Uncertainties and Resistance to Change

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Introduction

This paper aims to fill a gap between knowledge and practice about the effectiveness of rhetorical strategies in the communication of change inside large private organizations. The issue addressed here is that rhetorical strategies for communicating change can help overcome resistance to change in highly changeable organizational settings. My contribution to the knowledge of business communication arises from the application of both rhetorical communicative tools and concepts of communication uncertainty and change to a real business situation. A case of leadership change in the British subsidiary of Procter & Gamble has been investigated to demonstrate how to transform uncertainties into competitive advantages. Specifically, this case of best practice suggests that the rhetoric used in communication can help to overcome the problem of *"interpreted perceptions"* (Driskill & Goldstein 1986) or the unsharedness of organizational meaning in environments of routinized instability. Thus, a model of legitimization of uncertainties is suggested here in order to improve effectiveness in leadership *"in settings where conflicting forces are tolerated; where decision makers can live with tension and paradox"* (Weick & Ashford 2006, pp. 727-728). The gain to be made in attributing a positive connotation to uncertainties lies in the awareness that change is part of the business reality of flexible and adaptive organizations. As Suchan (2006) pointed out, there is no agreement about the concept of change in current scientific literature, which is mainly focused on the dichotomy of ongoing change vs. planned change in organizations. Feldman (2000) found out that organizational routines or varying regularities have a potential for change in their internal dynamics and in the thoughts and reactions of the people involved in such procedures. Other researchers have focused on strategies of reducing uncertainty about change by improving communication, so as to allow smooth adjustment of employees in the transition process (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois & Callan 2004).

A persistent variation in organizational settings (Levinthal 1991, Wall 2004, Weick 2006), *"unanticipated consequences of purposive social action"* (Merton 1936) and finally an *"organizational becoming"* (Tsoukas & Chia 2002) are basically the theoretical framework of the case-study explored in this paper. Thus, the illustration is framed according to the above described concepts of change as being constitutive of organizational reality. The rhetorical strategies adopted by the change agent to lead the transition have shown how large organizations can succeed in highly uncertain business environments. The practical importance of this investigation relates to the implications for learning and creativity for leaders communicating under stable conditions of uncertainty. From the perspective of communication uncertainty theories, a theoretical shift towards uncertainty has been highlighted as an ongoing organizational situation (Driskill & Goldstein 1987, Grant 2001, 2007, Baecker 2003, Kouzes & Posner 2002, Babrow 2001). However, the traditional approach in organization science analyses the factors that guarantee stability (Simon 1991) in order to eliminate uncertainty (Cyert & March 1963) or to reduce uncertainties (Berger &

Calabrese 1977). Admittedly, the concept of uncertainty applied to change describes realities that are inherently unpredictable and unavoidable. Crozier & Friedberg (1977) claim that unpredictability is not an exception; it is the starting point for understanding the limits and real meaning of constraints in organizations (p. 44).

To conclude, rhetorical communication appears to be an effective instrument in the construction of common understanding over new organizational practices in uncertain business environments characterized by ongoing changes.

Routinized instability: Uncertainties and change in organizations

The concepts of uncertainty and ambiguity have in common the occurrence of an unstable communicative process. Uncertainties happen when individuals are unable to assign meaning to the events or to predict future actions, whilst ambiguity is linked to the possibility of assigning multiple interpretations to the same event (Kramer 2004, p. 76).

Uncertainty Avoidance is a concept that first appeared in the literature of the American Organization of Sociology. Specifically, Cyert & March (1963) hold the view that organizations in any country need to handle uncertainty and have to live with it as the future is inherently uncertain (p. 166). Different modes of coping with uncertainties have related to the intention to find solutions to perceived problems; uncertainties and ambiguities have been envisaged as something to be reduced, avoided or managed in order to control them. For example, Cyert & March emphasize the crucial role of uncertainties in organizations by describing them as a *"feature of organizational decision making",* suggesting negotiating with the environment – competitors, suppliers, customers – in order to make it controllable, *"so as to eliminate uncertainty"* (p. 168). Cyert and March are aware of the existence of uncertainties as elements of business practices but they fail to consider uncertainties as a positive quality of organizational procedures.

