

CONFLICT AT DISNEYLAND: A ROOT-METAPHOR ANALYSIS

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This field study uses metaphor analysis to illuminate recent conflicts at Disneyland. A 30-year change of emphasis of root-metaphors from "drama" to "family" reflects fundamental differences in world-view between management and employees. Recently, economic problems brought some of these differences to the surface, triggering a complex confrontation involving first- and second-order issues. The implications of this confrontation for the future of Disneyland are discussed. Metaphor analysis is offered as one potentially useful method for studying the symbolic, dynamic aspects of organizational conflict.

"A world ends when its metaphor dies."

Archibald Macleish, *Hypocrite Auteur*

DISNEYLAND occupies a special place in the American psyche. A favorite family vacation spot, its popularity is fueled by its clean-cut, "All-American" image. Disneyland, many believe, is "the happiest place on earth"; it represents much that is worth celebrating about traditional American values. Millions visit the park each year (and millions more Disneyworld and Disney's park in Tokyo) and most leave with this impression intact. Perhaps the values found along "Main Street, USA" are not gone forever, and it is "a small world after all."

But things are seldom what they seem. In recent years, internal conflict at Disneyland has provided a contrasting image to these public perceptions of the park. While dissatisfaction had been mounting for some time, internal strife peaked in late 1984 when a group of unionized employees voted to strike. Initial reports suggested the strike was centered around hiring and compensation issues, but on examination the differences appear to be more deep-seated. We argue in this paper that management and employees developed interpretive frameworks or world-views that were incompatible. Our aim in this paper is to illuminate this incompatibility and its relationship to conflict at Disneyland through the use of a new interpretive methodology, root-metaphor analysis.

A SYMBOLIC APPROACH TO ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

In their recent review, Putnam and Poole (in press) characterized existing research on organizational conflict as overly mechanistic and static, and called for studies exploring the symbolic aspects of organizational conflict within a dynamic framework. Their sentiment reflects the recent "interpretive turn" in organizational studies (Geertz, 1985; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1984). A primary goal of interpretive research on organizations is to articulate the taken-for-granted rules, assumptions, values, and beliefs that constitute organizational members' world views. Whether conducted under the rubric of organizational culture (Frost et al., 1985) or organizational symbolism (cf. Eisenberg & Riley, in press; Pondy et al., 1983), all

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studies of this sort share a concern for the meanings and interpretations organizational members attach to events (Eisenberg, 1986; Weick, 1983). Furthermore, a key assumption of this approach is that these interpretations are not monolithic, but rather multiple world-views can and do coexist within a single organization.

This last point has special relevance for conflict theory. Traditional conflict theories have been applied to organizations in ways that focus almost exclusively on overt goals, strategies, and resources. Much less attention has been paid to the differing world views that may underlie these disagreements. This deficiency of research in the organizational context is especially striking since theorists addressing smaller groups (notably families) have been successful in articulating multiple layers of conflict (e.g., Hoffman, 1981; Reiss, 1981).

The failure to investigate potential differences in world-views may prevent researchers and practitioners from understanding the true sources of overt conflict, and as a result, from understanding why conflict may not be effectively managed over time. Researchers interested in motivating change in social systems should distinguish between first-order change, in overt attitudes and behaviors, and second-order change, in orientation, world-view, and the rules of the game (Argyris, 1982; Hoffman, 1981; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974).

Organizational members sometimes hold divergent world views that can lead to deep-seated, unrecognized second-order conflicts. These world views function similarly to "group ideologies" (Billig, 1976; Putnam & Poole, in press) in that they constrain what count as legitimate topics for thought and action. Second-order differences can remain latent for long periods of time, and if and when they finally surface as conflict, their depth and nature are often misunderstood, and mistaken for first-order conflict. Such misunderstandings are important since one result of unrecognized second-order conflict is a lingering inability to manage differences effectively.

