problems, crises, solutions, or even simple requests (as in the example to be cited) were quickly incorporated into the dance routines of specific individuals or into a collective group dance. In this way, the "reality" or seriousness of the problem was transformed into the "unreality" of the dance—which was itself a comment, at another level, on the "realities of life at the center." Because meetings in which dancing took place were themselves "good stories," jokes and tales about the length and "craziness" of specific meetings were quite common. These stories simultaneously created, transformed, and commented on the realities of center life. A staff member tells a story about his last board meeting in an interview:

> You won't believe the last board meeting I went to; it was one of those coalitions of community control. . . . This young women . . . delivers a sensible, a little bit adolescent in the sense that she wasn't as articulate as she could have been, request to become a member of the council and there is a member of the board who you might have thought they were talking about recognizing the People's Republic as opposed to Formosa. . . . I was unable to follow the thought/cognitive function that she was laying down verbally, even given the fact that it was not germane to [the other woman's request]. . . . Mary [another member of the board] was trying to say slow down . . . this doesn't make any sense. Then Mary made a motion, which was weird enough, so they had to discuss it for 15 to 20 minutes. And sure enough when that woman left [the one making the membership request], she didn't have any idea where she had been, and she walked out without her coat and purse. Five minutes later out on the street, she realized she left her clothes behind. It was like that woman must have felt like she was on a teeter-totter that not only was going up and down but was being spun at some tremendous rate because that was one of the craziest [meetings] I've even been to.

Meetings frequently "spun" people around, because, when dancing occurred, any actions that did take place were always confusing and often unpredictable. For this reason, individuals also spent a great deal of time interpreting what happened at particular meetings and planning future meetings. In the following example, a staff member and one of the researchers discuss a recent staff meeting and a series of "subversive" meetings (these latter meetings ultimately led to the formation of the union that is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7):

Res Kind of an interesting staff meeting in that/

Merrill It was dull.

Res Really? I thought things were being said or implied that really weren't/

Merrill Well, Toni was noticeably silent because she is usually very talkative, she was laying back a bit. Gary and Toni you know, they kept saying that there's feelings going on we've got to talk about them. They're just stupid.

Res Why?

Merrill Things that are going on aren't going to be able to be dealt with in one staff meeting.

Res I wasn't sure whether you were saying that there weren't things going on.

Merrill Oh, there are things going on. Are you aware of the subversives' meeting?

Res Yeah, and I wondered if that's, cause I didn't know that at the time. I only found out about that after the staff meeting and

then I started thinking about what had been going on at the staff meeting.

Merrill People, we're getting together again tonight and planning strategy. As far as I know, when the original meeting was called, which was a few nights ago, I had been told that this was a meeting and that there was going to be a walkout at the staff meeting yesterday, there was going to be a television crew here, that there was a song or something about "we need you and you need us" that was going to be played over a tape recorder. Ridiculous kinds of things which I would have no part of at all, saying look at how asinine we are and look at how I can't do anything, look how fucked up and this would certainly ruin any plans in the future, any kinds of positive actions that could be taken by staff. So I understand that once people got to this meeting that there were only two people that wanted to go that way, everybody else said no it's crazy. I'm glad to hear that because that would have [inaudible] sure. So I have no idea what's going to be happening at this meeting tonight. I'm going for a couple of hours and see.

It was this sense of "craziness" and unpredictability that the meeting stories always emphasized and because meetings and stories were systematically related to one another as I have suggested here, it was this relationship that ultimately reframed everyone's view of what it was that they were doing. The stories suggested (and the meetings "proved") that this was not an ordinary group of people working in an organization, attending meetings, seeing clients, drinking coffee, and gossiping in the halls. Instead, the stories suggested (and the meetings "proved") that this was an extraordinary group of people involved in a bizarre and "Alice in Wonderland-like world" (as one informant expressed it). This was a world, the stories suggested, that could be quite dangerous. But just how dangerous could a meeting be? To understand how this question was answered at the center, it is necessary to consider the second common story type, stories about individuals.

Stories about Individuals

At the time of our fieldwork, the center employed approximately 100 staff members; another 40 individuals were involved with the organization as board or council members. Almost all of these individuals told stories, but only a few staff/board members appeared as recurring characters in the stories everyone told. The two "characters" who appeared most frequently in the stories were the center's first director (Fred) and assistant director (Paula). These stories almost always

focused on the power that Fred or Paula exercised over individuals at the center (generally as displayed in the context of meetings). One frequently repeated saying, used to describe the relationship between Fred and Paula, illustrates this view. It was said that "Fred makes the bullets, and Paula shoots them." "Bullets" were almost always "shot" in meetings, and one of the more dramatic stories we heard was always told to illustrate the power and effect of Paula's "shots":

> One day in a training meeting, the topic was death and dying. It was supposed to help the [paraprofessionals] to be able to deal with dying clients. A book on the subject was being discussed, and Paula said she thought the author was wrong about her ideas. Ed [a staff member in substance abuse] disagreed with Paula about this, and she fired back at him—how did he know that this author was right, he hadn't ever died and hadn't ever been dying. Two weeks later he killed his wife, killed himself, and sent the suicide note to Paula. Paula got the suicide note in the mail at the center. The stationery was from a motel and was postmarked Dayton, Ohio. Paula called the police and asked them to check this particular place out. The police called back later, after having gone to this motel, and confirmed that they found the bodies of both Ed and his wife in the motel room. The first line of the note said, "The author was right. . . ."
>
> Paula did another training meeting on death and dying the day she got the suicide note from Ed. No one knew about the note before the meeting, and during the discussion Paula kept using Ed's name as an example of a person who was either dead or dying. Then, at the end of the meeting, she pulled out the note and read it to everyone.

This story confirmed everyone's view of Paula as an extraordinary, powerful person whose behavior could even provoke a suicide/murder ("and God knows what else," as one staff member suggested). Several versions of this story existed (in some, Ed only kills himself, in others he only threatens to kill himself and his wife), but all of my attempt to uncover the "facts" behind the story only produced more stories. However, by checking all of the stories that we heard, and by rechecking with some of our informants about particular stories, I was able to determine that a staff member named Ed did commit suicide while employed at the center. The primary circumstance that led to this suicide appears to have been Ed's chronic physical illness. Of course, what is interesting about the "suicide stories" that we heard is that this information was left out, and only the relationship between Paula's statement in the meeting and Ed's suicide is specifically emphasized.

It was exactly this type of story that generated "work" in the form of meetings for the center. An accumulation of what came to be known as "Paula stories" produced the "investigation committee" (discussed in Chapter 7) charged with the task of examining "all of the problems at the center." This committee met for several months, sometimes two or three times a week, and these meetings sometimes lasted between 5 and

6 hours. This committee and its behavior produced a new set of "crazy meeting" stories, which in turn led to the creation of a subcommittee charged with the task of establishing fair and understandable guidelines and procedures for the investigation. To my knowledge, these guidelines were never produced.

One of the interesting features of many of the stories that were told about individuals was the stress that was placed on the need for individuals to be strategic (sometimes hyperstrategic) and manipulative in order to control or attempt to control the presumed strategies and manipulations of other individuals and groups.[6] It was a world, as the stories characterized it, of strategy, manipulation, and distrust; or, as one individual described it, "paranoid grandiousity." One of the center's directors describes his first encounters with Fred Hart:

> I would say, "Well, what does this mean, Fred," and he would tell me "Plan A, B and C, and this one is trying to get you over there, and that one is trying to get you over there, and you have to have another plan over here, and you really can't tell people what's happening over there, and everyone is a motherfucker" but him. . . . [now] I don't have the inclination or the capacity to juggle 16 manipulations in my head and I think, boy, he's really great, I guess this is community mental health, and, boy, he sure can manipulate things and I'll just never know that . . .

The possibilities for paradox and the merging and confusion between activities such as play and work, therapy and craziness have been most usefully conceptualized by Bateson (see 1972) in his analysis of paradoxical modes of communication and their relation to a multitude of activities. Adopting this perspective, it is not surprising to find that, in an organization where staff engage in therapeutic work with patients, their activities with one another might exhibit characteristics of play, of therapy, and of craziness. I believe that this was the case for Midwest; however, because these frames or modes of organization are fluid, it is easy to move in and out of them, sometimes without even knowing that this is happening. That this occurred at the center is illustrated by the fact that individuals were constantly confused, perplexed, and yet also fascinated by the transformation of their "work" into a form of behavior that

[6]It is interesting to see how everyday stories, such as the one described here, reflect and generate an important theme in American culture, that is, the importance of individual strategies and manipulations as a means to control adverse circumstances. This is such a taken-for-granted theme in American society that the processes that work to construct it as a "fact of life" are rarely analyzed. In my research, I accepted it as a "fact," and it was only several years after this research and many readings and rereadings of transcripts and field notes that I began to see how I and my informants constructed the reality of "the powerful and strategic individual" for ourselves in the stories that we heard and told to each other.

ultimately began to seem "crazy" and sometimes quite dangerous and destructive. In this way, the stories that everyone told became a means for both creating confusion as well as for trying to make sense of it.

According to the stories, like Ed's suicide story, work at Midwest could be quite dangerous, but it was also quite exciting. Along with actually generating work for the center, stories also generated a series of recurring images for individuals to use to depict their activities and relationships, especially their conflictual relationships. The stories specifically offered a number of images of death, killing, and warfare that participants used in a variety of contexts[7]:

1. To describe their relationship to their work (e.g., during a board meeting, a secretary angrily announced her refusal to work: "I will not give one more drop of blood to this place until these problems are resolved")
2. To comment on their relationships to each other (e.g., in a joint staff/board meeting one staff member described his relationship to the clinical director by saying, "I stand behind her with a knife at her throat")
3. To depict their relationship to the center itself (e.g., a staff member filed a grievance against the director and assistant director because he believed that they "were trying to kill the organization or at least not let it be born").

[7]The rhetoric and associated imagery of warfare, killing, and the like appears to be quite common in other American alternative organizations of this era. For example, in Mansbridge's (1983) study of Helpline, individuals frequently described the events of crisis meetings using warfare rhetoric. In the following example, a staff member remembers the moment when his emergency van unit made its final statement in an important meeting discussing budget cutbacks:

> We made a statement. And we were all pretty relieved when Monty [a volunteer from the Shelter] stood up and said what he said about cutbacks—you know, like he said that they [the Shelter] were making a demand that CCC [another unit] cut back. And boy, was that a relief!
>
> But it wasn't enough because when it was Nan's turn [to make the van statement]—like Ruth, I had my eye on Ruth, and I had Susan down around my leg, and I had somebody beside me, and we were all holding each other, and we could all feel the weird vibes. I'm looking at Alex, and my eyes were bloodshot—I mean it was really heavy. It was like World War II in your living room! [laugh] Eddie was way across the other side of the room, and he was *bullshit!* He was absolutely bullshit! . . . We thought it was like dropping a bomb. And it was; it really was. It was like saying, what we were saying in essence was that we're getting blown out of what we're doing, and we don't feel *you* are! . . .
>
> That's really heavy—dropping a bomb and hurting people's feelings—confronting them as a whole, saying that your projects aren't very valuable to Helpline. . . . That's the heaviest thing that I have ever gone through, at Helpline. The meeting and the head changes I was going through, and then going home and finding I was alone, that I really needed them. I cried. (pp. 156–157)

The images everyone employed supported the view that extraordinary events were happening in what appeared to be ordinary contexts. Meetings were not really meetings but instead became battlegrounds for individual and group hostilities, which were created and perpetuated in part by the stories everyone told. At the center, the principal competing groups were staff and board members who, as has already been described, became locked in a struggle over what the goals and aims of the center could and should be. These differences were looked on as matters of historic importance, as a memo written by one of the center's "founders" illustrates. This particular memo was written in reaction to the deliberations of the "investigation committee" discussed more specifically in Chapter 7; it should be recalled that this committee was created in part as a response to "Paula stories." The memo uses examples from the organizational history of the Catholic church as a way to describe and interpret differences between the board and David and Paula:

> During the time I was present at the meeting of [date] (not the whole time I concede) the discussion revolved around possible reorganization of the board. To me, it seemed like a record (not a very good one) being played for the umptieth time. Now, on thinking it over this morning, let me add I also feel that such efforts are a rather stupid cop-out on the real problem.
>
> Let me cite, in a seemingly diversionary tactic, some of the experience of the Roman Catholic Church in its long organizational history for an example I find enlightening. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Church really began to get organized, and several major religious orders were founded. Why not just one order for one Church? Well, it is, after all a Catholic Church—in the sense of universal, something for everyone—and one order would not be able to suit all people, given their diverse cultures and personalities. So we see the founding of an order by a guy I think Fred resembles: Ignatius of Loyola. An elite group, highly trained, and maneuverable, intellectually skilled, dedicated, and loyal. Willing to submit to the discipline of not being respected until they proved themselves to the other members of the order. A group both Ignatius and the Pope could depend on in any kind of situation. Not always lovable, but effective as the devil himself.
>
> Then you find another order, which I think the founders and the community probably had more in mind; the Franciscans. Sloppy by Jesuit standards, not worldly, the opposite extreme, in fact. They were poor people who administered to poor people. Not bookish, but simple, practical in an impractical way: empathic, familiar with the paradoxes of life that can make a rich man miserable and a poor man happy. Spending a minimum amount of time in study and the pursuit of books, a maximum time in addressing themselves in any way they could to the needs of the poor. Lovable for seven centuries.
>
> Here, I think, is the heart of our problem: What shall the spirit of our center be like? Which of these alternative shall we choose? We obviously cannot have both, at least not with Fred and Paula, Jesuits both, in charge. If they stay, their ideal stays. Do we want it? This is the question we must answer, not how the board can be reorganized, in the vague hope of "controlling" Fred. I do not wish to exercise great control over the director, I want

him to control himself in a way that is congruent with our aims. We must now decide which to adjust: our aims or our leadership.