In psychology the debate around uncertainties started with an exploration of the initial entry stage of interpersonal interaction; Berger & Calabrese (1975) elaborated a theoretical framework grounded in the assumption that reducing uncertainty is crucial in communication: *"Central to the present theory is the assumption that when strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction or increasing predictability about the behaviour of both themselves and others in the interaction"* (p. 100*).* Berger & Calabrese emphasize that communicators try to predict others' behavior in order to reduce the uncertainty that results from *"a number of alternative ways in which each interactant might behave"* (p. 100). It follows that the receiver selects the response from a range of possible alternatives according to the prediction. A formulation of seven axioms generated a considerable body of work in organizational and psychological literature to validate or to challenge Berger & Calabrese's model. For example, these axioms have been applied to political campaigns (Kennamer & Chaffee 1982, cited in Kramer 2004), to health fields by measuring the doctor-patient interactions (William & Meredith 1984, cited in Kramer 2004) and to organizations (Miller & Jablin 1991, cited in Kramer 2004). In general, there is agreement within the disciplines that reducing uncertainty is a human need which permits the prediction of others' behaviour in communication processes.

To sum up, Berger & Calabrese (1972) assert that individuals exchange information aimed at reducing uncertainty by constructing predictions and explanations based on the behavior of others. This analysis is somewhat faulty because one can find some communicative performances of information exchange which are not driven by a search for predictability. For example, the interaction in occasional relationships – in the private sphere or in business, could be of this kind; insofar as the interactants do not intend to establish a lasting relationship with others, they are somehow indifferent to predictions or explanations of the others' behavior. It follows that in this case they are not motivated to predict future events. The issue addressed here concerns the possibility of considering uncertainties as a positive quality of communicative performance in situations where interactants choose not to manage the future events by searching for predictability. Rather, the interactants wait to see if future events will be better or worse than the *status quo*.

Austin Babrow (2001) suggests that the most widely discussed misconception is that uncertainty is bad or that *"uncertainty is uniform and uniformly negative but also on the mistaken assumption that its reduction is possible"* (p. 563). Indeed, uncertainties cannot be avoided, since future events are inherently unpredictable.

In the field of business communication one can note that uncertainty includes phenomena captured by terms such as 'change' and 'adaptation'. These concepts are consistent with uncertainty inasmuch as they describe realities that are inherently unstable and unpredictable. Tsoukas & Chia (2002) hold the view that organizational change is so pervasive and unavoidable that it can be named as an *"organizational becoming",* because change is constitutive of reality, since it occurs without necessarily intentional managerial action. As such, we need to learn to love changes and become *"Protean organizations"* as postulated by Wall (2004): *"The Greek God Proteus could alter his shape at will to elude his pursuers. When he chose, he could transform himself into a tree, a pillar of fire or a wild boar, a gift he used strategically to further his own ends. Modern organizations need to become 'protean' in the same way in order to respond to competitive threats or to pursue new opportunities"* (p. 38). The ability of Protean organizations to adapt to change is a result of a legitimization of uncertainties based on their inevitable occurrence. It has been demonstrated that to obtain better organizational outcomes or a successful adaptation of employees in situations of transition, change implementers have to reduce uncertainty about change through improving the effectiveness of communication (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois & Callan 2004). However, this investigation relies on strategies to reduce uncertainty about change, which implies a defence against uncertainties. Instead, the legitimization of uncertainty as a positive quality of organizational performance is crucial in improving business effectiveness in environments of unpredictable change.

The peculiarity of the uncertain organisational patterns is that they never settle down to a stable position, because of continuous adaptation to the changeable events or practices, which take place either within or outside of organizations. Levinthal (1991) emphasizes that the persistent variation in organisational settings is the result of both adaptation and selection from a number of alternatives viewed as *"fundamentally interrelated processes of change"* (p. 144). It follows that a positive connotation attributed to uncertainties is crucial in allowing the *"organizational becoming"* (Tsoukas & Chia 2002) or to *"respond to competitive threats"* (Wall 2004). Managing uncertainties should be like balancing institutionalized routines that tend to persist with unpredictable new opportunities that are useful to the health of the business. Thus, it is not by chance that business experts are gradually implementing research on the best strategizing process based on the planning of scenarios (Van der Heijden 2005).