As we see it, then, the challenge is to develop methods for identifying world views which enable us to anticipate, understand, and address second-order conflicts. Root-metaphor analysis is offered here as one such useful method. Root-metaphors are rich summaries of interpretive frameworks, and the identification of multiple root-metaphors operating within an organization can provide important insight into the underlying reasons for conflict. Furthermore, the change in root-metaphors over time—their ascendancy, adherence, and eventual demise—reflects the evolution in attitudes, beliefs, and values of organizational members. In other words, root-metaphors enable us to address the symbolic nature of organizational conflict in a dynamic framework. Changes in and competition among root-metaphors can illuminate organizational members' struggles over appropriate definitions of reality, over conceptions of what work life should be like. Applying this methodology at Disneyland, we identified two root-metaphors which had developed over a period of 30 years to the point where second-order conflict was inevitable. Before presenting the details of our analysis, however, we first provide some definitions and background on the utility of metaphor analysis for organizational research.

METAPHORS AND ORGANIZING

Metaphors play a crucial role in the production, understanding, and communication of human thought and action. Their importance is evidenced by the growing

number of scholars from humanists to social and natural scientists who are investigating the richness of metaphorical forms in a variety of human activities. Metaphors influence how we view and make sense of the world in general (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Langer, 1979), how we learn (Ortony, 1979), how we think (Honeck & Hoffman, 1980), how we create knowledge (Kuhn, 1970) and how we behave in social settings (Berg, 1985; Deetz & Mumby, 1985; Koch & Deetz, 1981; Owen, 1985). Furthermore, metaphors are not neutral representations of reality; they are manifestations of particular ideologies and world-views, and have implications for what counts as information, and for what is thinkable (Deetz & Mumby, 1985). As a direct response to the increasing scholarly interest in metaphor, an interdisciplinary journal titled *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* went into publication in 1986.

The symbolic role of metaphor in organizing has received increasing attention recently (Brown, 1986; Morgan, 1986; Smith & Simmons, 1983; Weick, 1979). Metaphors are important in organizing because they aid members in the interpretation of events; they allow cues from one context (e.g., the family) to be applied to the understanding of another (e.g., the organization). This usage is consistent with what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) call "structural" metaphors; they function by projecting the characteristics of one structured experience onto another. Over time, structural metaphors help "organization participants to infuse their organizational experiences with meaning" (Pondy, 1983, p. 157).

Organizational metaphors are useful for understanding how two central dialectics of organizing—stability-change, and autonomy-coordination—are managed. For each of these tensions, emphasis on one pole to the neglect of the other is risky; the challenge is in maintaining an effective balance. Metaphors help organizational participants to achieve this balance. Regarding the first dialectic, Pondy argues that "metaphor facilitates change by making the strange familiar, but in that process it deepens the meaning of values of the organization by giving them expression in novel situations. . . . Because of its inherent ambivalence of meaning, metaphor can fulfill the dual function of enabling change and preserving continuity" (p. 164). This ambivalence is also helpful in managing the tension between autonomy and coordination. Effective managers and employees use metaphors strategically to facilitate a sense of cohesiveness and at the same time allow for a variety of individual interpretations (Eisenberg, 1984). Lastly, the two dialectics are clearly interdependent: Maintenance of a diversity of interpretations can aid an organization in adapting to change (Keesing, 1974).

Previous research on metaphor has often taken a static approach, offering little sense of the process whereby metaphors and their meanings evolve. This study employs metaphor analysis (Koch & Deetz, 1981) to reveal how root-metaphors guide the symbolic development of an organization, and to articulate a framework within which organizational conflict can be investigated.

The notion of "root-metaphors" in organizations is itself a metaphor. The roots of a plant are vital to its survival, but as a rule, are below ground and not immediately visible. Root-metaphors can be recognized by their ability to undergird a broad area of meaning. Root-metaphors are symbolic frames (Levinson, 1983) that provide an inferential base for understanding more discrete attitudes and behavior. They capture a fundamental, underlying world view, but are often unobtrusive with regard to their frequency of usage in ordinary discourse. For example, a typical root-metaphor is "argument is war" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This root-metaphor

may guide our thinking, but we are mostly unconscious of its presence. We may say "he needs to prepare a more convincing defense," "he destroyed my position," or "she was defeated," but we rarely think of the root-metaphor of war as informing our understanding of argument. Similarly, the root-metaphor of "organization as family" can be manifested in numerous surface references, (e.g., "we should all take care of our own") while the family metaphor may not be explicitly articulated.