Documents such as this (and the story presented next) illustrate how individuals at the center interpreted their own conflicts and activities to each other. These differences were never perceived as ordinary differences that one might expect to occur between board and staff members in such an organization because the images that everyone used to describe their activities suggested that they were extraordinary individuals acting out historically important differences between groups who were living in very unusual times. For many participants, Fred was really Ignatius of Loyola (or the devil), and the board really represented the Franciscan order. These transformations made life at the center seem very exciting, and stories that specifically described this life and become metaphors for the organization as a whole were also quite frequently told. Therefore, the third category of stories described here is stories about the center.

Stories about the Center

The stories that appeared in conversations as very obvious stories were those that typically had as their principal subject the center and its fate. These stories were elaborate, often amusing, and very clearly framed, and they often compared events at Midwest to specific hisorical eras or to current international crises. In the following story, the center is depicted by one of the center's sponsors as a Western "boomtown" on the verge of destruction:

> It's 1850 and the wild, wild West and what happened is that Uncle Sam and Washington said, "Hey man, thar's gold in them thar hills," and everybody rushed right over to get the gold and the organizaers came along. The state and the feds came along with it and said, "Well, you have this boomtown but you really need somebody to build the houses and things like that." So they built these shacks and shanties, and they got somebody from Washington to be the mayor of the town, to run it, and everybody was happy ever after. And it was really gaudy too, they had all kinds of saloons and houses of ill repute, and everybody had the God-damnedest good time you've ever seen. But what they forgot to do, of course, was to build sewage systems and provide adequate law enforcement to keep certain things, banks, solvent and all the other things that a place needs; they just neglected it, forgot about it totally which meant no fire department; one day one of the shacks goes up and then the whole town. Also the gold is running out "in them thar hills," and now its' becoming unreal.

This story encapsulates the center's history by (1) focusing specifically on the organization's relation to its funding sources, founders, and leaders (the "gold" provided by "Uncle Sam and Washington," i.e.,

NIMH; and the "mayor from Washington," i.e., Fred); and (2) using the imagery of the boomtown to comment on the center's constitution as an organized anarchy (building "shacks and shanties" and forgetting "to build sewage systems and provide adequate law enforcement"). The individual and organizational advantages (life is fun) and disadvantages (life is precarious) of life in an organized anarchy are cleverly presented in this narrative. The story, however, also contains a moral message that seems quite clear—boomtowns may be fun "but you can't just enjoy yourself without having to pay for it." And so the center as boomtown burns up.

The idea that the organization could self-destruct at any moment was an extremely powerful and pervasive view held by participants. It was therefore not surprising to find that individuals described working in such an agency as an especially intense experience. Not one of the 65 individuals interviewed in our research described their working experience in neutral terms. For some, "it was totally involving and extremely intense"; "it was undignified, unprofessional, just plain craziness, but it was fun in a way", or "when the place got started, we were so into the whole process, it became your life, . . . and it used to be fun, that was the great part." For other staff members, working at Midwest was often frustrating, sometimes "unreal," and in some instances, very traumatic. One ex-staff member reported having nightmares about the center 2 years after he resigned from the organization. Other ex-staff members described their present work as "just a job," as "much less intense," or as "a place where you can keep you sanity intact but not as much fun."

How Stories Work: A Challenge to Expressive Behavior

In most organizations, life is not very exciting (March and Romelaer 1976:251; see their discussion of this point in regard to decision making in American universities). In some organizations, however, life seems to be very exciting, and these are the organizations to which researchers should direct their attention because the social forms that individuals use to construct and "organize" the organization, and their work within it, are specifically revealed in these settings. Two forms stood out at Midwest—the meeting and the story—as discussed here. Meetings, in this context, were a form for group interaction, interpretation, and construction of events; stories were a form for individual interpretation, construction, and reconstruction of events. Both of these forms provided individuals and the organization with a way to create and then discover the meaning of what it was they were doing and saying (Weick 1977:195). In an organized anarchy, these activities are essential because

they are the only way available for the organization to constitute itself to its members and for the members to legitimate their actions to each other. I assume that meetings and stories play this constitutive role in all organizations, but their importance is missed by most researchers who take the existence of organizations for granted and treat them as concrete, objective, and essentially unproblematic entities.

In conclusion, perhaps the most important aspect of the stories and meetings at Midwest was that they provided individuals with something to do in a system where everyone was unclear about what it was he or she should be doing. In this way, these events *worked* for the organization and the individuals in the organization because they generated activity that in turn generated interpretations of this activity, which suggested that it was not what it seemed to be. What more could we ask from a story?

Part III

Meetings: Comparisons and Conclusions

Chapter 10

Meetings, Culture, and Society

M: Kau ia iga ia fa'afofoga lo kākou Makai, (1.2) fesoasoagi
May our Lord listen to us (1.2) (and) help
mai iā 'i kākou 'o Akua fa'alelalolagi ma kākou vaivaiga.
us, the gods on the Earth [= matai] and our weaknesses.
(3.0) A 'o legei kaeao ma le aofia ma le fogo, (1.5) ia ua ala
But this morning (in) this meeting (1.5) (we) express
fo'i mai i le lagi mamā ma le soifua maua 'Āiga ma Aloali'i
also our wishes for a healthy life to the chiefs
?: Māile!
?: Māile!
M: Ala mai fo'i i fagugalelei le kōfā i le Makua legā ma
(we) also express the same to the senior orator here and
le kākou 'a'ai.
to the orators of our village.
(1.5)
I: Māile!
M: Kākou vi'ia le Akua I mea aupiko aluga.
We praise God for the highest accomplishments.
?: Māile!
?: Māile! lava!
?: Māile!
M: 'O sā ma faiga o Moamoa ((the name of the village malae)) o legā
The sacred names of Moamoa, your highness K, has
Ua pa'i i ai lau kōfā Kafiloa.
already mentioned.
T: Māile!
M: 'Ae o le kakou aofia ma le fogo, (0.8)
But as for our meeting (0.8)
(0.8)
M: *O le' ā fa'auso loa.*
the discussion will be started now.
Moe'ono, a Samoan senior orator, opens a fono *(meeting) for discussion.*
Alessandro Duranti (1984:239)

In this book, I have suggested that there is a systemic relationship between meetings, culture, and society. Meetings do not merely exist *in* a

sociocultural context because they frequently play an important role in constituting such systems for participants. At the same time, they provide individuals with multiple opportunities for making sense of such systems and negotiating as well as commenting on their place within it. Of course, as this event is typically defined in a great many societies, individuals in meetings are also attempting to accomplish specific culturally defined tasks (e.g., to organize a work group, to make a decision about where to move camp, to decide on a new leader) as they are also attempting to achieve specific individual desires and interests. I have illustrated this view of meetings by examining their significance in detail in an American mental health organization—Midwest Community Mental Health Center.

In this chapter, I expand this analysis by considering meetings in several traditional societies using the research on political speech and meeting behavior discussed in Chapter 2. I return to this literature (as well as other available studies of meetings) in this chapter and use it as an ethnographic resource in order to make some comparative statements about the form and function of meetings across cultural and social systems. I build this comparison around the framework already developed for examining the construction of meetings because I believe it provides a valuable model for making comparisons of meeting features and processes. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons that have already been discussed in this book, there are large gaps in the ethnographic literature that make it difficult to develop anything more than preliminary comparisons of the variety of issues that I discuss in this chapter. Therefore, I include in this discussion suggestions for what I feel are important areas of research to pursue to establish and further develop the anthropological study of meetings.

Community and Event

Hymes (1974) reminds us that the starting point of any ethnography of communication "is the ethnographic analysis of the communicative conduct of a community" (p. 9). Such an ethnography includes attention to, at least, the following components of communicative conduct that I have discussed in more detail in Chapter 3: participants (including addressor, addressee, relationships, and responsibilities), time, setting (spatial and sociocultural features), codes, (speaking, singing, silence; also see Irvine 1979), message form or communicative event, frame, message topic and results, goals, outcome, norms of speaking and interaction, norms of interpretation. I have defined meetings as a type of focused interaction that as a communicative event organizes interaction

in distinctive ways. Most specifically, a meeting is a gathering of three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organization or group. The event is characterized by multiparty talk that is episodic in nature, and participants either develop or use specific conventions for regulating this talk (see Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee 1978:149). The meeting form frames the behavior that occurs within it as concerning the "business" or "work" of the group or organization (p. 149).

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Using this definition, it is possible to see that the comparative studies of Bailey (1965), Richards and Kuper (1971), Bloch (1975), Paine (1981), Brenneis and Myers (1984), and especially Irvine (1979), although not always framed as such, in fact, present us with important information about types of meeting groups as well as specific features of meeting forms focusing on many of the components of communicative conduct as discussed here. For example, Bailey's (1965) comparison of decision-making procedures and processes in "arena" and "elite" councils provides us with information on relationships between types of participants, message topic and results, goals and norms of speaking (in this case, voting procedures used). Richards and Kuper (1971), because they also use Bailey's model, emphasize the analysis of relationships between these components, whereas they also include attention to outcomes, setting, and, to some extent, meeting form and frame. In contrast, Bloch (1975) and contributors focus on the features of formality and formalization of speech and oratory, and so the emphasis is on relationships between the norms of speaking, message form, message topic, participants, setting, goals, and outcome. The research reported in Paine (1981), in attempting to counter Bloch's emphasis on formality and formalization and its coercive effects, examines the creative, spontaneous as well as strategic and manipulative use of speech and oratory by participants to achieve their goals (e.g., campaign rhetoric, politician's speeches, etc.). Although paying more attention to relationships between participants in meetings (e.g., speaker and audience), these researchers also focus on similar components to the Bloch work. Of course, they develop very different conclusions as to the relationships between these components.

Irving (1979) illustrates her critique of the concept of formality in the analysis of communicative events by specifically comparing political meetings in three different societies: the Wolof, Mursi, and Ilongots. This is the only comparison of which I am aware in the anthropological

literature that is specifically set as a comparison *of meetings* as speech or communicative events across cultures. She focuses on four features of formality in communicative events that appear to be relevant cross-culturally: (1) increased code structuring—"addition of extra rules or conventions to the codes that organize behavior in a social setting" (p. 776); (2) code consistency, or co-occurrence rules provide for the extent to which choices about communicating expression must be consistent (p. 777); (3) invoking positional identities—"formal occasions invoke positional and public, rather than personal, identities" (p. 778); and (4) emergence of a central situational focus (p. 779). These features focus on participants, setting, codes, norms of speaking and interaction, goals and outcomes. The researchers in Brenneis and Myers (1984), as they (like Irving) attempt to resolve the differences between the Bloch versus Paine argument, provide perhaps the fullest treatment of communication components. It is not surprise, then, to find that this book contains some of the most detailed descriptions available of the process of constructing a meeting and the relationship between the form and function of these events (e.g., Brenneis, Lederman, Atkinson, Duranti, and Rosaldo). Myers and Brenneis adopt a concern in this book, following the work of Bloch (1975), with understanding "how the form of speech accomplishes its function" (1984:8).

Along with the detailed descriptions of specific meetings offered by several researchers in Brenneis and Myers, there are other investigators who have chosen to analyze a specific meeting and its social and cultural setting in detail. Examples of these studies are Moore's (1977) analysis of a Chagga political meeting in Tanzania, Silverman's (1977) examination of a Banaban community meeting, Rosaldo's (1973) descriptions of Ilongot political meetings, Howe's (1986) discussion of singing and talking gatherings for the San Blas Kuna in Panama, Myers's (1986) analysis of the importance of meetings for the Pintupi in Australia, and Black's (1983) report on a community meeting on the Western Caroline island of Tobi.

Cross-Event Comparisons

A second type of comparison that is found in the literature is relevant here for the information that it provides on meetings as communicative events as distinct from other events within specific societies. In several of the studies already mentioned before, the researcher provides information about the distinguishing features of meetings as communicative events as contrasted with other types of speech in the society studied. Frake's (1969) analysis of Yakan litigation is probably the classic

study here as he presents an analysis of the distinguishing features of "discussions" versus "conferences" versus "negotiations" versus "litigation" (see particularly pp. 152–155). To summarize Frake's presentation, these events are distinguished by topic, results, role structure, and integrity (the extent to which the activity is seen as an integral unit or as part of some other activity; p. 152). Discussion "is like an American 'bull session,'" in Frake's terms, where there is a subject of discussion but the purpose of the event is to talk. In "conferences," the subject of discussion is an issue, and a result (e.g., a decision) is expected by participants. In the case of "negotiation," the issue is a disagreement, and the participants are divided into two protagonistic sides, and the purpose is to reach a settlement. In "litigation," there is a dispute and the charge that an "offense" has occurred, and there are protagonists, optional witnesses and a court with neutral judges who control the proceedings. The settlement of litigation takes the form of a legal ruling, and this event always occurs as an integral activity. If it is interrupted by another activity, then a new instance of litigation occurs. "'Discussion,' 'conference,' and 'negotiation,' in their minimal senses, can occur as part of 'litigation,' but 'litigation' cannot occur as a part of these other activities" (p. 154).