The conceptual shift moves managers away from the prediction of one best solution towards the discovery of causal occurrences of some events to face up to the uncertainty. So far, the uncertainty about change need not be reduced or eliminated because it is result of the essential unpredictability of changeable business settings. It is not possible to exploit business opportunities without uncertainty.

Decision making and interpreted perceptions

In the field of business communication Driskill & Goldstein have defined uncertainty as *"an interpreted perception"* (1986: p. 45) because there is no shared meaning attributed to organizational actions and events. For example, the communication expert Grant argues that the individual interpretation of signs or the attribution of meaning as a reaction to open appeals is uncertain as *"statement A will never be received as statement A by the receiver"* (2001, p. 48). The transmission channel of communicative performance is inherently uncertain because of the unshared exchange of signs between speaker and hearer. Consequently, uncertainties *"need to be reduced by fictional codes constructed to simulate or impute 'shared knowledge"* (Grant 2007, p. 107). The need for predictability urges human beings to construct fictional realities in order to solve the problem of anxiety over the unknown future. In the field of strategy management Lorange notes *"We can no longer use the same old communication models, particularly the over-simplified concept that our messages go directly to our intended receivers with little or no interference"* (2005, p. 55). So, communication channels are noisy because interference is part of the normal communicative pattern in the operation of communicative selection of different options. Thus, meanings correspond to multiple possible interpretations, which are constructed as a reaction to open appeals or *'acoustic phenomena'* represented in the classical 'Organon model of language' (Bühler 1990: 30-39). Meetings, negotiations, telephone conversations, video conferences, announcements and speeches are examples of uncertain communicative performances. Lorange makes a list of communication obligations linked to the manager's job which involve communicative interferences:*"Transmit information from top management, Obtain feedback from employees, Transmit information from "down" to "up", Motivate, inspire and encourage personal development, Profile and market units, Speak at meetings, Carry out periodic evaluations of employees, Give feedback, criticism and praise, Speak personally with staff, Negotiate, Present unpopular decisions" (p. 55)*. The above mentioned communicative interactions correspond to the everyday activity of managers since work environments are inherently unstable. In a sense, managers engage in uncertain communicative activities because transmitted messages can be interpreted in different ways according to the receivers' perceptions.

Cyert & March (1963) suggest that decision making takes place under risk and uncertainty with respect to the behavior of the market, the behavior of competitors and the future actions of governmental agencies (p. 166). There is currently an amplification of routinized instability due to the expansion of markets in international environments. According to Baecker (2003), the ideology of rational organizational planning aimed at absorbing uncertainties cannot work at present because of unforeseen economic and political events which gradually become routine (p. 36). Mergers, acquisitions, cutting costs, leadership change, response to regulatory change, response to competitive threats, response to consumers' boycott, adoption of new technologies, quality improvement and entry into new markets are the most important factors

of change. One can note that these changes are uncertain due to their inevitable unpredictability, as previously highlighted.

A crucial question is to what extent human beings are capable of transforming the disadvantage of living on the brink of an unknown future into a competitive advantage. Kohlrieser (2006) is aware that *"most people are driven by fear or by avoidance of pain. Only a few are driven by the benefits"* (p. 22). It is thus emphasized that *"The brain is hardwired to survive by looking for danger and pain. We can override this instinctual aspect of the brain to look for the positive and for ways to act with personal power"* (p. 18). Thus, personal power in highly uncertain business environments must be used to improve managerial confidence and to foster positive ways of constructing unstable organizational realities. Legitimization of uncertainties occurs when an increase in personal power contributes to avoiding organizational *inertia*. Crucially for Kouzes & Posner (2002), *"the study of leadership is the study of how men and women, in times of constancy and complacency, actively seek to disturb the status quo and awaken to new possibilities. They search for opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve"* (pp. *176-177).* It follows that organizational routines can be considered as organizational *inertia* because a stable managerial job implies a barrier to innovation and growth. Kouzes & Posner constructed the concept of leadership by using words such as 'uncertainty', 'adversity', 'hardship', 'disruption', 'transformation', 'transition' and 'new beginnings' to stress the importance of taking challenging – or uncertain business decisions (p. 177). Ironically, a leadership gap is a result of stability, such that continuity is guaranteed through routines. Thus, legitimization of uncertainties is useful for improving leadership effectiveness in business contexts of changeable settings. Developing sound and healthy organizations means embracing uncertainty to avoid organizational *inertia*. It is necessary to experience failure and success in order to be active in business activities.

