SWP 48/89 LEADERSHIP, SYMBOLIC ACTION AND STRATEGIC CHANGE

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"....It was a feudal castle. They had their lunch in the feudal canteen, the feudal barons called Burton turning up and administering the rites, and allowing employment to be granted: and there would be a medical man on the premises and a bit of billiards and a bowling green. So the whole of the village set up was really to show that we could protect you there.......It had to go."

This is perhaps somewhat unusual language for the chief executive of a major corporation, but it is the way in which Sir Ralph Halpern described Hudson Mills, the company's factory, and he saw the need for change in the ailing Burton retail empire in the mid 1970s. It contains elements of symbolic imagery which demonstrate an acute awareness of the importance of cultural dimensions of management: and many of his subsequent actions show that it was an awareness put to use in the managing of major strategic change in the company (Johnson,1989).

There is growing awareness evident in the management literature of the links between corporate culture and strategy, and of the importance of symbolic action in the task of management (Dandridge et al, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981; Pondy et al,1983). However explanations of links between symbolic activity, strategy development in organisations, the management of strategic change and the role of leaders as change agents, remain largely implicit. The aim here is to draw on the developing literature in the field, as well as empirical research by the author and others, to provide an explanatory model of such linkages.

In exploring these linkages a number of explanatory propositions are developed. First that strategic change agency is a major leadership task yet a significant problem for corporate leaders. Second that the problem needs to be understood in the context of processes of strategy development in organisations which are characterised by incremental change (Quinn,1980) and strategic "momentum" (Miller and Friesen,1980) and, typically, a marked resistance to substantial change. Third that organisational symbols and symbolic action play a central role both in such incremental change but also in the management of more "global" (Mintzberg,1978) strategic change. And finally that symbolic action is of special value in the management of strategic change because of its peculiar capacity to deliver powerful strategic signals linked both to the past and to an uncertain future, in mundane ways, whilst coping with the ambiguity of change.

DEVELOPING VIEWS OF LEADERSHIP

Whilst traditional views of leaders as objective setting,co-ordinators of precisely identified systems and skills still exist in the literature (eg Harmon and Jacobs,1985), there has been an increasing recognition of the multifaceted nature of leadership. Garfield (1986) sets out a range of characteristics for effective leadership. These include above all a visionary capacity, a quality commented on, if rather unspecifically, by most writers on leadership. Other characteristics are the abilities of team building and "team playing"; of focussing activity in defined ways and of learning from mistakes; personal characteristics of mental agility and concentration; of self-directedness and self- confidence as well as the evocation of trust and confidence and the ability to get commitment of others. Successful leaders also have a "constructive restlessness" such that they more readily see opportunities and can identify their significance in both general and highly specific organisational terms. Other personal qualities and characteristics such as a high degree of objectivity (Schein,1985), an ability to handle ambiguity, contradiction and paradox (Kakabadse,1987; Quinn,1988) and the likelihood of a diverse career path with experience of other cultures (Schein,1985; Norburn,1986) are also noted. On top of all this it is emphasized that successful leaders are effective managers of change, though what this entails is not always made explicit.

Garfield's is as good a summary of the qualities of leadership that exists, but it not unusual in being a better catalogue than it is an explanation. "Vision" is explained in terms of "missions which motivate"; the ability to gain commitment and trust are emphasised and, above all, change agency is crucial: but what do these mean in terms of the mechanisms of management? Building on learning models of change, Schein (1985) argues that leaders need to be willing to unfreeze that which is taken for granted in the organisation and absorb the anger,anxiety and pain that this will bring. This process needs to be linked to a process of inducing a "cognitive re-definition" in others and providing a "safety net" for them so that they can internalise change. But how is all this to be done? And how does this all link to the problem which most chief executives claim is most difficult of all - the management of strategic change in organisations?.

Writers on leadership emphasise visible personal commitment and an orientation towards deeds rather than words (eg Sashkin, 1987). Charismatic leaders, for example, "engage in exemplary acts that followers perceive as involving great personal risk, cost and energy" (Conger and Kanungo, 1987) and which both demonstrate the redundancy of the old order and give rise to trust and commitment.

As change agents, successful leaders therefore act as role models (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). Some of what such leaders do in effecting change is therefore becoming clearer; but why is such action effective?