The isolation of root-metaphors often results in a heightened appreciation of how meanings and interpretations develop over time, revealing not only "the current reality of the organization but also the other possibilities open to it" (Koch & Deetz, p. 13). From any particular root-metaphor, multiple variations can evolve. For example, seeing an organization as a "living thing" leads quite naturally to discussions of organizational "births" and "deaths" (e.g., Harris & Sutton, 1986). In time, organizational members may reject one root-metaphor in favor of another. An alternative to the military metaphor of organizing, for example, is "organization as family," emphasizing non-violence and intimacy over conflict and a strict hierarchy (Weick, 1979).

This study examines the symbolic aspects of conflict at Disneyland in four stages. First, we identify the root-metaphors underlying employee world views. Second, we reveal how specific groups within the organization have chosen to emphasize some root-metaphors over others. Third, we examine how these differences in root-metaphors help us to understand overt conflict at the park. Fourth, and finally, we explore the implications of this conflict for the future of Disneyland.

METHOD

Our initial investigation of Disneyland began in March, 1983, with eight interviews of managers representing employment, training, publicity, and public relations. These interviews elicited general beliefs about organizational values, norms, and activities. In addition to these data, we were given access to a large number of documents describing the history and current activities of Disneyland. In late 1984, conflict came to a head in a 22-day strike by a group of unionized employees. Structured interviews were held with key figures in the strike, including negotiators and spokespeople for unions and management, and the federal mediator.¹ More focused data collection began in August, 1985. Thirty-five structured interviews with hourly employees were conducted. To maximize confidentiality, interviews were held in the lounge of a local restaurant, a favorite Disneyland haunt. Our sample included 25 men and 10 women, ranging in age from 21 to 45 and in tenure from two months to 20 years. Divisions represented in the sample were costuming, entertainment, foods, merchandising, services, and operations.²

Interviews were conducted in three parts. First, employees were asked general, open-ended questions like "What is it like working at Disneyland"? These questions were designed to build rapport and to solicit metaphors-in-use without introducing unnecessary bias from the researchers. Second, employees were given a list of metaphors that *management* had used in previous interviews and documents to describe the park,³ and asked to identify those terms which currently seemed to be descriptive of the park. Third, and finally, employees were asked to complete the sentence "Life at Disneyland is like . . ." and in doing so were encouraged to discuss the reasons for the strike, their attitudes toward the strike, and the extent to which they thought the organization was changing.

All interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed; the average interview was 30 minutes in length. Root-metaphors were identified from the transcripts through a semantic sorting process in which coherent patterns or clusters of meaning emerged around specific metaphorical expressions (Koch & Deetz, 1981). For example,

Expressions: "The cast members"
 "The show"
 "Our costumes"
 "The Disney image"
 "The Disney role"

Shared understanding: Disneyland has actors, costumes, stories to be enacted on a stage and an audience to be entertained

Organizational entailment: Disneyland puts on a show

Root-metaphor: Disneyland is a drama

A number of metaphors were initially identified (as shown in our original list of metaphors) but it soon became clear that there were two dominant metaphors which framed employee talk and which were classified as root-metaphors. Root-metaphors were chosen for their ability to provide a coherent summary of employee world-views, which was not necessarily reflected in their *frequency* of usage by employees (i.e., while few employees used the term "drama" to describe their activities, many more talked about the Disney "family" explicitly). Once the root-metaphors were identified, records were made of (1) who used them and under what circumstances, (2) how users interpreted them, and (3) how these interpretations were similar to or different from one another.

RESULTS

We do not claim to provide a complete history of Disneyland, which is available elsewhere.⁴ More important for our purposes is what has *not* been documented about the symbolic, affective nature of the park. Disneyland has been characterized as an "excellent" organization with a strong concern for the customer and widely shared core values and beliefs (Peters & Waterman, 1982). These shared understandings are manifest in the idiosyncratic language of the organization. Visitors are not customers but "guests," personnel is known as "casting," and there is a clear distinction made between the park's "on-stage" and "back-stage" areas. This specialized vocabulary is repeated in orientation and training seminars as well as in ongoing development efforts, and as a consequence is readily used by both employees and management. More than in most organizations, the appropriate use of such symbols is crucial to Disneyland's image and day-to-day operation.