Frake's work raises some important defining issues relevant in making both cross-event and cross-cultural comparisons of meetings as they have been defined in this book and in contrasting these occasions with events that involve the operation of court or courtlike institutions (similar to the Yakan concept of "litigation" and to some extent "negotiation"). There are a number of ambiguities in making such distinctions, but the studies that are most relevant for the topic of this book are discussions of dispute settlement occasions that do not involve court or courtlike institutions (e.g., see Gulliver 1969, 1979).[1] Brenneis (1984b) presents an excellent analysis of the use of the *pancayat*/"arbitration sessions" to manage specific conflicts in Bhatgaon (a Fiji Indian community). He compares the characteristics of these events that utilize "straight talk" (direct speech about participants and events and personalities) with the use of "sweet talk" (speech about sacred subjects that may be used to indirectly convey political messages) in religious speeches in meetings of participants in Hindu sects (pp. 77–79). An excellent film, *Courts and Councils* (1981, Ron Hess), compares three

[1]Comaroff and Roberts (1981) suggest that there are two very different paradigms that anthropologists use to study legal phenomena: the rule-centered paradigm and the processual paradigm. The role of public meetings in the settlement or management of disputes would be most likely to be considered in "processual" studies. However, Brison suggests that even here the role of public meetings in "dealing with disputes" has been curiously neglected (1984b: p. 1).

different types of decision-making events in India: (1) a village *nyaya panchayat* (tribunal), which is a recent legal creation and is a cross between the traditional village panchayat and the British court system; (2) a traditional caste *panchayat;* and (3) a district court (Friedlander 1984).

In many of these comparative discussions, meetings are frequently contrasted with chats or informal speech of some sort. For example, Turton (1975) notes the distinction that the Mursi make between a meeting discussion (*methe*) and chatting or gossip (*tirain*). According to Turton, "the Mursi word *methe* refers to a meeting at which a number of men discuss some issue which is public in the sense that it may be assumed to affect all members of the community equally" (p. 170). In Tikopia, according to Firth (1975), the term *fono* "has two linked meanings. As a substantive, it means a formal assembly of people gathered to receive a communication or hold a discussion on a matter of public interest. As a verb, it means to address such a formal assembly, i.e., to make a speech" (p. 29). The term *fono* "is differentiated in most contexts from *arara,* to converse, discuss, yarn in a relatively informal fashion" (p. 30). It seems that there is consistent cross-cultural evidence for the linking of meetings with stories (as yarns, gossip, informal speech, etc.) as discussed in Chapter 9. It appears that individuals in a wide variety of cultural contexts make distinctions between communicative events using these contrasts, and this suggests the importance of linking and investigating the relationship between these two types of events in further research.

Constructing a Meeting

The previously mentioned components of meetings as communicative events reveal a variety of different features of the meeting form as they also suggest a number of functions for meetings. However, the interrelationships between components in an event as well as the interrelationships between form and function in the accomplishment of an event such as a meeting has received much less attention. Components do not in themselves generate events. Individuals use them to accomplish various ends as there is always latitude for manipulation and strategy (e.g., invoking a particularly rigid interpretation of *Robert's Rules of Order* for regulating talk in meetings). However, it is also the case that events (and the relationships that obtain between components) may be said to constrain individuals and to effect the outcome of meetings for

individuals and social systems.[2] It is with this understanding that we can examine how the form of meetings as communicative events accomplishes its functions (Myers and Brenneis 1984:8; also Bloch 1975). I use my discussion and outline of the processes and procedures for constructing a meeting (see Chapters 3 and 5 for Midwest in particular) to examine what the anthropological research tells us about the form and function of meetings across cultures. In this discussion, I also use the admittedly difficult distinction between egalitarian and hierarchical societies to assess some of the differences that the literature suggests. I follow Myers and Brenneis' (1984) distinction here and define egalitarian societies as those that are concerned with the political autonomy of actors; recognizing that it is important to remember that such societies are egalitarian "only for certain categories of social actors" (e.g., senior males) (pp. 5,11). In hierarchical societies, the political system and its ranking and structure of subordinate and superordinate relationships tends to be taken for granted by participants and researchers (Myers and Brenneis 1984:24–25).

Negotiating a Meeting

In previous chapters, I have already discussed the processes whereby a formal meeting requires the negotiation and ultimately the acceptance (even if it is only temporary) of a set of social relationships and values that define someone(s) or some way to call a meeting, to specify time and place, someone(s) or way to start and end a meeting, a series of rules and conventions for ordering and regulating talk and recognition of this as talk that may be legitimated (and sometimes delegitimated) by the meeting frame.

Although there is sometimes discussion of preparations for meetings and the assumption that, through premeeting negotiations or "rump sessions" (see Howe 1986:177) and private lobbying, the results of a formal meeting may be set in advance (Irvine 1979:781–782), there is very little extensive information available in the literature about how meetings are actually negotiated among individuals.[3] In part, this may

[2]See Sherry Ortner's (1984) discussion of differences between interest theory and strain theory, particularly in anthropological analyses, as she builds on Geertz's (1973) distinction between these two theoretical approaches.

[3]I believe this lack of information is a function of the general neglect of meetings in the literature, a neglect that has been challenged throughout this book. Turton (1975) suggests that many anthropologists may have neglected to look at public speaking in meetings because they assumed that these discussions are merely "window dressing, masking

be because the existence of the meeting form itself and its time, setting, and participants are taken for granted, but it may also be that there is little room for negotiation at least for certain components of the event. For example, the time of a formal meeting may be permanently set (e.g., meetings of the Balinese *banjar* are held once a month according to the Javanese-Balinese calendrical month of 35 days; Hobart 1975:71); whereas the Kuna participate in talking or singing gatherings "day-in, day-out," although there is negotiation or discussion about what type of gathering will be held on which day (see Howe, 1986:30–31).

Among the Mendi of Highland Papua New Guinea, women cannot attend meetings, but as this is not explicitly articulated, it cannot be challenged (see Lederman 1984:104) or made the subject of negotiation. Women are explicitly prohibited from speaking at large public gatherings among the Maori and "any infraction of this rule is summarily punished" (Salmond 1975:47). In fact, the exclusion of women from formal roles in public meetings is a widespread phenomenon appearing in both egalitarian and hierarchical societies and calling for much more research attention than it has to date received.[4] The right of attending meetings may be related to "hereditary, descent, membership of a kinship, territorial or occupational group, and usually on account of age and status in that group" (Richards 1971:10), but it may also be related to individual skills as well as contacts and resources. Who is and is not able to attend meetings may be an important feature in determining what type of meeting one is describing.

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the underlying principles of political organization," and they are helped to this conclusion when they observe that most decisions are "foregone conclusions" (p. 164). However, he argues that neglect of public oratory and meetings is also a result of the fact that anthropologists

> simply did not, and indeed could not, understand well enough what was going on in public discussions until it was too late. For the detailed and systematic study of public meetings clearly presupposes that the investigator is already fluent in the language and has a good understanding of the issues being discussed at such meetings. It is one thing . . . to speak a language well enough to conduct interviews in it, and to question informants, and quite another to be able to cope with the allusive and archaic forms of speech that appear to be characteristic of political discourse in small language communities. By the time an anthropologist has gained sufficient familiarity with the society and fluency in the language, however, he will probably have come to the end of his period of fieldwork and be turning his thoughts to writing up. He may thus be tempted to fall back on the uncovering of "structural principles," such as age, territory and descent, and to construct in the process an unconvincingly static and homogeneous model of the society in question. (pp. 164–165)

[4]An early recognition of this point was made by Smith (1979) in her comparison of the functioning of two very different councils (the Taos Pueblo Council and the New England Regional Fishery Management Council). In both councils, participants consisted of senior males who were senior "in age and/or experience focused on the subsistence system" (p. 9).

The coercive power of these aspects of the meeting form would certainly be stressed by Bloch, as by agreeing to participate in a meeting one accepts the social structure and cultural values that the meeting produces and reproduces. For the Maori, once "relations between groups have been established by the exchange of formal greetings, they are in theory impossible to break off during the gathering" (Salmond 1975:58–59). However, even in the most formal of systems, there seems to be some room for negotiation and ways to "get out" of participating at least in some types of events (see Bloch 1975:9). There are, in fact, many formal meeting occasions that do not have a formal time set for their occurrence or where there is flexibility for setting and/or negotiating the time, setting, and/or participants. In his description of Tikopian speech making, Firth (1975) presents information on who initates a *fono* or public assembly. Generally it is the clan chief who initiates the fono, and he suggests to his *maru* (executive) that a fono be called to hear a policy statement, but there is flexibility here, according to Firth, as a maru may also call a fono on his own as may other leaders such as the mission priests, or the teacher (pp. 32–33). Firth describes the significance of this flexibility:

> This flexibility may seem surprising: Is there not resentment when one leader calls a *fono* without perhaps having consulting any others? The answer is yes, but with a reservation. To parallel Shakespeare: It is one thing to call Tikopia to attend a meeting; it is another thing for them to come. To anticipate a little, a measure of prestige, authority or influence of a Tikopia leader is given by the size and composition of the assembly that gathers in response to his summons, rather than by the reception of his oratory at the gathering itself. So a response to a call for an assembly tends to confirm the status of him who issues it, not to pose a threat to the status of other men of rank. (p. 33)

The implications of knowing about meetings or not knowing about them appears to be an important part of assessing one's status in many communities. According to Duranti (1984), in Samoan society "the very fact of being a title holder is defined by the participation in the village *fono*" (p. 225). Bloch (1971:47) reports that resentment occurred when people who considered themselves to be *raiamandreny* (elders) were not informed about meetings in Merina society. In conjunction with this, the ability to exclude individuals from a meeting is frequently an effective means of social control. A major form of disciplinary action utilized by the Labor party that controlled the English Town Council studied by Spencer (1971) was exclusion from meetings of the "policy group" (p. 182). This left the individuals in political isolation.

Comaroff (1975) suggests that a defining characteristic of the role of advisor to chief for the Barolong boo Ratshidi (or Tshidi) "is the frequency with which a man is called upon by the incumbant to offer counsel"

(p. 148). Public meetings are not held regularly in this setting but are called by the incumbant when a topic needs to be discussed: "in theory attendance is compulsory for all adult males, and the absence of a group is perceived as a declaration of opposition" (p. 148).

The issue of whether to meet or not would seem to be another important area to consider, as Richards (1971) demonstrates in her discussion of when a group discussion was used by the Bemba to make a decision as opposed to the issuing of an order by the chief or headman. In general, the latitude for meeting negotiations in a society seems to be a particularly important topic for investigation.

A Meeting Place

Researchers have frequently used the physical setting and spatial arrangement of participants to comment on what meetings communicate about social relations and cultural systems. Permanent meeting houses, structures, and/or grounds along with elaborately stratified seating arrangements are not surprisingly associated with hierarchical societies. Duranti (1984) describes the seating pattern of matai (title holders) for a Samoan *fono* and provides an example on one actual seating arrangement that he recorded and that is reproduced here as Figure 10.1:

> The way people seat themselves inside the house is also significant and is done according to an ideal plan structured on the basis of statuses (chiefs vs. orators), ranks (high vs. low-ranking titles), and extent of active participation in the event. . . . Very roughly, the two senior orators of the village and the orators who are going to speak sit in what is considered the "front" of the house. High-ranking chiefs sit in either one of the two shorter sides (*tala*); other chiefs and those orators who are in charge of the kava ceremony sit in the "back." (p. 220)

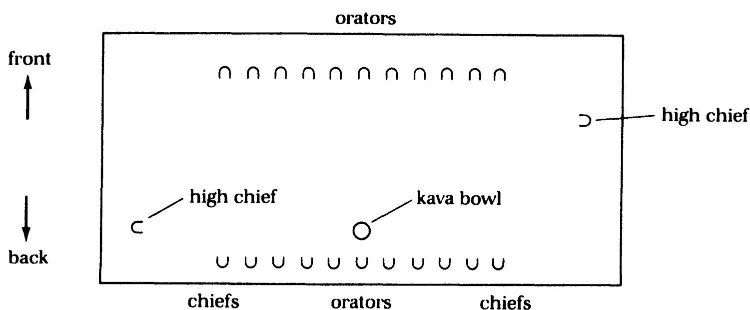

Figure 10.1. Seating arrangement of *matai* in a *fono*. From Duranti (1984:220, Figure 8.1). Reprinted by permission of New York University Press.

The Maori in New Zealand have large and frequently very complex ceremonial grounds (*marae*) where sacred and secular meetings (*hui*) are held. The Maori meeting house itself expresses the state of community relations in which it exists as well as the ancestral relationships of its owner group (see Salmond's extensive description of these features of Maori gatherings in *Hui: A Study of Maori Ceremonial Gatherings* 1976:31–90).