Explanations emphasize the necessity of involving others, and understanding the problems and needs for change, through the eyes of others and in terms of the emotions of others (Zaleznik,1977). Byrd, for example, writes of the need for "corporate leaders to be in touch with their employees psychological, economic, safety, spiritual, sexual, aesthetic, and physical needs (Byrd,1987 p39). Peters and Austin (1985) suggest that it is important to communicate meaning and vision in a "mundane" way which relates to those in the organisation. It is here that the role of symbolic activity surfaces in explanations. Schein argues that it is necessary somehow to involve others in the process of change and get them to "own" change: he suggests that in breaking down that which is taken for granted, and in gaining acceptance of the new, the use of symbolic devices such as myths and stories are important (also Boje et al 1982). Pfeffer, too, suggests that "language, symbolism and ritual are important elements in the process of developing shared systems of belief and meaning" (Pfeffer,1981,p9); and Trice and Beyer (1985) show how organisational rituals are used to stimulate change. These are views echoed by Bennis and Nanus when they argue that leaders must employ a range of mechanisms in effecting change "from statements of policy that have minimum impact, to revising recruiting aims and methods, training that is explicitly geared to modify behaviour in support of new organisational values, and not least, adapting to and modifying shared symbols that signal and reinforce the new vision."(Bennis and Nanus,1985,p143).

LEADERSHIP AND SYMBOLIC ACTION

There is, then, an emerging view in the literature that there is a link between the management of change and symbolic intervention and that this link is to do with the importance of relating changes in that which is taken for granted to new visions of strategy, but in terms and through means which are meaningful to those in the organisation.

Certainly there is no disagreement here that this linkage is important: the author's and others' research, as well as many examples from recent the popular management literature, provide enough examples.

> Foster Brothers was a highly successful menswear retailer in the 1970s which experienced a dramatic profit downturn in the early 1980s. Johnson (1987) records the problems and means of promoting strategic

change in that company. Managers themselves recognized the extent to which staff were imbued with the company way of doing things - the extent to which they were "Fosterized". The induction programmes for new staff, the stories of "heroes" of the past, and of dissenters who the "mafia" had got rid of, the insistence on company ways of dressing windows or promoting merchandise, the deferential way they were required to address the chief executive. The belief was that the company sold down market goods - "yobos uniforms" - to the uncritical "working lad". These stories, rituals and language helped preserve a company culture at the root of which was an assumption that it was buying expertise that drove success. Attempts to change all this in the early 1980s proved immensely difficult. Such progress as was made was not through rational argument or analysed evidence, though this was attempted. Rather it was through largely symbolic action of a small number of change agents. The consultant operating with this group insisted on calling the chief executive by his first name and publicly snubbing the powerful buying executives; development of new shops was managed through a quite different organisational structure ; the shops were substantially and visibly different and their success was magnified in stories throughout the shop network; staff were required to wear badges with their first names on them, and when this did not achieve sufficient change, they were required to wear merchandise from the new shops. This last move was very potent: as one of the executives involved remarked: "We did not realize the significance of (that); you see, they had to <u>wear</u> the new strategy". As the success of the changes became clearer, stories of hitherto unconvinced senior executives' conversions to the new strategy spread through the organisation; and some of those most resistant to change were seen to exit the organisation.

This is not an unusual account of change processes: other studies have shown similar patterns and examples:

John Harvey Jones' vision of ICI as a truly multinational firm was hampered by the highly segmentalist structure of the 1960's and before. As Andrew Pettigrew showed (1985) divisions had become separate cultures with very little cross-communication and little hope of strategic integration. Below the levels of top management it was likely that individuals could not tell you who the Chief Executive of ICI was. Within a few months of John Harvey Jones taking the job ICI personnel identified, if nothing else, with the flowery ties and long hair of John Harvey Jones.

Martin and Siehl (1983) show how John de Lorean in his time at GM deliberately promulgated stories to ridicule the dominant culture, introduced routines in direct contradiction of established values and underlined his refusal to accept such norms through dress and office decor.

Peters and Waterman (1982) provide many illustrations of the symbolic action of corporate leaders: the stories that spread through Mars of Forrest Mars throwing badly wrapped Mars bars across the boardroom; of Ray Krok of McDonalds repeated emphasis of QSC and V for Quality, Service, Cleanliness and Value. Of the language used to describe employees and customers: employees are "crew members" at McDonalds

and hosts at Disney; the evidence of the symbolic action of leaders goes on.