A case of leadership change: Corporate clause and sharedness of meaning

The aim of this work is to demonstrate the communicative effectiveness of rhetorical strategies in highly uncertain business environments.

On one side, the legitimization of uncertainties is necessary to avoid organizational *inertia* for the health of the business. On the other side, the adoption of rhetorical strategies refers to a straightforward means of communication, where the risk in not sharing meaning is high. It is in avoiding the construction of multiple interpretations that rhetoric can help create a common sense of reality amongst the organizational members. In particular, the Aristotelian terms of *ethos* and *pathos* have been used to explain the rhetorical communicative style adopted to create some zones of common meaning, as described in detail in the following paragraph.

The research question can be stated as follows "To what extent can rhetoric help organizations to face the uncertainty of leadership changes?" The appropriate research strategy to answer the above question is the case study; here, a case of leadership change in the British subsidiary of Procter & Gamble in the period July 2004 – July 2007. It is a timely topic today insofar as small, medium and large companies are increasingly expanding their businesses in global markets. International managers have to manage cross-geographically and multi-divisionally while engaging in local businesses or in global units. Procter & Gamble is a Fortune 500, American global corporation based in Cincinnati, Ohio, that

manufactures a wide range of consumer goods and holds about 60 subsidiaries and four headquarters around the globe.

In general, a leadership change appears to be a structural change because of the large disruption produced in the organizational experience of workers, employees and managers. Expatriates taking over their new assignments in their international career are expected to demonstrate specific skills in leading the change. In the case of Procter & Gamble one can say that leadership changes are a normal pattern of the organizational experience. As such, leadership changes can be considered as a routine taking place on average every three/six years in different departments of subsidiaries and headquarters worldwide. The method of a case-study has been chosen to allow an empirical investigation of the communicative competence of the change agent, the managing director, responsible for the British local business in the period July 1994 – July 1997. This is a real business context explored using multiple sources of evidence to gain an in-depth understanding of the communicative performance of the change agent. The data collection methods employed are mainly my notes taken in the direct observation of the managerial activity of the mentioned leader, then my participant observation of events and organizational ceremonies of many kinds as well as in-depth interviews with the managing director to gather detailed information on the communication strategies. Furthermore, the analysis of an internal survey conducted in the period January-March 2007 to investigate the employees` job satisfaction was useful to test the communicative effectiveness of the change agent. Similarly, Madlock (2008) has empirically investigated the link between leadership style, communicator competence and employee satisfaction to prove that both task and relational leadership styles are positively related to subordinate job and communication satisfaction. Indeed, the adoption of rhetorical strategies to communicate change can be considered as an appropriate communication tool of a relational style of leadership. Other researchers have investigated the role of rhetoric in influencing academic commitment to multiple goals across a sample of cases in the UK by highlighting the relationships between rhetoric and context (Jarzabkowski & Sillince 2007). However, these contributions do not directly relate rhetoric strategies to organisational patterns of uncertainty in changeable organisational patterns.