Even for egalitarian societies, the meeting place plays an important role in articulating and expressing whatever the important divisions are in the society. Among the pastoralist Mursi, seating is indicative of age, generation, and gender differences (Turton 1975:172). This is true as well for the Mendi in New Guinea as reported by Lederman (1984) in her description of the seating arrangement of a specific meeting held by the Suolol (the Mendi tribe Lederman studied) to discuss the organization and timing of a parade festival that would signal an upcoming major pig kill. She suggests that the spatial arrangement of the event was the most "strikingly structured" aspect of the meeting, and she analyzes the implications of this structuring, especially in regard to male/female relationships, in detail (pp. 99–106).

Women are frequently reported to sit on the sidelines of meetings or in the back or away from the spatial center of the event, or women may be excluded all together from the meeting place (e.g., meetings that "big men" hold around the hearth of the men's house in Mount Hagen, Strathern 1975:188).

The seating strategy that individuals use in meetings in an attempt to influence or respond to meeting outcomes has also been commented on by some investigators. Hobart suggests that in Bali "there is a close relationship between informal spacing and participation in debates" (1975:72). Participants arrange themselves more or less in concentric circles oriented around the *klian* (elders). The inner circle consists of spokesmen from various factions "so that the physical center of the meeting is also the focus of debate" (p. 73). However, "allied spokesmen do not usually sit together, for this is regarded as too explicit a statement of factional allegiance and because dispersed support creates the tactical illusion of widespread approval" (pp. 72–73). In contrast, in Mount Hagen, on important decision occasions that involved disputes and group opposition, "men of a group tend to sit together, and they do so more firmly when the chances of physical conflict are greater. Women generally sit to one side of the main arena of speech-making, which also becomes the arena of fighting, if verbal control of a situation is lost" (Strathern 1975:188).

Changes in settlement patterns and changes in the size and permanency of meetings and meetings structures would seem to be a particu-

larly important topic for examining relationships between meetings and social change, especially the development of sedantarism. Unfortunately, there is very little information here, although Turton (1975) offers some interesting observations for the Mursi that suggest an important systemic relationship between crises, settlement patterns, size of meetings, and leadership:

> It is . . . evident that the more concentrated the settlement pattern of an area, the larger any public meeting which takes place within it is likely to be. The significance of this is that . . . a relatively concentrated settlement pattern is a response to public crisis—namely, to the threat of attack from outside. Apart from its obvious strategic benefits, such a response has the added advantage of maximizing the leadership potential available to the community, *by reducing the physical obstacles to the attendance at meetings of relatively large numbers of people.* Those who take an active part in these meetings are, on the other hand, presented with an excellent opportunity to extend the domain of their influence. (p. 182 [emphasis added])

Arrivals and Departures

A meeting, by definition, brings individuals together and presents them with multiple opportunities for talking before, during, and after the event. This increases the possibility for informal meetings and sharing of information, stories, and "chats" of various sorts (see examples of moving from chats to meetings presented in the next section). The timing of meeting arrivals as well as departures is also significant for communicating status, alliance, support, and opposition (see also examples in the preceeding negotiation section).

The *raiamandreny* (elders) in Merina society seem to particularly excel in this use of meetings as noted by Bloch (1971):

> The actual time of the meeting was always set three or four hours too early, and as for many Merina occasions, great skill was required by those who wanted to arrive at the right time, in the right place. Nobody wanted to arrive too early, but obviously it would not do to arrive too late. The influence of a person is at stake in manoeuvres of this kind, and his effectiveness at such a meeting depends on his appearing at the right time to give the impression that the meeting is starting because of his arrival. This involves a lot of waiting about in nearby houses and sending children to spy out the land and report back. As if by magic the *raiamandreny* all appear at once at a time little related to the originally appointed hour. This custom (infuriating for the anthropologist) is part of the prestige auction which . . . characterizes these meetings. (pp. 47–48)

Lederman (1984) reports the use of arriving late by a group as an expression of disagreement about the topic of the Suolol meeting that she studied. The traditional chief on the western Caroline island of Tobi

is reported by Black (1983) to habitually arrive late to meetings, which seems to be an effective way to communicate and reinforce his status in the community (p. 17). Black also notes that after about three-fourths of the participants arrive for island wide meetings an interesting pattern appears. "As each late person arrives he or she quickly takes a mental roll-call, determines who is not yet there and then loudly asks: 'Where's so and so? Haven't they got here yet? They are always late!' or words to that effect. By doing this they focus attention away from their own tardiness and on to someone else's" (p. 28). It is, of course, also the case that people "vote with their feet" or more generally communicate information about agreements and disagreements by avoiding or walking out of meetings (see Robertson 1971:159–161 description of this phenomenon in town committees in Ahafo, Ghana).

The Meeting Frame

Meetings almost invariably follow a pattern of moving from informal or everyday speech or "chatting" to whatever is culturally recognized as proper meeting talk and action and then back to "chatting." There are, however, a variety of ways that groups mark the beginning of a meeting, ways that then serve to frame the behavior as occurring *within* the meeting frame. This process may be very clear-cut and associated with a variety of formalized procedures and rituals such as signaling a call for assembly by beating the town gong (e.g., see Robertson 1971:156), or opening the formal meeting with formal speeches, prayers, the use of a gavel, and the approval of minutes from the previous meeting. In contrast, the event may only be marked by a move from "one-on-one" chatting to a focus on a single topic. Howe (1986) provides a detailed example of this process in his description of a Kuna "talking gathering." The meeting begins in the evening:

> At about 7:00, a junior policeman finally succeeds in getting a pressure lantern to light, the first chief looks around to see how many men have arrived, and then he begins speaking in a voice loud enough to be heard by everyone. He begins by informing the men about the man who left without obtaining a travel permit.
>
> *First Chief:* The paper, the *permiso* from his own village [the one that authorized him to make the visit], he brought it to me in the afternoon. . . . Well, he said to me, "I'll be wanting another one" [to authorize his return home]. . . . I said to him, "There are no secretaries here today. . . ." And now . . . he went off without a *permiso*. That's what I wanted to tell you. I always *pinsa* tell you these things. (pp. 152–153)

Among the Mursi, a "discussion" emerges out of chatting, gossiping, and informal speech:

> when one of the individuals present starts to make a speech, signalling his intention by means of the conventional phrases and expressions with which all public speeches begin. If the others present fall silent, and if the first speaker is followed by a second, then a discussion is under way, each individual who speaks doing so from wherever he happens to be sitting. The speeches continue until a consensus, which is summed up by one of the last men to speak, has been achieved. (Turton 1975:170–171)

Debates are more formal occasions for the Mursi and involve a larger number of participants. In this case, speakers make their speeches while pacing back and forth, holding a rifle, spear, or stick in their hand, and the event may also include a public ritual performance, such as the killing and eating of a stock animal (p. 171). For the Mendi, Lederman reports that the formal opening of the meeting occurs when the pandanus nut oven is closed, and the meeting ends when individuals raise their shovels and the oven is opened (1984:94,100). At the close of the Balinese *banjar,* Hobart reports that "a small offering is performed by the *klian* using *cane* (which contains betel—chewing ingredients symbolizing commensality) to remove any impurity caused by anger and to 'calm feelings'" (1975:73).

Duranti (1984) presents one of the most detailed discussions of the frame of meetings in the ethnographic literature. The effect of the meeting or *fono* frame on the performance of two Samoan speech genres, *lāugua* (ceremonial speech) and *talanoaga* is specifically analyzed and contrasted with the performance of these genres in ceremonies. In conjunction with this description, he diagrams both the spatial (see Figure 10.1) and temporal boundaries of a Samoan fono. In the latter case, he documents the shift from conversation to the opening of the meeting with the performance of a kava ceremony (see Figure 10.2):

> Temporal boundaries refer . . . to the beginning and to the end of the event. The beginning of a *fono* is always signaled by a kava ceremony. Almost anytime *matai* get together for some official reason, kava is served. However, the way kava is distributed varies. In the *fono* I am describing, the order of kava serving at the beginning is different from any other gathering of *matai* in

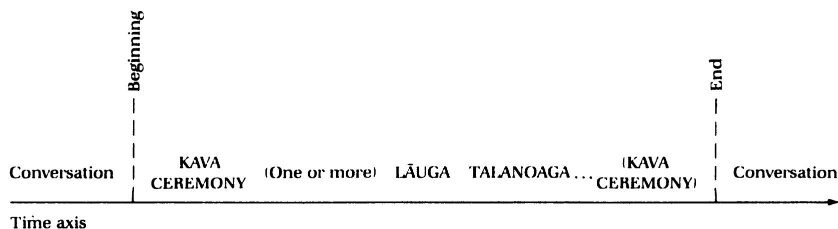

Figure 10.2. Temporal boundaries of a *fono* from Duranti (1984:221, Figure 8.2). Reprinted by permission of New York University Press.

> that orators drink first and according to a particular sequence principle (cf. Duranti 1981). The order of drinking kava also parallels the order of speakers in the *fono*, at least up to a certain (predictable) number. Right after the kava an orator from a particular subvillage will deliver the first speech of the day, a *lāugua*. After this speech, either other *lāugua* follow (one for each of the subvillages represented at the meeting) or the discussion (*talanoaga*) starts.
>
> The end of a *fono* is sometimes marked by another kava ceremony. At other times, though, the end is less clear-cut, and one may perceive a gradual change in the form and content of verbal and nonverbal behavior going from more "formal" to less "formal" features. (pp. 220–221)

In other societies, the conclusion of a meeting seems to occur when the single topic focus is, or can no longer be, sustained and multiple meetings or chats develop and the meeting in essence dissipates and breaks up. To return to the example of a Kuna meeting, Howe (1986) describes the end of a "talking gathering":

> After he [the *arkar*] finishes, comments . . . fade off into murmured conversations. The first chief, meanwhile, climbs out of his hammock, ties it up high out of the way, and sits down on the bench next to Gilberto [the last speaker at this particular meeting]. After the talk dies altogether, the third chief ties his hammock up, the first *arkar* says, "sleep," several men stretch and yawn, and then they all stand up and file out. One of the men lying on a bench has to be prodded awake by the senior policeman, who closes up the building as one of his subordinates extinguishes the lanterns. It is 9:50. (p. 167)

It is not uncommon sometime during the course of a meeting for the meeting frame to be broken for a variety of purposes, sometimes for rest or refreshments (see Atkinson, Cuff, and Lee's 1978 analysis of the recommencement of a meeting after a coffee break in an American radio station). Specific groups may also break away from a formal meeting to hold their own meetings and then return with a new line of action or resolution (see Robertson's 1971 description of this process in town and village committees in Ahafo, Western Ghana; the Mende in Sierra Leone refer to this practice as "hanging-head" according to Murphy 1988).

Meeting Talk, Participants, Speakers, and Results

The majority of ethnographic studies that report information about meetings focus on an analysis of meeting talk. In this case, the focus is on the significance of specific speeches, speech styles, speaking roles, procedures for guiding discussion, the development of a central topic and the results of meetings.

Development of a Central Focus

The development and maintenance of a central focus of speech is an important feature of meetings (Irvine 1979:779 suggests that this is an

important feature characteristic of formality in communicative events in general). Myers discusses the continual movement between centralization and peripheralization in Pintupi meetings as they "move back and forth between a predominance of unfocused side conversations and the achievement of a central focus" (1986:438). This movement may, in part, be related to his observation that one characteristic of these meetings is that they "do not press on toward a topic, relentlessly to solve a problem" (p. 432). However, the issue, or "threat," of side conversations and peripheralization disrupting the meeting event is an issue in all societies, both hierarchical and egalitarian as it is related to the accomplishment of meetings as communicative events. Black (1983) notes this process as it occurs in the specific Tobian meeting that he analyzed in detail:

> Up to this time the meeting had unfolded as a typical Tobian gathering. The magistrate had introduced item after item from his agenda. After the initial presentation of each piece of business he had paused to let others speak. People responded to the magistrate, then were interrupted by others who were themselves interrupted. Interrupted people only rarely ceased talking. They simply continued whatever point they had been making in a louder voice. Those not talking listened to all the discussions going on around them, seeking a chance to bring the house down with a joke (usually at the expense of one of the shouters). People tried to stump one another with sequences of questions leading towards unanswerable arguments or objections. . . . Inevitably the preceding discussions had rapidly spiralled off the topic and splintered into many loud and competing conversations. (p. 18)

Even in the formalized meeting of the Balinese *banjar assembly,* Hobart (1975) reports that "side conversations" are frequent (p. 73). For the Maori, women (especially older women) provide side commentaries on speeches, and Salmond (1975) reports that "the old women in particular exercise great license in the freedom and audibility of their comments" (p. 52). Speakers who are young and pushy or who break the rules of speech-exchanges (*whaikoorero*) may be even more actively chastised by the older women who may stand before the speaker "and flip up their skirts by way of graphic comment" (p. 47).