The two root-metaphors identified from our interview data were "drama" and "family." Other metaphors were initially considered, such as "magical," "team-work," and "people experts," but further investigation revealed that they could be subsumed within employees' characterization of the park as either a drama or a family. For example,

The magic is part of the drama:

Magical—no doubt about it. Downtown Anaheim with two million people, in the middle of a town . . . there's something about walking into a place where there's sixty-six acres and Mark Twain's whistle blowing. . . . The costumes have something to do with it. You punch in dressed in t-shirt, shorts . . .

[then you] get into your coon skin hat, leathers and stuff . . . you're home free. (Ride Operator/Male/6 years tenure)

Teamwork comes from being a member of a family:

Teamwork—you have to have this to have things go as smooth as they do, it goes with family—like that's why people are so close. (Parking Lot/Female/5 years tenure)

No metaphors were volunteered by hourly employees that had not already been proposed by management, a surprising finding which underscores the important role management may play in providing interpretive frameworks for employees (Pfeffer, 1981; Pondy, 1978; Weick, 1980).

Root-metaphor I: The Disney experience as drama

Organizational documents, particularly those recording Disneyland's history (see footnote 4), largely explain the pervasiveness of the drama metaphor. It is clearly, consciously and repeatedly stated in this literature that from the outset—the early 1950's—Walt Disney and his followers conceived of the park in dramatic terms. The design and construction of the park were influenced by the theatrical techniques learned in the Disney movie studios. Plans for the park were drawn up with the aid of “storyboard” techniques used by cartoonists. The parking lot was regarded as the “outer lobby,” the ticket booths the theater's “box office,” and the sixteen-foot wall surrounding the park, the “theater walls.” Employee behavior and appearance were carefully regulated and justified by this dramatic context: Dress codes (known as “costuming”) and rules for proper grooming were widely acknowledged as “all part of the show.” Special ways of looking, talking, and acting comprised the Disney “role” and were part of the Disney “script.” The park or “show” is the enactment of Walt Disney's utopian vision; it is “the happiest place on earth.” Thus Disneyland was designed as a show, an escape from the real world, where paying customers are “guests,” and every employee plays the role of host or hostess. Organizational documents and training seminars frequently cite Disney: “I don't want the public to see the real world they're living in. . . . I want them to feel they're in another world.”

Our interview data reveal how successful management has been in getting employees to adopt the drama metaphor. Most employees come to see their role at the park as not simply providing a service but as entertainment. Not one person we interviewed used the words “customer,” “amusement park,” or “uniforms” in describing life at Disneyland.

Despite this avoidance of traditional business terminology, the drama metaphor is not inconsistent with a business orientation. Dramas are highly structured, rule-governed presentations, in which individuals play clearly defined roles designed to bring about an intended effect. Moreover, all theatrical concerns have box office considerations. Introductory guidelines, manuals, and even a recent television commercial⁵ stress the business orientation alongside drama; one management training manual concludes that “each member . . . must have a clear understanding of the ‘business of show business.’ ”

The mid-1960's was a period of dramatic change for Disneyland. This period was marked by general growth and prosperity in the American economy, and the growing success of Walt Disney Productions. Gaining an international reputation as the “finest in family entertainment,” Disneyland was hailed as the corporation's

“flagship,” secure in its popularity and emerging as a revered American institution. In this era of material well-being, however, the park suffered the loss of Walt Disney, who died in 1966.

The question of what happens to an organization when its founder departs is currently under debate (Martin et al., 1985; Rosenblatt et al., 1985; Schein, 1983, 1985; Siehl, 1985.) Martin et al. are particularly critical of the popular belief that a founder can leave an organizational culture as a legacy, calling it a “seductive promise” (p. 99). Disneyland is an interesting case. Disney was a charismatic founder and leader (still referred to by management and employees as “Walt”), and the organization struggled to adapt to his loss. In his absence, management reflected on and often reinterpreted Disney’s life and achievements, as evidenced by the nostalgic histories in organizational documents, the commemorative exhibit housed inside the park, and the creation of the “Disney philosophy.”

By the 1980’s, however, employees were casting themselves as the sole “caretakers” of Disney’s legacy. They perceived management’s actions as departing from Disney’s original vision, and complained bitterly.