> We all know of further anecdotal examples. Kit Mcmahon of Midland Bank doing away with the staid be-suited image of bank employees and replacing them with the Midland "collection" which came to symbolise staff's dedication to his new strategic approach. Of the director of a business school, intent on inculcating a research culture, he moved his computer terminal near to the foyer of the School and was seen visibly to be working at it as staff came in and out. Of the Chief Executive of a multinational hotel chain that not only promised a convention of travel agent directors of outstanding service he preceded to issue his home telephone number for each of them and ask for a personal report of any problems - action which the directors of the travel agents found was known by the hotel staff who served them at lunch.

There is little doubt that the language used, the stories told or the ceremonies introduced are seen as significant by those corporate leaders who used them. There is also little doubt that such action has significant impact on managers, employees and customers of these organisations. However it is not entirely clear just what the links are between such symbolic action, the strategies of these firms and the management of strategic change by the corporate leaders themselves. The aim in the rest of this paper is to clarify the role of symbols and symbolic action in the development of organisational strategies, their tendency towards a persistent momentum, and also the management of their change. This is done by building on existing literature and the research by the author, reported elsewhere (Johnson,1987), to formalise a model of the links between strategy development in organisations and corporate culture; and the management of strategic change and symbolic action.

PATTERNS IN STRATEGIC DECISION - MAKING

Miller and Friesen (1980) characterise the development of strategy in organisation as a tendency towards "momentum"; reversals in the direction of change in variables of strategy and structure are infrequent and when they occur may be of a dramatic nature. It is an observation borne out by Chandler (1962), Greiner (1972), Mintzberg (1978) Grinyer and Spender (1979a) and Tushman and Romanelli (1986). Mintzberg (1978) found that most of the historical pattern of strategy development in an organisation could be described as periods of continuity or incremental change.

There have been an increasing number of studies which have sought to explain this incremental nature of strategic change. It is evident that rational, linear (Chaffe, 1985) or synoptic (Frederickson, 1983) models of strategic decision making, so typical of normative models of strategic decision making, do not characterize management

behaviour (see Beyer, 1981; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Quinn, 1980; Pettigrew, 1985; Johnson and Scholes, 1989), planning systems are not central to the formulation of strategy (Hall, 1973; Mintzberg et al, 1976), strategic options not systematically analysed (Fahey, 1981) and objectives often ill-defined, diverse and not agreed upon (Norburn & Grinyer, 1973/4), post-rationalised (Mintzberg et al, 1976), unstated, or very generalised (Quinn, 1980). There are those, however, who argue that managers consciously pursue incremental change by systematic environmental scanning and option evaluation within explicitly considered social and political organisational constraints; this is the "logical incrementalist" view of strategic management (Quinn,1980; Pondy,1983).

However the incremental nature of strategy development needs to be squared with our understanding of management behaviour and cognition. We know that managers are "distinguished by very strong active experimentation skills and are very weak on reflective observation skills" (Kolb, 1974 p.33). Managers do not tend to consider in abstract, intellectual form the responses to perceived problems; rather they seek to enter active stages of problem resolution and implementation. Schon (1983) has argued that it is a mistake to think of managerial thought and managerial action as separable: management is characterised by thought or "reflection in action", the continuing interweaving of cognition and action. As Weick (1983, p223) argues: "when managers act, their thinking occurs concurrently": there is a "presumption of logic" in meeting a situation, so action is natural and the thinking (in action) in turn endows the action itself with greater meaning.

This notion of "enactment" (Weick, 1979)argues that present decisions are taken on the basis of past experience, and past experience confirmed by present action. So the uncertainty and ambiguity of decision making is reduced and becomes manageable. Schon argues similarly that such "perceptual sets" or "causal maps" provide the managers with "a repertoire of examples, images, understandings and actions (so when he) makes sense of a situation he perceived to be unique, he sees it as something already present in his repertoire" (Schon, 1983, p.138). It is an emphasis on managerial experience also demonstrated by Argyris and Schon (1974, 1978). They show that "single-loop learning" is characterized by managers searching for solutions to problems, or behaving in ways in line with, or by detecting errors which can be defined in terms of, existing "theories in use": and also that "theories in use" are very difficult to change, even when their "owners" are able to spell them out and recognise the need for changing them. Kiesler and Sproull (1982) have noted other such mechanisms for preserving core managerial beliefs include the false inference of causality, overestimating facilitating reasons to utilise such beliefs and diminishing

inhibiting reasons (also Tversky and Kahneman, 1974), discounting disconfirming evidence and focussing on powerful facilitating reasons to support current practice (also Kozielecki, 1981), "perceiving or inferring events as correlated due to their fortuitous associative pairing of their mutual infrequent occurrence" (Kiesler and Sproull, 1982, p.553). There is, in short, substantial evidence that what is often loosely referred to as "managerial experience" is central to understanding the development of strategy in organisations.