In highly changeable work environments leaders have to be skilled communicators to achieve a good reputation inside the organization and gain trust from organizational members. According to Lorange (2005) *"the organization must sell its strategy to its own employees, further implying that a primary function of managers is to do just this. This takes communication competency. Possessing the set of skills that makes managers effective communicators is part of strategy implementation today"* (p. 54). It follows that employees of large multinational companies are stakeholders to the extent that they are the vehicle of transmission of a good company image worldwide. An internal effective communication seems to be crucial for business success in the global marketplace. In short, a new leader has to deliver sustained growth and profitability for the corporation by re-thinking the work activity and adjusting the corporate values to fit the local subsidiary. To do so implies the definition of new strategies and the implementation of meaningful changes to deliver the new goals. The introduction of "adjusted" corporate values opens up issues related to the improvement of common understanding and perceptions, because the transition requires agreement over new organizational patterns. The organizational members are expected to develop adapted models of behavior to fit in with the new goals. Employees of multinational companies carry different constructions of realities, which have to be diverted into a restricted area of possible interpreted perceptions. This is in practice the aim of an effective communication or in Lorange's words, *"to communicate in understandable terms with each*

other, and with a certain level of precision" (2005, p. 55). A creation of some zones of shared organizational meaning is crucial in overcoming resistance to change. The adjustment of corporate principles is a process of change because organizational members have to re-learn work activities and to re-commit to new work patterns. The transition phases leading to the final stage of new beginnings can be defined as a re-construction of consensus over new meanings.

The role of rhetorical communicative tools is relevant to help create some areas of common ground so as to avoid conflicts in the transition process and foster positive feelings of shared perceptions. So, this study addresses both issues of rhetoric and of communication uncertainty through an example of managerial effectiveness in the communication of change.

Effective rhetorical communication: A progressive adoption cycle

Traditional studies of Rhetoric derive from the ancient Greek. Rhetoric has a communicative connotation, since it is generally considered as the art of persuasion through language. Contemporary practices of rhetoric highlight the relevance of meaning as well.

In the field of business communication Sillince (2006) suggests that *"Rhetoric is the particular use of language deployed when a speaker addresses an audience in the form of a proposition about a controversy"* (p. 189). In the case of a leadership change the controversy relates to the search for consensus over new corporate values. The aim of rhetorical communicative tools is to reach a coordination of meanings between speaker and hearer thanks to the perception of belonging to a unique community, a work environment of trust and sincerity. Rhetorical communicative strategies can help create shared meanings by reinforcing the sense of belongingness to the corporation – a sense of 'we'-ness. The change agent has to avoid communicative misunderstandings or the production of multiple interpretations of the organizational reality by creating some zones of common meanings. It is within conditions of uncertainty that rhetoric defines the practice of people arguing their different projects (Holt 2006). The reference to the Aristotelian terms of *pathos* and *ethos* was useful to explain the communicative performance of the change agent. *Ethos* relates to the character and credibility of a speaker for the audience while *pathos* refers to the use of emotional appeals such as metaphor and storytelling to evoke feelings shared between the speaker and the audience. Holt (2006) argues that the Aristotelian *ethos* can refer to the possibility that managers can and should act morally to create an organizational awareness of their own conception of the common good. It is then taken for granted – to distinguish rhetoric from sophistry, that the Aristotelian's *ethos* is not meant to be an emotional manipulation of others in the service of exploitative interests. In addition, Holt (2006) claims that a good rhetorical communicator develops a publicly appropriate sensitivity to imagine the stories that the audience would like to tell taking advantage of emotional devices (*pathos*).

The rhetorical communicative approach investigated in this case-study follows the conceptual frameworks of the Aristotelian concepts of *ethos* and *pathos,* as previously described. The credibility or reputation of the new leader (*ethos*), reinforced through the use of emotional appeals (*pathos*) was crucial in overcoming resistance to change. According to Holt (2006) organizational procedures relate to a person's life stories. Consequently, the rhetorical performance of the change agent worked because in understanding others' perspectives an effective transmission of the proposed organizational procedures was possible. Suchan (2006)

notes *"Change agents need to carefully frame the change message to minimize worker defensiveness. Frames are language-created windows and lenses on organizational experience that focus workers´ perception and understanding"* (p. 26). Thus, the change agent tried to frame the change in the British subsidiary by creating a new organizational experience that helped employees and managers to minimize the pain of the transition process. The aim was to change both the perception and the understanding of the job experience by means of new organizational words and slogans, a different office location, a new reward system and finally, gatherings or events to reinforce the sense of belongingness to the corporation. This transition process was characterized by the dominant adoption of rhetorical communicative strategies, firstly to overcome resistance to change and then, to reach the majority of organizational members and avoid the risk of distortions in the communication process caused by the transmission of information through intermediaries. This direct communication from the top manager to employees and managers was possible thanks to the straightforward nature of rhetorical communication and to its easy access to a large number of people. The assignment period of this change agent lasted three years and it was named as a "Progressive-Adoption Cycle" to describe the three stages of the transition:

1. Denial phase
2. Acceptance phase
3. Support phase

Denial Phase

The first phase of change was characterised by the introduction in the British subsidiary of the adjusted corporate values which fitted the new goals and did not clash with the standardized corporate values of the multinational company. The routine was gradually altered in transitional stages towards the new organizational patterns. Employees experienced a sense of loss and hurt by remembering the "good old days" and there was an instinctual attitude of refusal of new information. In this initial stage of confusion and chaos there was the necessity to transmit a visual image of the change by means of a material transformation of the work environment. New values needed to be continuously communicated through visual images and through re-inventing corporate and business language, and were made tangible through a change in the office environment. The new leader proposed a slogan "*Winning STAR Behaviors*", which stood for:

○ *See reality*
○ *Take decisions quickly and boldly*
○ *Act with excellence and discipline*
○ *Review and learn*

"See reality" refers to the value of seeing things for what they are without being defensive. As unpredictability is inherent in human life and in organizational patterns, managers should be persuaded of their managerial ability to take clear decisions without delay. To avoid organizational *inertia* one needs to strike a balance between the search for predictability to take advantage of new opportunities or to prevent mistakes, and the need for fast decision making. So, managerial confidence in decision-making has to be improved to face uncertainties related to risks of error, lack of information and time pressures. These risks constitute what Merton (1936) names as *"the unanticipated consequences of social purposive action"* in his well-known sociological article. Merton suggests that social purposive action is unpredictable because of lack of adequate knowledge, error, imperious immediacy of interest

and value. Merton's conceptual framework can be applied to business communication since business decisions are an example of purposive action. In business terms one can suggest the following questions:

○ *"How much information do managers need in order to take a decision? ("lack of adequate knowledge")*
○ *To what extent does the fear of making errors impact on a business decision? ("error")*
○ *What is the impact of time and of hierarchical pressure on decision-making? ("Imperious immediacy of interest")*
○ *To what extent do subjective and own cultural values influence a business decision? ("value").*

These questions investigate the uncertainty of the decision-making process resulting from the unpredictability of future events and actions. Thus, the manager's job is to take challenging decisions as uncertainties cannot be eliminated or reduced. This communicative challenge relates to the ability to legitimize uncertainties in order to get to fast decision making.

Acceptance Phase

The second phase of transition in this leadership change of the British subsidiary set out to build emotional involvement and a sense of integration in new organizational patterns. In this stage employees and managers can see possibilities, build up energy to explore alternatives and learn new skills. Memorable initiatives foster feelings of belonging to a unique community crucial in overcoming resistance to change.

Yearly events were organized to communicate the past company results and the future planned achievements to a public of 850 people – British and Northern Irish employees and managers. Shared understanding was built through *pathos* or the heightening of emotional involvements occurring in magnificent places such as the 'Park Lane Hotel' in Central London or the new London Stadium 'Wembley Arena'. Moreover, the rhetorical tool of metaphors was deployed through story-telling to build up feelings of group-belonging; the change agent told the Aesop's fables to align common perceptions of the organizational reality. This is an example of a rhetorical performance that demonstrated sensitivity and an *"understanding of others' perspectives"* (Holt 2006).

Support Phase

A final rhetorical tool to definitively overcome the resistance to change was the construction of a company *ethos* through a clearly expressed reward system that celebrated outstanding performers and which was effective in developing employee commitment and feelings of ownership. Public recognition of any small accomplishments was useful in conveying enthusiasm and progress. For example, monthly conference meetings were organized to hand out *"Recognition Shares Certificates"* signed by the CEO of the company.