It’s their [management’s] responsibility to maintain, preserve and project the image . . . ; we’ve seen a change in attitudes and beliefs during the last 16 years. . . . Facilities have to change but not the subtleties behind them: styles of management, the handling of its cast, the treatment of its employees (Ride Operator/Male/20 years tenure)

Ironically, the employees’ impulse to preserve Disney’s founding vision resulted in a revised interpretation that even Disney may not have fully endorsed. Their interpretation placed primary emphasis on Disney employees as “family,” and it was the protection and preservation of that interpretation that led ultimately to conflict with management.

Root-metaphor II: The Disney experience as family

In response to the loss of Disney, documents reveal that management began to nurture the idea of a “Disney philosophy.” The philosophy was intended to capture the spirit of and to act as a surrogate for Walt. Disneyland became known as a “friendly” place to work, an organization on a “first-name basis” in which “teamwork” was paramount. Current introductory guidelines read “we are an informal, friendly organization and it is essential that we maintain this. Walt insisted that everyone call him ‘Walt’ and he applied his first-name philosophy to everyone in the organization.” The organizational stories we were told depicted Disney as a caring family man who reserved his Saturdays for his two daughters and who designed the park to give his and other families a safe, clean, fun place to go. The establishment of “Disneyland University” offering career and extra-curricular activities along with generous compensation packages reinforced Walt’s philosophy of the caring employer. In short, Walt Disney was immortalized as the somewhat paternalistic, spiritual leader of an organization that, in turn, regarded itself as the caretaker of his beliefs. Friendly, wholesome, family entertainment had become synonymous with “Disney.”

Our interview data suggest that the notions of friendliness (originally designed to refer to the employee-customer relationship) were interpreted by employees to refer to relationships among management and employees as well. While the notion of Disneyland as a tight-knit ‘family’ existed to some extent in earlier years, the mid-1960’s saw it receive emphasis that overshadowed even the drama metaphor.

The friendly, family atmosphere was so convincing that most employees and many managers came to believe it uncritically, seeming at times to forget that Disneyland was a for-profit business selling a highly calculated fantasy world. Indeed, one long-term manager bemoaned the fact that people often forgot Disney was "a shrewd business man, intolerant of incompetence, who certainly knew how to make a buck." Despite recent hard times, the feeling of the "Disney family" persists. Some typical employee comments:

These people are like my brothers and sisters. (Ride Operator/Male/3 years tenure)

It's family-like as far as the employees go (Attractions trainer/Female/8.5 years tenure)

Real close knit . . . better than marriage (Ride Operator/Male/6 months tenure)

Yes, family-like; I feel so close to the employees (Attractions hostess/Female/5.5 years tenure)

The people who work here treat each other as a family, there seems to be a common cause. . . . We're family presenting family entertainment; it's like we're inviting someone to our home to entertain them. (Entertainer/Male/2 years tenure)

As the family metaphor gained acceptance, employees not only continued to treat the public like personal guests but came to expect similar favored treatment from management. Management, in turn, did little to discourage this tendency; if anything, this close-knit feeling helped business, improved employee morale, and in some cases was even consistent with their personal dreams for what the park should be like. This is reflected in naming the annual party the "family picnic." Management continued its paternalistic style; according to one executive, the park became "so comfortable that employees were afraid to leave the womb." The dream of a familial utopia had become a fragile reality, and work at Disneyland was no longer just a role, but "a way of life." (Ride Operator/Male/7 years tenure).

Consequences of the Change in Metaphorical Emphasis

The years leading up to the 1984 strike were characterized by a change in emphasis of root-metaphors from drama to family, accompanied by parallel changes in the way management and employees interpreted their work experiences. In addition, general economic factors such as increased operating costs, reduced spending power, greater competition, takeover attempts and corporate-level resignations led to a growing sense of malaise and uncertainty at the park. By the 1980's financial problems were substantial and the economic aspects of the park became increasingly salient to management. This seemingly new emphasis on the "bottom-line" offended some employees, and was perceived by many as constituting a breach of Disney's caring philosophy. Employee comments illustrate this resentment:

Walt Disney's philosophy was to bring families together so that they could have fun. . . . The philosophy is now let's make as much money as [we] can. . . . We're numbers now, we're not people to them anymore. (Merchandising/Female/14 years tenure)