Norms of Speaking and Interaction

A variety of issues that relate to speaking and interaction procedures in meetings have been discussed by researchers. Turn-taking processes, as well as the presence or absence of a strong "chair" or meeting leader, seem to differentiate meetings in egalitarian and hierarchical societies. Irvine (1979) contrasts the regulation of turn taking among the Wolof (a society characterized by a complex organization of castes, centralized political authority, and a strong emphasis on rank)

and the Mursi (a small-scale society characterized by an acephalous political system with an emphasis on egalitarian relationships and consensual decision making) (p. 779). Irvine reports that in Wolof political meetings, turn-taking procedures are very regulated and structured, and the order of speakers may be announced in the beginning, or someone may serve as master of ceremonies, thereby controlling the order of speakers (p. 781). This is similar to processes described by Duranti (1984) for Samoan society where participants in a *fono* speak in a prearranged order, based on rank and village representation, and once a party has started to speak, there are no "second starters," that is, nobody else will compete with the current speaker for the floor if he has the right to speak at that particular time (p. 223; see also discussion of how individuals signal their intention to speak).

In contrast, among the Mursi, speakers compete for turns, and there may be many interruptions (Irvine 1979:781). Turton (1975:172–173) suggests that this situation puts pressure on Mursi speakers to be brief, to speak to the point, and to try to convince participants that what they have to say is valuable, as those in the wings are always looking for signs of weakening:

> The successful speakers are those who are not only instrumental in bringing to an end the speeches immediately preceding their own, but who also do not finish speaking themselves until they are ready. (p. 173)

Lederman (1984) describes Mendi meetings as "anarchic and unstructured" in comparison to formal meetings in hierarchical societies as there was no chair, no vote, and no way for individuals to be bound by any of the recommendations that were made (p. 97). However, as described before, even when there is no chair, there are various procedures and processes that develop to structure and often limit debate in such contexts.

In hierarchical societies, formalized rules and regulations for governing debate and discussion are often found. For example, Duranti (1984) describes the distinctions between *lāugua* (ceremonial speech) and *talanoago* as speech genres in Samoan meetings and the "debate" and ordering rules for meetings that these distinctions create. In this case, once a *fono* begins, there may be one or more *lāugua,* which will be followed by *talanoago.* However, once *talanoago* or discussion begins, there can be no more *lāugua* (p. 229).

The expression of conflict in meetings appears to be negatively valued in many egalitarian and hierarchical societies, and a variety of procedures have been developed to deal with this issue. In Balinese assembly meetings, open conflict is forbidden according to Hobart (1975):

> In Pisang-kaja, the interruption of a klian incurs a fine of Rp. 20, which is immediately doubled on complaint, while open argument is punished as if it were physical assault with a minimum fine of Rp. 100. The use of improper or insulting language is a serious offense which causes ritual pollution of the whole *banjar*. This state must be annulled, ideally before further work, by an expensive purification ceremony, *perascita*, paid by the offender. (p. 73)

Among the Merina, as reported by Bloch (1971), every effort is made in *fokon'olona* council meetings to avoid "open confrontation of conflicting points of view" (p. 51). Sometimes this means that it is very difficult to determine what, if any, decision has been made about a particular subject. For example, in discussing what time individuals should appear to dig drainage channels:

> The argument never appears on the surface as a conflict of views. The discussions happen as a series of mutually exclusive statements. One person makes a speech the gist of which is a proposal to come on a particular day. This may well be followed by another speech which seems to be in support of the proposal and full of praise for it, but in fact contains, hidden within the mass of polite sentences, a counter-proposal for another day. There is no argument and it is very difficult to realize that the statements are contradictory. What is more, no decision seems to be reached at the time. However, if a large number of people mention one time rather than the other, everyone knows that this is the right time. Often, however, the matter is left in the air and the chosen day is understood to be that proposed by the more influential man. In this way these contradictions may be tests in a power struggle between different individuals. Very often it is not clear to the participants at what time they should turn up. If this is so on the first day mentioned the supporters of one side will start to gather. If they are few, they will soon disperse. If, on the contrary, they are many, they will be joined by waverers and then the whole thing snowballs, until ultimately perhaps even the proposer of the alternative day will be drawn in. (pp. 50–51)

When Merina women meet, however, the tendency to avoid open verbal conflict is reversed. Bloch discusses two types of women's meetings (although he notes that he did not actually attend such meetings): (1) meetings of the Malagasy Red Cross, and (2) meetings concerned with the organization of the transplanting of rice seedlings (1975:56):

> The main contrast is that the formal speech is not used by women, at least at these meetings. Much shorter, to-the-point, speeches are made. In addition, in contrast to what we have seen in the case of the wider *fokon'olona* meeting, there is no avoidance of open conflict and indeed it is a characteristic of the meetings of women that they are loud, bad-tempered and back-biting. This at any rate is the accepted stereotype; and in my opinion it does seem to correspond to reality. . . . The difference of behavior between meetings of women and meetings dominated by men corresponds to the more generally expected behavior of these two categories of people. An interesting aspect of this type of behavior of women is that it is accompanied by actual voting by a show of hands. This procedure is said to be a European introduction, but fits

> very well with the way women conduct their deliberations. By contrast voting would be unthinkable at a village meeting.

In contrast to the Merina, meetings in Mount Hagen are concerned with disputes over a variety of issues, including theft, adultery, divorce, bridewealth, land, and murder (Strathern 1975:187). In addition, it is not uncommon for physical conflict to occur during a meeting occasion among this group (pp. 188, 196–199).

Topics

The topics of meetings could easily be used to generate a list of the preferred topics and issues in the anthropological literature: leadership succession, disputes, economic exchanges, marital negotiations and arrangements, planning for rituals, decision making, and so forth. Meeting topics are related to the concerns, issues, and needs of a society, and so for the Ilongots, speeches and meetings are most frequently about "marrying and killing," according to Rosaldo (1973:156). Mursi meetings, on the other hand, relate to the concerns that pastoralist societies could be expected to have, for example, what to do about cattle raids and when to move camp (Turton 1975). The meetings reported by Strathern for the Mount Hageners, not surprisingly, deal with disputes over a variety of issues as discussed before or with economic exchanges within the *moka* system. Merina meetings were historically the context where most of the important community decisions were made, but now most of these decisions are made by the government, and so meetings of the *fokon'olona* are left with deciding issues such as establishing a date for digging drainage channels, to repair roads or to work on reafforestation (Bloch 1971). It is the meeting topic (as defined here) that has been privileged in anthropological research.

Participants and Speakers

A number of issues are relevant here, including who can and cannot attend and/or speak in meetings (the exclusion of women in meetings has already been discussed), the order of speaking, and who speakers represent (i.e., whom speakers may speak for). As already discussed, meeting participants may be defined and/or related by kinship, gender, residence, territorial, or occupational groups. Individuals may attend meetings as representatives of these groups, or they may represent only themselves (as is typical of community in council meetings or town meetings). Meetings that are not based on the idea of speakers representing specific groups or interests are more typically associated with

egalitarian societies, whereas more hierarchical societies tend to be characterized by a variety of meeting groups where speakers and participants are frequently spokesmen for and representative of specific constituencies.

In the United States, we expect leaders to have spokespersons (e.g., the press secretary for the president). This practice is followed in some non-Western societies as well, where it is sometimes customary for leaders to never address public meetings. In Tikopia, "chiefs do *not* orate or address public assemblies; they give instruction to their *maru* to speak for them. They 'hand over the speech' to their mouthpiece, and commonly are not even present at a *fono* where their orders are promulgated" (Firth 1975:35). In Bali, it is possible for anyone, in principle, to address a meeting, but, in fact, according to Hobart (1975:77), only about 10% of the members of a banjar participate in debates and discussions. Individuals with specific speaking skills and knowledge become designated as orators or "speech specialists" (*juru raos* or *tukang munyiang*). "This role is generally recognized in local society and orators comprise an informal elite within the *banjar* with high prestige and extensive influence in the assembly and community" (p. 77).

In hierarchical societies, speaking turns in meetings often reproduce the hierarchy of the society, as prominent chiefs or leaders typically open a meeting and are then followed by less prominent chiefs and finally "others" (e.g., Comaroff 1975:149; Duranti 1984:220, 223–224; Salmond 1975:47–48). In egalitarian societies, where speaking and the ability to summarize and articulate points is crucial for generating consensus and is therefore a particularly valued skill, the "important" speakers frequently come at the end of the meeting. Turton makes this important point in describing the characteristics of Mursi *jalaba* (influential men):

> One does not have to attend many meetings in a particular locality before coming to recognize the more influential men of the area. They are the speakers who are listened to without interruption and whose speeches tend to come towards the end of a debate, not because there is any set order of speakers, but because the very nature of their contributions reduces the need for further discussion. These are the men who present an argument, or sum up a situation in such a way that they make, or are allowed to make, a positive and significant contribution to the achievement of consensus. (1975:173–174)

Myers (1986) makes a similar observation for the Pintupi in Australia. "Certain talented speakers are successful and gain prestige from bringing meetings to fruition, sustaining a focus within a framework of 'anonymization'. . . . The substance of Pintupi strategies is clarified in the way meetings, typically appeared to end in assent. A speaker

catches the drift of the main sentiments and phrases them for the whole group present" (p. 438).[5]

Speeches

Researchers writing about political language have focused specifically on the analysis of speeches and speech making, and so there is a great deal of information here. Comaroff (1975) illustrates this focus by describing two different types of "oratorical styles" or "codes" for the Tshidi. He refers to these as formal and evaluative codes. The formal code "refers to abstractions and shared values," whereas the evaluative code refers to "the actions of living men" (p. 151). Comaroff suggests that the success of a Tshidi chief is directly related to his ability to control these codes and achieve convergence between the formal and evaluative as they pertain to his practices in office (p. 155). He offers examples of the use of each type of code noting that they are frequently juxtaposed in the same speech. In the following example, the speaker (who was a headman) begins his speech using the formal code:

> The chief is chief because of the tribe (*kgosi ke kgosi ka morafe*). He is our father; but he is the servant of our people. He must listen to us, his advisers and his aides. He must always be at his meeting-place to receive news and complaints. Chief of the Barolong! People are not ruled with clubs; they are waved with winnowing fans (*batho ga se ba melamu; ba bokwa ka lotlhare*). (p. 150)

Following a pause, the pace of the speech begins to pick up, and the speaker employs the evaluative code:

> I do not know what to say. I am an honest man and I must just say what is in my mind. The tribal taxes and levies have remained uncollected and the tribal treasury is almost empty. The tribe is getting deeper and deeper into difficulties, and essential services are not attended to. Decay and filth lie here in the village. Beer brewing and drinking are increasing at a shocking rate and the chief, himself being fond of drink, is not setting a good example. The chief sees to nothing, however important. He is hardly ever in his office, he does not seek advice and he does not take advice. He is never at his place. His rule is no rule. (pp. 150–151)

In his analysis of Merina oratory, Bloch (1975) is specifically concerned with how formalization of speech and the code restriction that formalization produces can become a form of power or coercion (p. 12). He extends his analysis beyond the Merina to examine what types of

[5]However, Myers notes that, although a meeting may end in assent, "nothing may come of it" (1986:438).

political systems are associated with an emphasis on this "power through form," but it is important to remember that, for Bloch, formalization reproduces but does not constitute social structure. Formalized speech acts, in Bloch's terms, are characterized by fixed loudness patterns, extremely limited choice of intonation, some syntactic forms excluded, partial vocabulary, fixity of sequencing of speech acts, illustrations only from certain limited sources, for example, scriptures, proverbs; stylistic rules are consciously applied at all levels (p. 13). Bloch describes the impact of this type of speech in everyday life specifically in Merina village councils. He suggests also that the power of this form of speech is well-known to the Merina:

> The extraordinary way in which the highly formalized codes of Merina oratory put people in a situation where they feel compelled against their will to follow a course of action, is well known to the actors and they take all kinds of courses to avoid being addressed in this way, rather like unwilling witnesses avoiding being served subpoenas. I have often found myself caught in precisely this situation when I have allowed somebody to place both himself and me in the right place for such formal interactions and have allowed him to begin a speech in a formal manner. (pp. 9–10)

A variety of researchers have examined different forms of speech and speech making and their use is specific contexts. Strathern (1975) describes two different speech forms as he encountered them in Mount Hagen: *el-ik* and *ik-ek*. El-ik or "arrow talk" is very formal speech that may be used to mark the end of a ceremonial prestation. It is characterized by Strathern as conventional speech with phrases and images that recur from occasion to occasion:

> On a given occasion a number of men follow one another in making the *el-ik*. An older man, not necessarily a major big-man, often begins; but again, there is neither any formal rule nor any rigid behavioral pattern here. The speaker, instead of standing still, marches up and down, twirling an axe in his hand and ending each stylized phrase in his speech with a long-drawn out "o-o-o-o." Speakers do not contend with one another, but they tend to take up the burden of speech-making smartly until the whole set of men has completed the session. Speech-sequences of individual orators are likely to resemble one another in content. There is heavy redundancy and over-communication in this respect. On the other hand, the actual language used is compressed, and this is achieved both through the use of figures of speech and through shorthand references to those past events which have produced the present. (p. 189)

Ik-ek or "veiled speech" is talk that is bent over or folded: "It can be used politely, for example, in reference to genitals or the act of copulation. In such a context straight talk, described as 'straight on the fat,' can be inappropriate" (p. 189). Veiled speech is particularly important in Mount Hagen because it "preserves the social relationships between

. . . [individuals], while at the same time allowing for information about their dissatisfactions to pass over to their hearers" (p. 193). In order to demonstrate the use of ik-ek in a specific context, Strathern presents an example of a court case and the use of veiled speech as a form of inquiry:

> The technique of the inquiring Councillor, who was also a big-man, was not to interrogate or challenge anyone directly, but to tell stories of parallel cases and to stress that he and his friends were there simply to ask questions and to say their pieces and then depart for home. (p. 194)

Rosaldo (1973) was an early analyst of the importance of indirect speech for communicating information about hostilities, alliances, and the like. She describes the difference between "straight speech" and "crooked speech" in Ilongot society as it reflects and generates social change and the increasing "modernization" of this group:

> Elaborate, "crooked" language belongs to a world in which none can offend, command, or give orders, and speakers must negotiate the agreement and understanding of their opposites, through an aesthetically attractive and politically non-directive style. "Straight" oratory, by contrast, is direct and explicit, and it is associated with new sources of, and claims to, authority. (p. 221)

In order to illustrate these differences, Rosaldo describes a specific peace meeting that she attended in 1969:

> In the spring of 1969, I attended and taped a peace meeting, a meeting where "straight speech" was presented as an ideal by some speakers, who opposed their mode of argument, their authority and understanding to the "crooked" style of speaking used by traditional men. Orators from coastal communities, familiar with Philippine national life, said that Tagalog law speaks of peace, not of conflict, that the law speaks directly, without curves. A schoolboy, in his twenties, announced that, in the old speech, men interrupted one another; to prevent confusion, he would call, one by one, on the "captain" of each "barrio" who could, in turn speak for his "men." Speakers from several missionized communities announced that they would speak for their "soldiers," that someone should write down that they were the "captains," that they knew the law. Gesticulating in a rude parody of lowland speech making, the captains proclaimed their allegiance to order, straight talk, and God. It is important to recall that in traditional Ilongot society, young men, or "soldiers," are not in fact bound by the words of their orators; as noted above, peace has, in the past, been broken by young men who stpped outside when their speakers swore friendship in an oath of salt. These "captains" were, then, claiming a far from traditional power over the people of their communities; they did not have to win the agreement of their fellows by wit, subtlety, persuasion, because their power was sanctioned by external governmental force. (p. 219)

Nowhere is the use of indirect and self-deprecating speech in public meetings more well-developed than in Bali. Hobart (1975) illustrates this by summarizing a speech given in an assembly meeting in Pisangkaja.

In this case, individuals were concerned with the proximity of a temple festival in one of the *désa* temples to *Galungan* (a series of ritual days in the Javanese-Balinese calendar):

> The speaker apologized for taking up the time of the assembly with a matter which was not important. However, in eight weeks' time the *désa* temple festival would occur which would require the *banjar* to work for two weeks in preparation. According to his calculations, which might well be incorrect, *Galungan* would occur at the same time. This would then mean a heavy work load on each household, and worse, because it was shortly before harvest the contributions to both rituals simultaneously would strain individual resources. While far be it from him to suggest a solution to the meeting, would it be possible to change the date of the temple festival until after the harvest? Perhaps other members also felt that the matter should be referred to the *bendésa* and the *Pedanda?* He apologized for raising the issue and wished to concur with the decision of the *banjar*. There was general consensus that difficulty would arise and a resolution was adopted to pass the matter to the attention of the *bendésa*. (p. 76)

Nonverbal

The nonverbal behavior that accompanies speeches and is an intrinsic part of the communication that occurs in meetings has received very little attention in the literature. There are, however, a few comments on the significance of nonverbal gestures and information in some reports. For example, Duranti (1984) notes that Samoan speakers communicate their intention to talk in a *fono* by changing their body posture and clearing their voices (p. 241). They also look at other participants for signs of their intention to speak next. A verbal cue that signifies their intention to speak and hold the "vacant" floor is *ua* ("so well" followed by a brief pause) (p. 241). Howe (1986) notes that, for the Kuna: "In the close quarters of the gathering house, listeners make their moods known in other ways, by murmurs, facial expressions, restlessness, and so forth" (p. 178). However, he does not elaborate on what these gestures are and how they are used in particular contexts. For the Ilongots, eye contact in oratory is a metaphor for agreement: "the orator does not, as in ordinary encounters, look directly at his opposite; rather, his eyes are cast sideways, past his opponent, giving (to this observer) an impression of aloofness and poise" (p. 210).

Strathern (1975) describes the nonverbal behavior that accompanies the speech making of men (typically big men) in Mount Hagen:

> In discussions and occasions of oratorical display in the open, the speaker always stands while the bulk of his listeners are sitting. He attracts attention to himself by stepping forward, clearing his throat, raising his hand or hands perhaps, and calling to the other men "you men!" or "look here!" Speakers

vary greatly in the degree to which they alter their physical posture while speaking. Although I do not have precise observations on this, nor have I been told any definite set of rules governing the matter, it is my impression that speakers tend to stand fairly still, bent very slightly forward with their string apron tucked between their legs, look directly at the mass of people they are addressing, and keep their arms at their back or side except when emphasizing a point or becoming more involved in a contention with someone else. One influential big-man I know, however, clearly specializes in facial expressions and hand gesture. He is the most energetic, confident and picturesque speaker I know and he has a capacious knowledge of figurative speech and group history. Nevertheless, he by no means always gets his way. (pp. 188–189)

Probably the most extensive discussion of a meeting that makes nonverbal communication a central aspect of the analysis is Black's (1983) description of a Tobi meeting and the significance of the traditional chief's cough. A behavior that in most circumstances would hardly be noticed, in this context became a powerful statement of the chief's power. The event took place in a meeting to discuss the problem of the use of obscenity by the adolescent boys on the island. At one moment when the meeting frame was about to be completely broken by jokes, laughter, and confusion, the chief quietly, but also very pointedly, coughed. Black describes the significance of this behavior:

Laughter echoed back and forth across the room. . . . The magistrate, teary-eyed and out of breath, laughed louder than anyone. Suddenly, though, his laughter ceased. Just as it had dominated the uproar with its volume, so now it dominated by its absence. For he had heard (along with a few others of us seated close to him) a quiet, dry cough from the chief and immediately had fallen silent. With a minimum of nudging and hushing, the rest of the crowd quieted down and the sounds of convulsive hilarity quickly passed away.

The chief's cough, a minimal communication to be sure, was the most direct expression of his power I ever observed. He exerted control by simply reminding people of his presence and thus of their common political culture. He acted to preserve decorum and order and he succeeded impressively (pp. 20–21).

The extraordinary egalitarianism of Tobian society makes leadership totally a matter of persuasion achieved indirectly and by example. . . . The chief's cough during that meeting was a particularly vivid example of this style of leadership. It recalled people's attention to the chief and everyone, including the magistrate, responded. The response can be understood only as political compliance. . . . There was no way to be deaf in that meeting. A failure to stop laughing would have been a rejection of the moral order which the chief was indicating and which Tobians believe separates them from such non-existent "benchmarks" . . . as "ghosts," "people of the bush" and "Papuans." There was no escape for those at the meeting; to remain good, in their own and their fellow Tobian's estimation they had to stop laughing. Stopping laughing then reaffirmed for themselves and the chief that he was in charge of their society. Their action also validated for me their statements about the chief's role in their politics. (p. 22)

Results and Outcomes

What is clear in examining the information available in this area is that ethnographers believe (adopting a Western, American meeting orientation) that results of meetings should be clear and that they should influence action in some clearly discernible way. Voting is, of course, one way to obtain clarity on the "results" of a discussion and is more typically found in hierarchical societies. However, in many cases, and this is true for egalitarian and also hierarchical societies, results are not clear and do not necessarily influence action. Sometimes results, as we expect them, are specifically avoided. In Bhatgaon, the Fiji Indian community that Brenneis studied (see 1984b), arbitration sessions are left deliberately unclear. On these occasions, there is no summing up and no decision as the event is used to construct, publicly, an official story. "A cooperative and binding account of a contested incident is accomplished and interested villagers are left to draw their own conclusions and interpretations" (p. 82).

The Basseri, pastoral nomads living in Iran, avoid large assemblies when making decisions about whether to move camp or not. Instead, according to Barth (1961, see especially pp. 43–46), they engage in "endless" discussions "without clear statements of position, and often without a clear conclusion, so that even experienced members of the group retire in the evening without knowing whether the tents will be struck the next morning" (p. 44). The multiplex relationships of individuals in this tribe are activated by this process of discussing issues in small informal gatherings or meetings. In Barth's view, a leader avoids large assemblies of camp members "where each voice would be more nearly equal. Instead he seeks persons out singly or in small gatherings where his friends and kinsmen are in majority; within such a group his influence may prevail" (p. 44). In these gatherings, no one ever commits himself to one view "as they always retain counter-arguments in their statements" (p. 44). Of course, as Barth notes, this is a frustrating experience for the anthropologist, who is used to more clear-cut decision-making processes and who wants to know "whether he will have to pack his stuff and move on next morning" (p. 45).

This difference between researcher expectations and cultural events provides important information about variation in meeting results, and especially some of the taken-for-granted aspects of Western assumptions about meetings. Atkinson (1984) suggests this view while reporting her frustration with the "results" of Wana meetings:

> Time and again in my fieldwork among the Wana I was personally distressed as well as analytically perplexed when after engaging in weighty discussions of vexing problems my companions would later "fail" to act on what I took to

> be their resolve. But then talk is action, and the accomplishment of these discussions has more to do with creating and sustaining relationships among participants than with taking direct and concerted action regarding the ostensible topic of the talk. (pp. 35–36)

In a study of Kwanga funeral meetings, Brison (1984a) analyzes the issue of "all talk and no action" for this Papua New Guinea group, and she specifically examines the various functions of long meetings where decisions are not implemented:

> The purpose of meetings is not so much to decide on action as to shape a particular interpretation of events and situations. This interpretation increases the prestige of individual men and the political status of all initiated men. Individuals gain prestige by hinting knowledge of sorcery and by publicly condemning troublemakers. . . . The meetings do more than just play a role in shaping an interpretation of a particular death; the meetings act to focus attention on the process of interpretation itself. This process of interpretation conveys . . . messages to the community which also increases the status of initiated men. (pp. 18–19)

Fred Myers reports that Pintupi meetings "rarely resulted in decisions or plans for concerted action," and he cites studies of several small-scale societies where this is also the case (e.g., Bell and Ditton 1980, Brenneis, 1984b; Frake 1963; Lederman 1984; Meggitt 1962; Rosaldo 1973 [p. 436]).[6] For the Pintupi, it is the "subjective, moral dimension of relatedness" that is the "notable element of speech in meetings," and it is this stress that many anthropologists and administrators initially see as a problem because it limits "the legislative effectiveness of meetings" (p. 436). This "problem" of results, however, requires rethinking the nature and purpose of talk in meetings. Myers describes his gradual understanding of this difference:

> Despite urging by white authorities to do so, talk at Pintupi meetings does not press on toward a topic, relentlessly to solve a problem. At first this puzzled me as much as it frustrated well-intentioned advisors interested in Pintupi self-determination. Gradually, I came to understand the nature of talk at meetings differently. For Pintupi, the meeting must first sustain the very occasion of its performance. This is so because there is no preexisting, assured organizational framework of political action within which people live, yet they are in need of each other. Thus, the force of their speaking is concerned mainly to sustain relations among the participants under a rubric of being related to each other—but always maintaining the identity as autonomous equals that is so marked a feature in Pintupi life more generally. (1986:432)

[6]Brison (1984b, p. 2) cites a number of other studies where "inconclusive" meetings have been discussed, although, as she suggests, they are usually mentioned in passing "but seldom analyzed" (e.g., Keenan 1974; Kuper 1971; Lederman 1984; Richards 1971; Watson-Gegeo 1986; Young 1971, 1974).

The importance of meetings for building consensus as well as for creating a sense of "polity" in societies, especially those that do not have permanent leadership positions or centralized authority relationships, is suggested in the literature. This issue has been discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, but the research by Atkinson (1984) for Wana meetings Brenneis (1984b) on Fiji Indians, Lederman (1984) on Mendi community meetings, Myers (1986) (as discussed before), Rosaldo (1973, 1984) on Ilongot political meetings, and Silverman (1971) on a Banaban meeting suggests that this is an important outcome (i.e., what the event accomplishes for the community or culture) of meetings in egalitarian societies.

It has often been assumed that the results of formal meetings are completely predictable because the decision was made elsewhere and the meeting is only the place to announce it. This may be true in some instances (see Irvine for the Wolof, 1979:781); however, this view has also contributed to the neglect of meetings as legitimate topics of research (see Turton 1975:164–165). What I wish to emphasize here is that the ethnographic literature suggests that the results of debates and decisions in both hierarchical and egalitarian societies are not always predictable. Even when plans and strategies are made to influence the decision, they become, as Howe (1986:177) suggests for the Kuna, "only the starting point for debate."