However, managerial experience should not be thought of as a purely individual phenomenon. There exist in organisations a "relatively coherent sets of beliefs that bind some people together and that explain their worlds in terms of cause and effect relations". (Beyer, 1981, p.166). It is an organisational view of the world which helps interpret the changes the organisation and the individual within it meet. These sets of core beliefs and assumptions are variously referred to as "myths" (Hedberg and Jonsonn, 1977) "paradigms" (Sheldon, 1980; Dighton, 1980; Johnson, 1987) (the term used in the rest of this paper); "interpretative schemes" (Bartunek, 1984) and, if we follow Sathe, "ideational culture" - the "set of important assumptions (often unstated) that members of a community share in common" and which "govern communications, justifications and behaviour" (Sathe, 1985). These bonding and interpretative mechanisms, appear to be particular important the greater the degree of ambiguity or uncertainty in the organisation, where formal structures and bureaucratic procedures cope less well (Beyer, 1981; Ouchi, 1980) and where there are less formal, more organic structures but long serving and stable membership (Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983).

Still others (Spender, 1980; Grinyer and Spender, 1979; Huff, 1982) have argued that such ideologies exist at an industry level; that is managers within the same industry tend to subscribe to a similar set of beliefs and assumptions. The "recipe" is "an accepted set of beliefs about what is consistent, realistic and which outcomes will follow the commitment of resources to specified actions" (Grinyer and Spender, 1979, p.83).

A STRATEGIC ROLE FOR ORGANISATIONAL SYMBOLISM

It is not difficult to see that the process of enactment of strategy within bounded rationalities (March and Simon,1958) is likely to result in incremental strategic change. But what is the role and significance of organisational symbolism in this? Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Trice and Beyer (1984,1985) have shown the importance of organisational rituals and ceremonies in binding individuals in organisational actions. Stories, or myths, are also important not least because they

link current situations with the past and thus experiences of previous situations (Schrank and Abelson, 1977). Wilkins (1983) also argues that people tend to believe more readily that which is enshrined in myth which act as "vehicles for conception", embracing within them complex explanations and thus providing "cognitive short cuts": but more than this they may also communicate the "vision of the organisation's mission or role".

The links between the paradigm, culture and symbolic acts, and strategy becomes clearer when it is remembered that the typical patterns of strategic development in organisations are incremental, or adaptive. Myths rituals and other symbolic aspects of organisations do not merely endow and encapsulate meaning on a transitory basis; they are enduring and resistant to change, as interventionists in organisations have found (e.g. see Pettigrew, 1985 and Marshall and McLean, 1985). In effect they are an important mechanism in preserving the assumptions and beliefs in which strategy is rooted. Indeed as Abravanel (1983) suggests myths mediate between likely contradictions and conflicts in what the organisation as a collectivity, or in its parts, sees itself as (or wishes to be) and what it has to be done on a day to day basis. Their is therefore to maintain legitimacy and "help us to get on with our work" (Abravanel, 1983, p.286) at times when the organisation is in flux, for example when core values and assumptions are under threat or being questioned as in situations of strategic change.

The paradigm is also likely to relate to the limited range of capabilities based on its available routines and physical assets. "There is no 'shelf of technologies' external to the firm and available to all industry participants. A firm's capabilities are defined very much by where it has been in the past and what it has done". (Teece, 1985, p.60 on Nelson and Winter, 1981); and these routines themselves can come to take on the role of organisational rituals which guide organisational action. It would be wrong to conceptualise the manager as re-constructing anew the "reality" of his task every time a problem or opportunity arises. Rather managers will be ritualized into familiarity with, and will learn to lean on the routines that have evolved in the organisation (Trice and Beyer,1984) such that they are likely to seek strategic opportunities as defined by them (Cohen, March and Olsen; 1972).