It used to be, 'let's try to make the employees as happy as possible so that they make the public happy' and now it's 'let's save as much money as we can and make a buck.' (Ride Operator/Male/7 years tenure)

Management doesn't really care any more. . . . They keep going for the dollars and that's it. (Attractions trainer/Female/8.5 years tenure)

What management wanted from us ten years ago and what they want now are two different things. . . . It's now more for the money and the employees are second. (Foods/Male/15 years tenure)

Management doesn't care anymore. (Attractions hostess/Female/8 years tenure)

There was a time when the employee was very important to the company; now they're more of a company. . . . It's getting more like a business. . . . I don't think the park should be run like a business. (Services/Female/8 years tenure)

In late 1984, management proposed a two-year wage freeze and an elimination of benefits for some future employees, thereby creating a two-tier pay scale. Arguments presented by management were based on a 62% discrepancy between the amount Disneyland was paying its employees and comparable positions in the entertainment industry. Management's concerns were essentially economic, as they needed to improve the business aspects of the show in order to remain solvent. From the employee's point of view, management's preoccupation with economics had potentially disturbing implications. Employees perceived the underlying issue to be a threat to the Disney 'family.' Employees were shocked and claimed management's proposals violated the spirit of Disneyland, Walt's original vision. Accustomed to thinking of themselves as different and special, it was unthinkable to bring Disneyland employees in line with other amusement parks.

The people have made Disneyland what it is. Disneyland claims to be different, and it is different. Walt Disney said many times that the difference is in our people. (Spokesperson for five-union bargaining team)

Resentment of management decisions ran high and culminated in a 22-day strike by unions that had not struck for over 29 years. During this period, striking employees held a candlelight vigil to honor the memory of Disney and his philosophy, and bumper stickers were made which read, "Disneyland—Walt's dying dream." Employees claimed that management acted unfairly—that this was not the way one treats "family." Some typical employee reactions:

My family wouldn't treat me the way they [management] do. (Merchandising/Female/14 years tenure)

It's just totally business . . . they are not worried about the family thing. (Foods/Male/3 years tenure)

Getting to be businesslike, especially this last year, we're a lot more towards the money making, let's go for the buck . . . we're losing a lot of the magic. (Sweeper/Female/2.5 years tenure)

They don't care. (Ride Operator/Male/4 years tenure)

It's all business now. (Parking/Female/9 years tenure)

The family-like thing is really dying . . . it's becoming more and more businesslike and less and less like a family. (Ride Operator/Male/8 years tenure)

It's getting farther away from family like . . . but it's one of the best run businesses I've ever seen . . . everything's down to a science. (Attractions/Female/11 years tenure)

It's not fun to work at Disneyland any more . . . they gave us a cold slap in the face. (Merchandise/Female/14 yrs tenure)

Walt wanted family, but it's business now, not Walt's dream, that's shot, it's not what he wanted. (Ride Operator/Male/5 yrs tenure)

It's the end of an era . . . it's time to leave, they don't want us any more. (Ride Operator/Male/8.5 years tenure)

Management tried in vain to counteract the growing discontent with their own interpretation of "family." According to management, family life was sometimes hard, and truly close families must make sacrifices if they are to survive. This attempt at reinterpretation failed to catch on, however, and it soon became clear to management that the financial exigencies they faced would require some permanent changes in the way the park was run.

Forging New Interpretations: The Strike and its Aftermath

During the strike, actions on both sides followed a predictable pattern: Unions picketed, management obtained restraining orders, union officials were arrested, management issued an ultimatum, letters of replacement were sent and rehiring began. When the strike started, only a small percentage of employees crossed the picket-line. Later on, management's ultimatum convinced a third of the striking employees to cross, which aggravated poor relations among employees.

Three days prior to the end of the strike, striking employees made their grievances more public; they paid their way into the park and distributed handbills to the guests. In the words of one union official, "it was a wowzer," and it had a profound effect on both management and the public. By going public with their complaints, the employees had effectively rejected the validity of the drama. This move was interpreted by some as a "clever strategy" but by others as "a cheap shot, a tacky move."