As in many societies, among the Kuna, a group of influential individuals may hold a "rump session" before a formal gathering to attempt to "predecide" an issue (Howe 1986:177). However, it is not uncommon for such "predecisions" to be remade and sometimes unmade when the actual meeting occurs. Howe describes one such "reversal":

> **Case 8.1.** The most dramatic example of such a reversal occurred during a general congress in 1981. A foreign company mapping offshore waters requested permission to set up radio beacons in San Blas for a few weeks. The *intendente* and the caciques saw little harm in the request, all granted permission, and they saw no need to get formal approval from the General Congress (probably because the company did not propose to stay, to do business in San Blas, or to alienate land).
>
> When, however, a company spokesman addressed the congress as a courtesy gesture, he rapidly ran into trouble. The presumptuousness of his Kuna interpreter provoked irritation. More important, the presentation followed two days of emotional discussion of encroachments on the reserve and the need to gain control of its natural resources. The congress was held in a large and volatile community, with a sizeable contingent of young radicals, many of them in the room. Sentiment turned against the spokesman, and permission was denied. (p. 177)

The predictability or unpredictability of decisions in meetings is a topic that should receive much more attention, and I believe that the

work of March and Olsen (1976) will be extremely helpful in attempting to examine this issue cross-culturally. The relationship between the "outcome" of a *public* meeting and the events that occur in *private* meetings held prior to (and sometimes alongside of) public meetings must also be examined and recent research by Murphy (1988) on political meetings in Mende society in Sierra Leone and Pinsker (1984) on meeting forms in Micronesian societies should help to clarify some of the important issues here.

Maintaining/Encouraging Interest and Participation

In American society, we are accustomed to questions about who has the right to participate in meetings or to have representation in meetings, whereas we are much less likely to be concerned about the problems or issues involved in getting people to participate (Olsen 1976:277). The assumption appears to be that given an opportunity, everyone will want to participate. However, as anyone who has ever worked in an organization should know, it is a mistake to assume that everyone wants to meet all the time.

The opportunity for realizing specific aims and the opportunities for social interaction and realization of group "relatedness" (Myers 1986) along with the possibility of participating in cultural dramas and excitement are all likely to insure participation at meetings some of the time. However, depending on the meeting and the context, it is also the case that societies and organizations use a variety of threats as well as rewards, sanctions, fines, and ridicule to insure participation. Unfortunately, there is very little information here probably for the reasons already described before. Howe (1986:180) discusses the use of travel permits to insure attendance at Kuna gatherings, and Wallman (1968:170) briefly mentions the attraction of beer and meat, as well as the sanction of fines, for nonattendance at traditional meetings (*pitsos*) in Lesotho. In many societies, it appears that one's status may be generated and/or confirmed and evaluated by which meetings one attends, and this could be assumed to be a powerful inducement for meeting participation.

Although they may not appear to be a place for play and joking, the opportunity that this form creates for individuals to engage in this behavior is also important to examine in attempting to understand how and why individuals allocate time to meetings. Opportunities for playing and joking in meetings have been outlined by Bailey (see discussion in Chapter 3) and mentioned by Black (1983) in analyzing Tobi meetings and Salmond (1975) in discussing Maori meetings. Miller (1967) has devoted one article to a discussion of the role of humor in Chippewa

tribal council meetings, and he concludes that humor is important as a way to indirectly comment on action and also as a way to relieve tension especially when discussing controversial topics.

Meetings, however, are not always fun, and American meetings are not the only ones to be notorious for putting people to sleep. Howe (1977) discusses the procedure used to maintain attention in Kuna singing gatherings (*omekan pela*). In these meetings:

> one of several village chiefs sings to the assembled community for an hour or two, seated in his hammock, while another chief in the hammock next to him sings short ritualized replies at the end of each phrase. Policemen (*sualipkana*) patrol the hall, occasionally calling out to the audience to stay awake and listen, and after the singing, an interpreter (*arkala*) stands and explains the chief's chant. (p. 134, also see 1986)

It is also the case, as Sally Falk Moore (1977) has suggested, that individuals who attend meetings do not necessarily need to be enthusiastic or even supportive of the system. Their participation will inevitably support the social system (an important outcome of the event from the standpoint of the community and the nation) because of the "performative" quality of these occasions:

> The performative quality of the Kilimanjaro meeting is of major importance. What took place constituted an official public meeting of the citizens of a ward. To say that it was a dramatization of government is merely to make an analogy. It *was* local government, whether those attending "believed" in African socialism or not, and whether they were permitted to make important decisions or not. (p. 167)

Postmeetings and Interpretations

Meetings are texts for cultural interpretation both during and after the occurrence of the event. In my view, the relationship between chatting and meetings is more than just a sequential one (see specifically Chapter 9) because it is in speech forms such as stories, gossip, and other casual speech that what happens in meetings is interpreted and evaluated by participants and others as they continually represent their structure and culture to each other in these events. It is also the case that meetings may become a primary context for interpreting what happens or is said in gossip and stories (see Brison 1984b). As Hymes (1974) suggests, individual groups develop specific norms of interpretation that are used to account for what happens in particular events. This may include, as is frequently the case in our society, interpreting the results of events as inevitable or predictable, or alternately it may suggest that

what happened is crazy and out of control. (Examples of both of these types of interpretations have already been presented in Chapter 9.)

In many societies, the events that occur in meetings become part of the story-telling repertoire of individuals as the speeches and drama that occur quickly "pass into legend" (as Salmond suggests for the Maori 1975:57). Salmond also notes that *mana* (or prestige) is made not only in making speeches in meetings/gatherings but also in assessing speeches after the gathering (p. 62). In societies that place a high value on speech and speech making, individuals are reported to spend a great deal of time after meetings, evaluating and assessing specific speeches, the skills of specific orators, and the activities that transpired in the event. Comaroff reports that:

> among the Tshidi, the ability to speak persuasively in public is widely respected. There are well-defined indigenous aesthetic criteria for the evaluation of speeches, and mystical techniques are used for improving oratorical performance.[7] In lengthy post-mortems of public meetings and court cases, Tshidi devote most of their attention to detailed assessments of the speeches. Indeed, the relative oratorical talents of political actors is a favorite topic of casual conversation. That this should be so is hardly surprising, for oratorical ability is seen to be both a significant component of political success and the means by which politicians demonstrate their acumen. Tshidi often took pains to explain to me the extent to which power derives from speech-making. When describing a political career, an informant would usually do little more that recall a series of public speeches. (p. 143)

Researchers who have studied councils and committees have also encouraged informants to engage in post mortems of meetings in order to understand, from their informant's perspective, what was happening at the meeting. Robertson (1971:170) notes his use of "post-mortems" for this purpose, and Comaroff (1975) and also Murphy (1988) used the technique of replaying meeting tapes to informants who provided a running commentary and interpretation of events at the meeting and the meaning of participants' statements, terms, and expressions.

It is not uncommon for individuals to blame meetings and meeting processes when inexplicable actions take place or when no action occurs. A Tshidi chief who has been accused of not being in his meeting place and of not accomplishing what he should for his people turns this

[7]Comaroff does not elaborate on what these mystical techniques are, but Bill Murphy (personal communication) informs me that, among the Mende in Sierra Leone, individuals use padlocks that have been prepared by ritual specialists to give their owners the power to make participants in a political meeting responsive to requests and speeches, as well as to vote in the owner's favor. When individuals put the padlock in the closed position and speak to it, they ask that their opponents in meetings become dumb and inarticulate or even that they suffer a stroke or other physical illness.

accusation around and blames "committees" and "secret meetings" for his lack of accomplishment:

> Barolong! We say that to be chief is not easy. There are always things to be done. The chief is a herdsman, and he must do everything for his people. But he must be helped. The tribe is the tribe because of the chief.
>
> I have been working very hard for many years. I have had a lot of troubles. I started committees for health and finance and education and work. Everyone agreed when I brought up that matter. But what happened? We have never heard from those committees. We say a chief must be at his meeting-place.
>
> I have heard people say that I go around from place to place, and am never here. If men fail in their work, what is to be done? If the committees did their work, I could stay at my place. The village would be clean and tax would be collected. I would not be so tired. If there were less secret meetings, the tribe would not go backwards. These things take the time when men should be working. The intrigue does not make me happy. (p. 157)

Meeting Cycles and Patterns

The relationship of meetings to one another is an important part of analyzing the event in context. If they lead nowhere else, meetings, as has been documented in this book, frequently lead to other meetings. Individuals may meet informally after a formal meeting to assess what has happened and to plan strategy. The knowledge that one group is meeting may be all that is needed to encourage another group to start meeting, as meetings quickly reproduce themselves in many societies. The frequency of meetings as a means of assessing relationships and assumed power has already been discussed (see Comaroff 1975:148).

It may be that it is instructive to characterize political systems according to the type and number of meeting forms that they have. Egalitarian and economically and technically less specialized societies frequently have only one or a limited number of meeting forms. When change occurs in such societies, it is very frequently evident in new meeting forms created to deal with new tasks, to establish new relationships, as well as to maintain traditional ties (see Parkin 1975; Richards and Kuper 1971). Howe's (1986) work with the Kuna illustrates these characteristics of meetings. Change is particularly apparent in villages like Neytumma, a growing community of several thousand where multiple meeting forms have developed and traditional gatherings compete with other meeting forms to secure attention and participation:

> By 1978 Neytumma had reorganized itself into three main governing bodies, the *assemblea general*, or general assembly, the *congreso local*, corresponding to the traditional gathering, and an organization called *Kalu Koskun* after one of the principal spirit strongholds in the mountains. The general assembly has its own roster of president, vice-president, and other officers. At its annual

> meeting, for which attendance is obligatory on all adult males, it passes legislation, makes a budget, approves or disproves projects, elects officers to the *congreso local* and *Kalu Koskun*, and evaluates their work in the previous year. The *congreso local*, which has its complement of traditional officers, celebrates sacred gatherings and discusses village concerns, but Kalu Koskun has more influence over most issues. As a body, Kalu Koskun receives suggestions from the congreso local and reviews actions taken by its own component commissions one with administrative and legislative functions, the other judicial. There are numerous secretaries of several sorts: The congreso local has a secretary and subsecretary for secular matters, each with his own special functions, as well as a separate set for the sacred gathering. (p. 118–119)

Migrants to the city are able to continue to influence village politics also by the formation of new meeting groups, *capítulos* (village chapter houses located in the city):

> *Capítulos* provide a forum for discussion of village issues and they regularize communication between migrants and villages. Chiefs and other leaders visiting the city on commissions hear migrants out in *capítulo* meetings, workers take opinions back with them on vacation, and letters go back and forth frequently. (p. 180)

An interesting documentation of changes in the process and procedures of traditional meetings is provided by Alexander Moore (1984) who compares the Kuna general congresses' proceedings with local congresses (the singing and talking gatherings described by Howe 1986) and the Panamanian legislature.[8] The comparison discloses an increasing formalization and move toward British-style parliamentarianism, which is "itself a folk model for resolving conflict" that uses "redressive mechanisms" in an effort to deflect conflict from battlefield to parliament and that provides means by the use of particular debating and voting procedures to grant "victory to one side or the other" (pp. 39, 30). In contrast, the Kuna model of proper conciliar behavior and processes of discussion conceptualizes each issue as a "'path' along which one strives for harmony and consensus" (p. 39).[9]

[8]Jane Mansbridge's (1983) comparison of adversary democracy and unitary democracy in Western political thought, discussed briefly in Chapter 4, is a particularly penetrating analysis of some of the differences that Moore suggests in his analysis of different models of democracy and their impact on the San Blas Kuna.

[9]Pinsker (1984) suggests that it is important to remember that the meaning of the term *consensus* is quite variable especially when considered in traditional cultural contexts. She argues (using Downing 1980) that it is the Quaker ideology of consensus that appears in the literature on most American alternative political movements. This view of consensus "specifies that all disagreements should be fully voiced in open meeting, and the group should not make a decision unless all of its members individually truly feel that the decision is right" (p. 33). In contrast, in Micronesia, use of the term *consensus* seems "to mean that one controls one's public dissensions in order to assure the unanimity of the group's public decision. Rather than its being incumbent on the dissenting individual to speak up, as in the Quaker case, it is incumbent on him to keep silent" (p. 33).

Using an approach informed in part by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) that stresses the importance of invented traditions in understanding change, Pinsker (1984) is currently examining and comparing processes and procedures utilized in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) Congress with practices utilized in local community meetings (especially on Ponape island). In this study, specific attention is focused on "the strategies and procedures used to order discussion in the FSM Congress" as compared with "what Micronesians think of as traditional procedures currently used in local-level Micronesian communities" (p. 3).