Because the paradigm is socialised in terms of myths, rituals, routines and symbolic language and activity, new ways of doing things which move outside established norms will affect social systems and working relationships. Such change is likely to be perceived as threatening to present power groupings (Pettigrew, 1973; Johnson,1987) whose position arises from their association with the perceived

uncertainty reducing mechanisms of existing beliefs and assumptions (Thompson,1967;Hickson et al,1971). There may well result greater group solidarity and the employment of organisational mechanisms to protect current norms. Such protective mechanisms might include the denial of the competence of the protagonists of new ideas, the withholding of information, the control of recruitment (Pettigrew, 1973) and the regulisation of divergent individuals to that which is organisationally acceptable, if necessary through rituals of intimidation (O'Day, 1974), degradation or passage (Trice and Beyer, 1985).

Johnson (1987) has illustrated the way in which the paradigm is supported and preserved by symbolic artefacts and organisational systems (which themselves tend to take on symbolic significance) as shown in exhibit 1.

MANAGING STRATEGIC CHANGE

None of this is to say change does not take place within organisations. Ouchi (1980) shows how commonly held belief systems and values hold together potential divergence of interests or ambiguity of goals but separately argues that:

> "The loyalty produced by assumptions about goal congruences provides tremendous energy and willingness to adapt. The change problems come when organisational conditions are so radically altered that clan members must clearly violate their basic assumptions" (Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983, p.479)".

EXHIBIT 1

THE CULTURAL WEB OF AN ORGANISATION
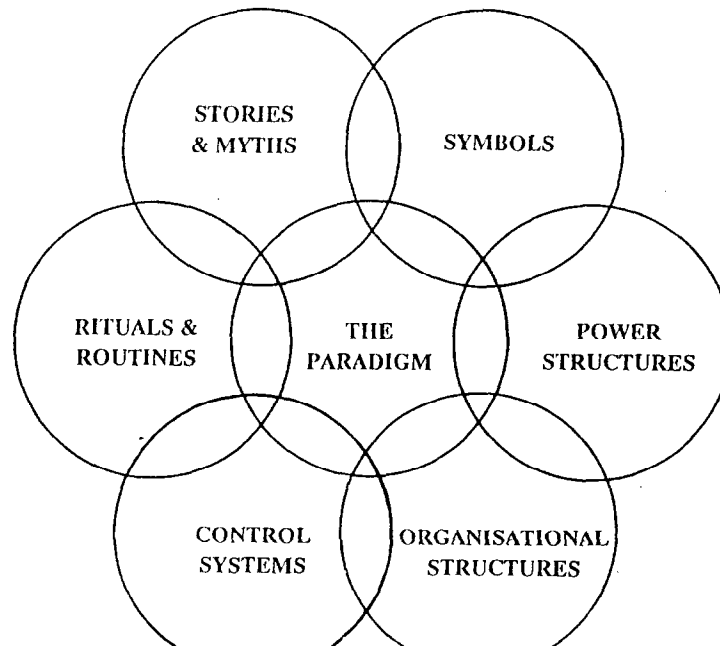
It is a finding also supported by other writers on change. Grinyer and Spender (1979) show that strategic change may take place readily within the constraints of what they call the recipe, but infrequently outside it. Sheldon (1980) argues that organisations are likely to enter a "paradigmatic state" in which they cease to adapt in their environment, adjusting marginally within their paradigm. In such circumstances a "paradigmatic shift" will be required at some stage. Organisations may need to move from "first order change" to "second order change" (Witzlawick et al, 1974), to effect "global" strategic shifts (Mintzberg,1978).

How are these more fundamental shifts in strategy likely to happen? Given the processes outlined above, strategy may become less and less in line with an "objective" environment, resulting in "strategic drift" (Johnson, 1987,1988). Such drift may occur for long periods of time as the organisation enters a period of flux (Mintzberg, 1978) during which there is a generally accepted lack of clarity about the strategic direction of the organisation. There is, however, not likely to be any clear consensus about what should be done about the situation, and still a strong adherence to cultural norms of the past. Pressures for change come into conflict with political groupings resistant to change (Fahey, 1981; Pettigrew, 1985; Johnson, 1987), which draw on values and symbols of the past to legitimize their stance.