The striking employees were surprisingly unanimous over the specific issues, as was noted by the experienced union spokespersons. One commented, "I've never seen anything quite like the way they turned out. Ninety-nine percent of them showed at every meeting, very vocal, very much in unison, very much all felt the same way. . . . They really are a family."

For the striking employees, the overt conflict was over economics, but the deeper second-order issue was that their interpretation of the Disney philosophy, with family as its root-metaphor, was in danger of extinction. Consider this employee's representative opinion:

It is not a strike over economics but policy and principle. It's the break of the family tradition; it's turning a family-oriented business into another cog of a large corporate structure and losing that identity. . . . There's no belief in the corporation's word whatsoever. . . . We should be able to conduct our business exactly as it was 20 years ago. . . . There's no reason why we can't be a family. (Ride operator/Male/20 years tenure)

Moreover, the candlelight vigil in memory of Walt Disney held by employees during the strike further confirms the strikers' deeper concerns, their longing to preserve a threatened world view: "Its purpose [the vigil] was a hint of exactly what this strike was all about. It was a remembrance of Walt's ideals." (Ride operator/Male/20 years tenure)

Since the strike, overt tensions have eased somewhat, but relations throughout the park seem greatly changed. Not only do some hourly employees view management as their adversaries, the employees themselves are now fractionated. In and around the period of the strike, the family metaphor was reinterpreted by many employees to exclude management. In the aftermath, some employees have been excluded from the family circle as well. Generational differences are now dividing employees; the two-tier pay-scale which came out of the strike settlement ("grandfathering") makes a clear distinction between employees of three years or more, known informally as "the old timers," and recent employees.

Tensions are further aggravated by contradictory desires among employees. Disneyland employees resent being "treated like kids," and "not [being] allowed to have a personal opinion," yet at the same time miss the benefits of the paternalistic care of earlier years. In an attempt to facilitate interaction among employees, management initiated a circulating employee program, in which employees move

through a variety of jobs. But the change in interpretive framework reflected by the revision of "who's in the family" has proven to be pervasive. Since many employees no longer trust management to look out for their best interests, the new program is seen as yet another attempt by management to destroy the family and to break the "Disney spirit." One employee complains, "when you move people away that love each other, how are you going to boost morale? . . . they are losing the family." (Ride operator/Male/5 years tenure)

CONCLUSIONS

Our purpose in this study was to illuminate recent conflicts at Disneyland through the use of a new interpretive methodology, root-metaphor analysis. Our major point has been that disagreements over policies and procedures are often better understood in the context of underlying world views of management and employees. In good times at Disneyland, use of terms like "drama" or "family" caused few obvious problems. In light of harsh economics and scarce resources, however, the somewhat divergent behavioral implications of these symbols became clear. The managerial emphasis on drama and the "business of show business" implied structure, conformity, efficiency, and a concern for the bottom-line. This was incompatible with the employees' emphasis on family, which suggested a transcendence of structure and an uncritical support of fellow employees. The strike at Disneyland, then, is traceable to a conflict over rival deep-seated, second-order issues, represented here as competing root-metaphors.

Our experience with root-metaphor analysis in this study makes us hopeful for its potential in future research. While other methods exist for studying organizational member's interpretations, (e.g., analysis of organizational myths or stories), the concept of root-metaphor is elegant and easily understood by both researchers and practitioners. Naturally, care must be taken not to overgeneralize; interpretations may not always be representative, and perspectives may exist that are missed by the researchers. In all, however, we believe the strengths outweigh the limitations. Further, we feel that as a method for investigating organizational conflict, root-metaphor analysis captures the symbolic and dynamic character of organizational life.

Disneyland is sometimes singled out by organizational observers as possessing an especially "strong" or "excellent" culture. Most writers making this claim further contend that such a culture, once established, would be highly resistant to change. Wilkins (1984) takes exception to this conclusion, with important implications for this study. According to Wilkins, while so-called "strong cultures" with widely shared world-views are difficult to build, they are relatively easy to destroy. Alternative interpretations are always available; people enter organizations with pre-existing frameworks for thinking about work (e.g., as stifling, unfair, adversarial) and even a single bad experience can trigger a dramatic shift such as that seen at Disneyland. This argument may explain the fast rate at which Disney employees have become disillusioned. Once there was trouble in paradise, employees had in mind the culturally shared interpretation of "management as adversary" to fall back on.