In conclusion, a measure of the effectiveness of the above mentioned rhetorical tools was shown in the results of an opinion survey conducted internally in the British subsidiary in the third year of the managing director's business activity. Results demonstrated a change in the behavior of employees, which implied the acceptance of the values called *"STAR behaviors"*, as previously described. For example, 88% of employees and managers agreed on the item *"I am encouraged to see reality on my business and raise potential issues",* and 81% of

interviewees declared *"I am empowered to make decisions that enable me to do my job effectively"*. So far, the transition has been conducted through an effective communicative performance: the rhetorical approach, proved by the high rates of agreement on items containing the "adjusted" corporate values proposed by the change agent. This case-study was useful to demonstrate that a leader can achieve communicative competence through the adoption of rhetorical strategies used to reach consensus over a new organizational experience. Admittedly, a task and relationship leadership style (Madlock 2008), which is by definition direct and straightforward as well as being sensitive to the others' perspectives, is crucial to the agreement on shared goals through a relational communication.

Concluding notes

This paper set out to combine rhetorical communicative tools and concepts of communication uncertainty to improve effectiveness in the communication of change in private corporations. A case of leadership change in the British subsidiary of Procter & Gamble showed how to overcome resistance to change by legitimizing uncertainties. This case of best practice investigated the rhetorical communicative performance of a change agent in the transformation of uncertainties into competitive advantages. Thus, the creation of some zones of sharedness of meaning was useful to improve common understanding of work practices and norms amongst a large number of corporate members through the rhetorical practice of *ethos* and *pathos* in Aristotelian terms. This entailed an effective transmission of the new organizational practice by the leader who could connect with the others' stories and points of view through the heightening of emotional involvement and the sense of belonging to the corporation. It is indeed in work environments characterized by *"organizational becoming"* (Tsoukas & Chia 2002) that people develop *"interpreted perceptions"* (Driskill & Goldstein 1986) insofar as they inter-subjectively make sense of their own business reality, which is *"an imputation of shared knowledge"* (Grant 2007).

A survey conducted internally in the organization in the last period of the assignment of the leader demonstrated wide consensus from the employees as well as the managers over the new adjusted corporate values proposed at the beginning of the transition process. This is the proof of the communicative effectiveness of the change agent, who was able to reach a wide number of organizational members directly thanks to the adoption of rhetorical strategies. This case has demonstrated that rhetorical strategies are particularly useful to executives eager to communicate directly with a large number of organizational members and to be aware of the perspectives of their audiences. Effectiveness of rhetorical approach implies a communicative competency crucial for strengthening the reputations of leaders inside large organizations.

However, it is relevant to point out that Procter & Gamble is an adaptive organization, which is open to new opportunities as to align with internal and external environmental threats. Consequently, the organizational members are used to ongoing changes. So, a leadership change in flexible and adaptive companies is not only a structural change, because of the involvement of big efforts and resources, but also a routine practice because of the high frequency of occurrence. Indeed, workers, employees and managers of Procter & Gamble active in subsidiaries or in headquarters constantly have to cope with uncertainties. The habitual practice of working in an uncertain environment of a routinized instability helps to attribute a positive connotation to uncertainties. The high occurrence of a practice, such as

that of changeable organizational procedures, generates a situation of routine, where the future is apparently predictable or known because of similar events in the past. Consequently, people do not resist change when there is an identification of the change with the routine, which is likely to occur quite often. Crucially for Kohlrieser (2006), change is not the event to avoid in the mindset of people. It is the painful process that leads to the transition from one state to another that causes a barrier to change.

To sum up, organizational members working in highly uncertain business environments have to learn to keep up with conflicting forces and be adaptable, flexible and creative. This is important in the maintenance of healthy business settings capable of balancing institutionalized procedures with routinized instability.

It is important to address an important limitation of this paper. Attitudes and opinions of employees and managers about the change agent and the proposed changes have not been directly investigated. This case-study primarily highlighted the communication of change solely from the perspective of the change agent. One future direction for further research could be an in-depth analysis of the impact of change on the audience: to what extent do employees and managers cope with the uncertainties related to the high occurrence of leadership changes? The aim should be to find out symmetries and asymmetries in the communicative interrelationship between change agents and audiences.

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Biography

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