Sheldon (1980) observed processes of fundamental change and concluded that there has to be acknowledged evidence of the existing "paradigm" dying. Bartunek found that "second order change in interpretative schemes interact, resulting in a synthesis" (Bartunek, 1984, p.356). Like Grinyer and Spender (1979), she observed that such interaction typically began with a perceived crises which challenged the validity of existing interpretive schemes, and proceeded as a conflict ridden dialectic between existing and divergent views (Bartunek, 1984). However, Biggart (1977), Martin and Siehl (1983) and Johnson (1987) have shown the importance of symbolic and political mechanisms in questioning and breaking down the adherence to current norms and political structures and building a "counterculture" as a necessary process if new approaches were to be accepted.

As the paradigm becomes less fixed, so it is possible for new perspective to be introduced in the organisation which may lead to more fundamental changes. This is likely to be associated with the activities of "outsiders" (Johnson 1987) often in the form of new senior management (Grinyer & Spender, 1979a,b; Pettigrew, 1985) or as a result of takeover. Again, such outsiders may use political and symbolic mechanisms both to break down current assumptions and political structures and also signal change (Pettigrew, 1985; Johnson 1987) . The extent to which members of the

organisation internalize and comply with such change processes is likely to depend as much on symbolic aspects of change as on the intellectual case made for the change or the explicit reward and punishment systems associated with it. So much was illustrated in the examples given earlier, for example in the way in which the staff's wearing of new merchandise in the new Fosters shops signified a personal involvement in the changes taking place.

A SUMMARY OF THE ROLE OF SYMBOLIC ACTIVITY IN THE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS.

The management of strategy is conceptualized as the most complex of managerial activities (Hickson et al,1986; Johnson and Scholes, 1989). Perhaps for this reason the literature on the subject has tended to emphasize rationalistic models of strategy formulation and change. However empirical studies of strategic management show that strategies are likely to evolve in organisations through the interpretation of external and internal stimuli on the basis of organisational paradigms, and through the predominance of organisational routines. This occurs within a social and political milieux in which symbolic artefacts tend to legitimize current assumptions and behaviour. The role of symbols and symbolic action therefore helps to explain the tendency towards a momentum in strategy development in organisations.

In time organisations' strategies are therefore likely to drift, to become less related to external stimuli resulting in growing disquiet about current strategy from within and outside the organisation. The organisation is likely to enter a period of flux in which there is a conflict between adherents of old ways and those that question these: again, the symbols of the organisation are likely to perform the role of legitimizing the norms of the past and therefore to constrain change.

However there is evidence that in periods of more fundamental change, change agents are likely to manipulate such symbolic devices to signal challenges to that which is taken for granted and representative of the past. Moreover, they may seek to create their own symbolic devices as means of signalling a new order and providing substantial organisational evidence of its durability.

Symbols and symbolic action therefore provide bases for both legitimizing the past yet potentially also signalling change.

LEADERSHIP,STRATEGIC CHANGE AND SYMBOLIC ACTIVITY: THE ROLE OF PARADOX.

This paper set out to examine why symbolic activity is especially important for leaders in their crucial role as change agents. It began by reviewing what writers on leadership have argued as important qualities and characteristics of successful leaders. These included the ability to be visionary, yet focussed; and the ability to drive change yet to be in communion with the feelings and needs of the rest of those in the organisation. Quinn suggests that: "masters of management appear to act in paradoxical ways" (Quinn,1988 p4), a view echoed by Peters and Waterman (1982 p287) who write that:

> "An effective leader must be the master of two ends of the spectrum: ideas at the highest level of abstraction and actions at the most mundane level of detail.......With soaring, lofty visions that will generate excitement and enthusiasm for tens or hundreds of thousands of people......On the other hand , it seems the only way to instill enthusiasm is through scores of daily events......"

Specifying further these paradoxes we see that a whole series exist :

In strategy creation there is a need for vision yet detailed analysis.

In achieving credibility there is a need to be seen as insightful yet action oriented

In challenging the status quo there is a need to maintain this credibility whilst attacking the existing paradigm.

In communicating strategic intent there is a need to encapsulate the complexity and vision of strategic thinking in mundane ways which have organisational meaning.

In achieving commitment to strategy there is a need to achieve a focus of mission to overcome the ambiguity of a current situation likely to be in flux.

In consolidating a new strategy there is the need to maintain performance whilst breaking down old approaches and assumptions.