Successful organizations find ways of coping with multiple goals, and of managing the stability-change and autonomy-coordination dialectics described earlier in this paper. The Disneyland experience is not atypical of our times: A large, successful

company faces serious financial exigencies brought on by a failing economy, and, in turn, cuts labor costs in an attempt to remain solvent. Similar examples can be found in the domestic airline and automobile industries. What makes Disneyland unique is the distance its employees perceive the company to have fallen, from a utopian vision to the cold reality of the bottom line. The problematic nature of their utopia is exacerbated by the particular interpretation of "family" the employees chose to advocate. There are many different types of families, but a central aspect of American mythology holds that happy families are tightly-knit and conflict-free. Recent research on family interaction reveals not only that this is a myth, but that perpetuation of the harmony-at-all-costs ideal can cause serious problems of adjustment (Reiss, 1981). In promoting a conflict-free work environment, and in particular one that was "on-stage" for all the world to see, Disneyland management and employees never learned to manage conflict effectively and were therefore seriously upset when disagreements finally surfaced. Of all the employees we interviewed, only two dancers were convinced that happiness was still the order of the day. Others had already made plans to leave, while still others were gearing up for the possibility of a second strike. Perhaps no organization can claim to be the "happiest place on earth" for long, especially if employees start to believe it.

In spite of all that has taken place, the future is not altogether bleak. From managements' point of view, the key to Disneyland's future lies in a reconciliation of current economic realities with a distinctive tradition. One traditional image that may be worth preserving is that of "Walt" as the organizational hero:

He was a genius. (Ride operator/Male/4 years tenure)

A lot of people say if Walt was here it would be different and I have to agree with that. . . . He was a very special person. (Supervisor/Female/8 years tenure)

If Walt Disney was alive today he'd. . . . (Ride operator/Male/3 years tenure)

A conscious reconsideration of the drama metaphor might help reconcile management with employees, and past with present. An appeal of the drama metaphor lies in its ability to subsume some of the interpretations of both management and employees; it simultaneously retains the image of the park as *family* entertainment and permits a *business* orientation. Alternatively, an altogether new root-metaphor may be needed, one that sees employees neither as 'actors' nor 'children' but as full participants in shaping the present and future of life at Disneyland.

NOTES

¹The second round of interviews was designed to confirm results from the first round and to obtain data on the purposes, language and actions of the 1984 strike. The interview schedule included the following questions: What are the characteristics of Disneyland that make it a unique organization, and in what ways is it similar to other organizations?; Which of the following terms accurately describe the park and personnel? (Subjects were shown or read the list of terms listed in footnote 3); Have you heard personnel using any of these terms, in particular?; Did you notice any discrepancies between the terms used and actions taken?; What is the Disney philosophy? Do personnel agree on what it is?; What does it mean that "the people make the place"?; What were the issues in the strike: from management's point of view?, from the union's point of view?, from your point of view?; What were the intentions and reactions of all parties to the respective strategies and moves in the strike?; What are the short- and long-term implications of the strike?

²The sample of hourly employees included members from all the principal divisions except maintenance. The latter were particularly inaccessible because they worked the "graveyard" shift. We decided, however, that their inclusion would be largely redundant given the tenure and age ranges of the present sample and the general consensus of opinion which existed among those interviewed.

³Subjects were presented with the following list of terms and were told that they "had been used to describe

Disneyland"; management was not identified as the source: *friendly, people experts, magical, family-like, informal, pioneering, teamwork, democratic, business-like, wholesome, like a drama*

⁴See France, V.A. (1982). *The spirit of Disneyland*. Unpublished manuscript, Anaheim, CA; Morgenstern, J. (1966, December 26). Walt Disney (1901-1966): Imagineer of fun. *Newsweek*, p. 68-69; Walt Disney Productions. (1977). *The Disney theme show*; Walt Disney Productions. (1979). *Disneyland: The first quarter century*; Walt Disney Productions. (1981). *The Disney management style*; Walt Disney Productions. (1982). *Disneyland: A talented team*; Walt Disney Productions. (1982). *Your role in the Disneyland show*.

⁵A recent TV commercial for Pacific Bell shows a Disneyland representative stressing the business side of his organization.

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