Hierarchical societies may in one sense be defined by the presence of multiple meeting groups and the nested arrangement of such groups. In this way, the processes by which such meeting groups relate to one another establish the political structure and culture of the society. These linkages may become extremely complex and complicated even at local levels of government, as political groups schedule their own meetings to accommodate to and attempt to influence local or national meeting schedules. The complexity and influence of these cycles and linkages would seem to be a particularly important area to examine, especially for researchers interested in how meetings and meeting cycles reproduce dependency or dominance relationships. Spencer's (1971) study of a town council in Aberton, England, illustrates what the ethnographic study of meetings, and specifically councils and committees, can reveal in this regard. He illustrates how the Labor party (the dominant party in this context) and Conservative parties cycle their committee meetings in conjunction with town council and committee meetings (see Figure 10.3) in an attempt to prepare for and/or control what happens:

> As was noted earlier, the committee system of the council was based on a monthly cycle. In superimposing its control over committee and council affairs, the Labour group logically accommodated itself to this cycle by meeting in a monthly cycle of its own. This involved the group in two sorts of activity: screening the decisions already made in the various committees before they were ratified by the council on the one hand; and arriving at an agreed group policy towards certain more general issues on the other (p. 180).
>
> In order to prepare their strategy for the council meeting, the Conservatives held two meetings of their own. The first was held a week earlier and was attended by a few of the more influential members who formed the Conservative policy group. At this stage, there was only an incomplete knowledge of what would be on the agenda for the council meeting. However, some of the committee minutes were available, and, in addition, the finance committee would have met on the same morning. This gave the group some scope for devising a basic strategy which could be elaborated a week later when the full Conservative group met and the council agenda was available. Because the Conservatives were in opposition, their activities as a group were very largely confined to this rather negative role of screening the council agenda rather than formulating positive policies. (p. 187)

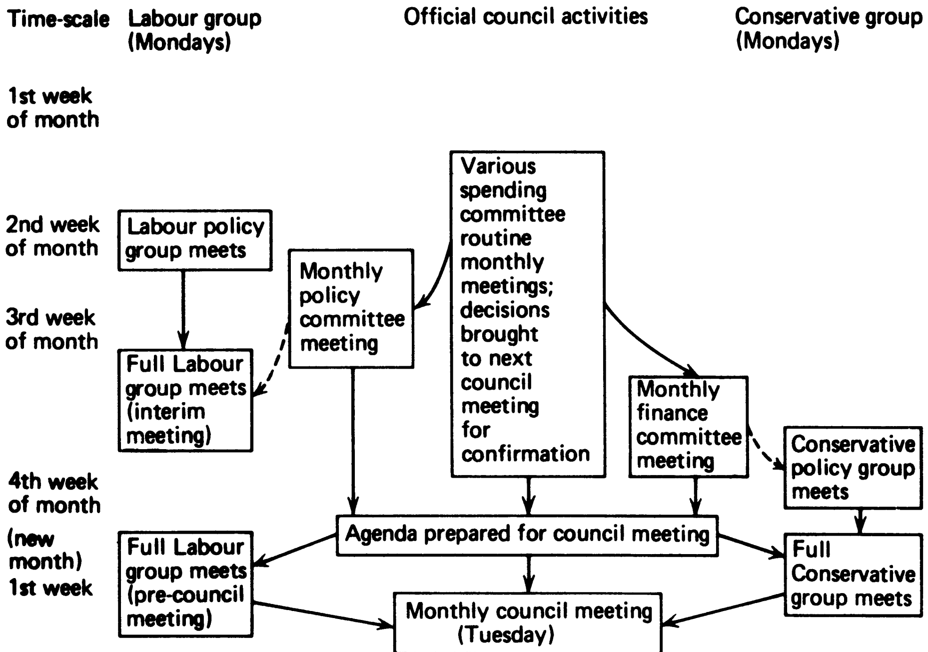

Figure 10.3. The monthly cycle of party group, committee, and council meetings at Aberton. From Spencer (1971:187, Figure 5). Reprinted by permission of Cambridge University Press.

Summary

Meetings occur frequently in both egalitarian and hierarchical societies, but their frequency and patterns and cycles appear to be accomplishing different things for the groups involved. Preliminary observations suggest that in egalitarian societies, the sense-making function of meetings dominates as each event becomes the place for individuals to constitute and create their social system. In hierarchical societies, the social validating function of meetings is stressed as meetings become one of several *carriers* of the social structure and culture for participants, interrelating them in such a way so as to continually reproduce the system in the multiple and nested arrangements of the meeting groups.

Chapter 11

The Meeting

Foreground/Background

The things of this world can be truly perceived only by looking at them backwards.
Balthasar Gracien
(as quoted in Babcock 1978:13)[1]

In most anthropological studies, it is a group of people—the Cheyenne warriors, the Samoan adolescents, the Balinese villagers—who are transformed into the heros/heroines of the stories we tell each other. In this study, I have chosen to make a form of interaction—the meeting—the hero; or, if you prefer, the villain of my story. Because we have chosen to look *behind* (see R. Rosaldo 1980:17) rather than *at* meetings, our literature is organized around other topics. I have tried to reverse this process, first by arguing that meetings need to become a topic of research in their own right and then by attempting to demonstrate what we learn about how social systems are constructed and how individuals make sense of them, when we put meetings in the foreground. In this chapter, I would like to highlight some of the contributions of this approach to meetings, recognizing that work in this area is still in a very early stage.

Ethnography and Cultural Criticism

I believe that the hallmark of cultural anthropology is the dual perspective that we bring to the study of sociocultural systems. This dual

[1]This quotation is used by Babcock (1978) to begin her excellent book, *The Reversible World,* that examines symbolic inversion in art and society. She notes that this epigraph was taken from a novel, *El Criticon* written in 1651 by a Spanish Jesuit. In the novel, the character Proteus is a minister "to a king who reigns over an inverted city where nothing is as it seems to be. The statement refers to Proteus, who so dissimulates that he can be seen only if one turns one's back and uses a mirror" (p. 13).

perspective is the result of research on alternative ways of knowing and acting in the world, and it allows us to examine and challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions of our own and other societies. The promise of anthropology, as Marcus and Fisher (1986) have suggested, has been to present and richly portray the knowledge and experience of cultural forms very different from our own, and to use this knowledge "to reflect self-critically on our own ways" (p. 1). On the whole, anthropologists have made good on the first promise, but I am in agreement with Marcus and Fischer when they argue that we have "taken the job of reflecting back upon ourselves must less seriously than that of probing other cultures" (p. 111). My overall goal in this book has been to take this "job" very seriously by foregrounding what traditionally has been a background phenomenon in American society and in this way to challenge several assumptions about community and organizational structure and process. A specific effort has been made here to defamiliarize the form of meetings in order to present them for inspection and analysis. It is this process, I believe, that allows us to see the familiar from a novel perspective.

Doing Meetings:[2] Form and Function

When meetings become a topic for research, then their existence becomes problematic and not everyday. How, in fact, do individuals construct meetings as speech and communication events? What local knowledge do participants use to produce and recognize a meeting as a significant event? What are the types of meetings that individuals in particular settings recognize, and how do they interpret the significance of their meetings? How do meetings interact with other events (including other meetings) to reproduce themselves?

Drawing on the work of researchers in the ethnography of speaking and communication literature, I present an approach for the study of meetings that focuses on the various components of meetings as communicative events (e.g., participants, setting, channels and codes, frame, meeting talk including topic and results, norms of speaking and interaction, oratorical genres and styles, interest and participation, norms of interpretation, individual goals and community outcomes, and cycles and patterns) and allows one to examine how individuals actually produce meetings in particular organizational and community contexts (negotiating meetings, the setting of meetings, arrivals and departures, the meeting frame, meeting talk, and postmeetings). This approach is

[2] I take this expression from D. R. Buckholdt and J. F. Gubrium's excellent article, "Doing Staffings" (1979).

particularly valuable because it illustrates how the form of a meeting accomplishes its functions. The importance of meetings as sense-making and social and cultural-validating forms for individuals and communities is particularly stressed in this research, and support for this analysis comes from studies of meetings in traditional and complex societies.

Using the approach to meetings presented in this book, it is possible to examine all of the components of meetings and their relationships to each other in order to discover which components and which relationships are of central importance in particular social systems. This avoids the bias of current models that automatically privilege particular components (e.g., studies that focus on the topic and results of meetings) and thereby obscure the possible importance of other components and make it difficult to ask questions that do not focus on these issues and difficult as well to examine the variation that I assume exists from setting to setting and culture to culture. If we move away from asking questions only about privileged components then new questions appear:

- How can we explain the appearance of participants at meetings? How and why do participants chose to go to particular meetings? (See March and Olsen 1976 for important research here and particularly for their thoughts on the need for a theory of attention in the research literature.)
- How does a "press" of meetings select for their particular types of participants in an organization?
- How is talk in a meeting ordered and how is the social structure of a society embedded in these ordering procedures?
- How (or do) individuals sustain a central focus in their meeting discussions, and how does this vary cross-culturally?
- How is the frame of a meeting maintained and when, and for what purposes, is it broken?
- How does the frame of a meeting provide participants with a way to discuss individual and group relationships, agreements, and disagreements while they appear to be focused on "business"?
- How does a meeting transform the behavior of individuals into organizational action?
- How are the events that may surround a formal meeting (e.g, premeetings, planning meetings, stories about meetings, chats, and informal discussions) interrelated?
- How are meetings generated and produced? How do crises, problems, and decisions generate meetings?
- How do meetings generate and transform social and cultural systems?

- What are the differences between individual goals and community outcomes in meetings in particular settings?
- How do expectations about what meetings should accomplish differ cross-culturally?

These are only a few of the questions that this approach suggests. I have tried to provide answers to some of these questions in both the ethnography and comparison sections of this book.

Seeing with Meetings

The approach presented here assumes that individuals do not and cannot act outside of social forms such as meetings that they use to generate interaction as well as to interpret what it means (we are chatting, we are playing, we are meeting). It was my gradual understanding of this point that helped me realize that I could only portray the experience of working, as well as conducting research, at Midwest *through* the meetings that informants used to make sense of or "see" the organization and their actions in it. Staff and board members saw the world as a battleground, and they became caught up in a battle for control, whereas, at the same time viewing each other's activities as "out of control." Staff and board members saw the organization and their actions quite differently because they were seeing events and trying to understand and interpret them, through different meetings. To explain these differences in terms of the different roles that individuals occupied in the organization does not help us understand how these differences were experienced and generated in the daily actions of individuals in this context.

Individuals also use meetings to read and/or see their place in particular social systems. We say that an individual is or is not a powerful person, but often we only "know" this based on how we read and interpret events in a meeting. This was certainly the case for participants at Midwest where there were very few ways outside of meetings for individuals to negotiate and/or determine their status and social ranking and where their status was frequently in flux. The importance of meetings for seeing and interpreting one's status is suggested as well in the cross-cultural literature as Black (1983) illustrates in his analysis of how he came to understand the power of the traditional chief on the Western Caroline island of Tobi by interpreting events in a meeting. Black concludes, following recent work in sociolinguistics and ethnomethodology, that "seeing how you are heard reveals who you are" (p. 23), but it is also *where* you are heard that is important, and meetings are crucial places for this type of "seeing" and "hearing."

Decision Theory and Folk Theory

I have drawn extensively on the work of March and Olsen in preparing this book. Although it may be pushing their analysis, I suggest that one of their major insights is the suggestion that most decision-theories or decision models are actually *folk models* that, not surprisingly, privilege decisions and individual intention in attempting to develop explanations of the results of choice-making processes. March and Olsen make the important point that decisions, in fact, "are a stage for many dramas" (1976:12), and they suggest what some of these other dramas are:

> A choice process provides an occasion for a number of other things, most notably:
>
> —an occasion for executing standard operating procedures, and fulfilling role-expectations, duties, or earlier commitments.
>
> —an occasion for defining virtue and truth, during which the organization discovers or interprets what has happened to it, what it has been doing, what it is doing, what it is going to do, and what justifies its actions.
>
> —an occasion for distributing glory or blame for what has happened in the organization; and thus an occasion for exercising, challenging or reaffirming friendship or trust relationships, antagonisms, power or status relationships.
>
> —an occasion for expressing and discovering "self-interest" and "group interest," for socialization, and for recruiting (to organizational positions, or to informal groups).
>
> —an occasion for having a good time, for enjoying the pleasures connected to taking part in a choice situation. (pp. 11–12)

Now it is one thing to make this claim and another to demonstrate how, in fact, decisions stage or accomplish these "dramas." In my view, this requires putting the drama before the decision and recognizing that these dramas are facilitated by the recurring context of meetings. Meetings, I believe, are an important missing piece in the March and Olsen model because they are "the can" or structure for the "garbage" (the mix of issues, problems, participants, solutions, pleasure, pain) that is the focus of their research. One of the contributions that I hope to have made to this tradition of research is to illustrate how it is the form of meetings (and the processes of constructing, enacting, interpreting, and reinterpreting these events), and not the decision itself, that is the best stage for the "dramas" identified by March and Olsen.

Sense and Nonsense

Meetings create pockets of order in an often disordered world, but they are also responsible for reversing, inverting, upsetting, and dis-

assembling organizational worlds. In this book, I have tried to demonstrate where and how these processes occur, and I have tried to make use of the reversal qualities of meetings to upset our commonsense understandings of these events. I have suggested that meetings are valuable because they are not what they appear to be. They seem to be a sort of "blank-slate" phenomenon that individuals can use to conduct or facilitate culturally defined business but a form that in itself has no effect on an organization or community. In this book, I have tried to challenge this view and present an alternate one that conceptualizes meetings as a form with many effects on our behavior. The effect of meetings on the life of participants and researchers in one American mental health center has been described in detail in order to illustrate this point.

In the broadest sense of the term, it is in meetings that we come to know ourselves and our social systems. An anthropologist's ethnography is in this way a transformation of all of the meetings that she or he has had with all informants. This means that all ethnographies are about meetings, but most researchers write about other topics. My research began as a study of the structure and ideology of an alternative mental health center, but this book is about the meeting as a universal social and cultural form. Although I expect that to some readers my argument still seems backwards, it will not seem so to my Midwest informants—they always knew it was meetings "all the way down."

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