Pfeffer (1981) suggests that symbolic acts are important because they "legitimize" such leadership behaviour . The argument here is that such legitimization occurs because symbolic acts provide an organisational language with sufficient power and relevance yet requisite ambiguity to allow the bridging of these paradoxes situations, in the challenging, communicating, commitment creating and consolidation roles of implementing strategic change. A brief review of the power of symbolic action shows why.

i) First it is important to remember the extent to which the sort of organisational inertia and "strategic momentum" that the leader as change agent faces are likely to be preserved in symbolic ways. Schrank and Abelson (1977) and Martin et al (1983) note the extent to which organisational stories tend to be linked to the past; and Meyer (1982) shows how paradigms are preserved through stories and rituals. Berg (1987) argues that corporate artifacts can take on a totemistic role as they "embody the corporate soul" (p26), not least because they become perceived as highly specific to the organisation. The factory that Halpern described as a "feudal castle" had become just such a totem: but that meant that its closure,when it happened, signified much more than the trimming of surplus capacity; it was a powerful sign of a fundamental break with the past. The very fact of the close association of myths, rituals and symbolic artefacts with the past therefore provides for a powerful tool for challenging the taken for granted and signalling change.

ii) Symbolic activity is also powerful because it is at one and the same time mundane (Peters,1978) in terms of organisational realities and substantial in terms of what it signifies; and it is for this reason that it plays an important role in the day to day management of the complexity we call strategy.The impact in Fosters of the staff wearing new merchandise again illustrates this point.

iii) Symbolic means of communication provide a greater clarity than can be expected from analytic argument (Martin and Powers,1983). Peters and Austin quote a Procter and Gamble manager explaining the sort of activity which convinces employees of the centrality of product quality in the organisation :

> "After you've finished your first three hundred mile ride through the back hills of Tennessee at seventy miles an hour to look at one damned thirty four cent bar of soap,you understand that the ...company is very, very serious about product quality. You don't....need a detailed two hundred page manual to prove it to you" (Peters and Austin,p279).

Yet it is just these two hundred page arguments, or their glossy presentational substitutes, that are often seen by chief executives as the appropriate medium for arguing strategy.

iv) Symbolic acts and stories are the more powerful, and the leader as change agent might argue ,the more useful, because they appear to have a "life of their own" (Peters and Austin,1985), being repeated and promulgated over time through the organisation. The story of Forrest Mars and the throwing of Mars bars has survived for decades and is more enduring than any statement of policy.

v) Symbolic acts also have the benefit of glossing over excessive ambiguity (Boje et al,1982;Wilkins,1983); they can illustrate desired ends without being " too specific on outcome" (Pfeffer,1981), and therefore avoid the sort of objective assessment and scrutiny (Pfeffer,1981; Meyer and Rowan,1977) and cut through difficulties of interpretation (Boje et al,1982) that can delay or dilute action or commitment.

vi) This, combined with the interpretative quality of symbolic acts, provides a further useful basis of communicating the ambiguity of change. It is doubtful if John Harvey Jones or John de Lorean analysed the impact that their dress or appearance would have on the change process; nor is it likely that their subordinates did. Rather meaning and relevance was created in terms of the actions they took and the changes they initiated. Sperber, in discussing the meaning of symbolic acts for the benefit of the semiologist, argues a view which is also appropriate here:

> "It is therefore not a question of discovering the meaning of symbolic
> representations but, on the contrary, of inventing a relevance and a place
> in the memory for them..."(Sperber, 1975,p113).

vii) Symbolic acts and language also have an emotive quality. Wilkins (1983) has demonstrated this as far as organisational stories are concerned and Peters and Waterman (1982) emphasize as much for stories, language and ritual. Activity at this level is therefore addressing the feelings of organisational members rather than the intellect alone.

The difficulty, above all else, which the leader as change agent faces is that of overcoming the powerful agents of "strategic momentum" rooted in the organisational paradigm. These may take the form of executives whose power is based upon it or organisational members whose reality is defined by it. The change agent, - quite likely an outsider anyway - has to challenge that which is taken for granted and create commitment to a new vision. The symbolic mechanisms discussed here are powerful in coping with the paradoxes of managing such change: they have an organisationally specific emotive content which provides for clarity in terms of the everyday whilst coping with ambiguity, avoiding objective scrutiny and being sufficiently malleable to allow meaning to devolve upon them.

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