

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

#### 9.1 Introduction

To be successful in the face of stiff competition, globalisation, and ever changing environments, organisations that undertake a large-scale planned change initiative must maintain employee commitment and loyalty to the organisation. Organisational members' identification with an organisation's goals, direction and thrust is crucial for the success of organisational change management. Employee identification with the organisation, as well as ideological alignment with the organisational goals, is pivotal for the success of the organisation.

Interest in discourse and the employment of discourse analysis is prominent in both organisation studies (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b) and in organisational communication research (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2001, Sillince, 2007). There is hardly an organisational change that does not involve the re-definition, the re-labeling, or the re-interpretation of an institutional activity. Thus, language is not simply the medium through which change is brought about, but change occurs in language and, by doing so, language brings about a different state of affairs (Tsoukas, 2005, p. 99). Grant et al. (2005), claim that in order to fully understand organisational change, it is necessary to engage with it as a discursively constructed object (p. 7). The role of actors in bringing about ideological change and the construction of organisational

members' identity in organisational change, as well as how the narrative of change unfolds needs to be woven into the account of change. Organisational change involves the use of discourse. Discourse, thus, is the means to effect change. In order to understand the role of discourse and what it does to bring about change, it has to be studied discursively. In other words, "to understand change, we need to understand how it is discursively constructed and interpreted" (Grant et al., 2005, p. 12).

This study has examined how an organisation through its large-scale reengineering process to implement organisational change initiatives appropriated discourse of transformation to effect changes among its organisational members. Reengineering is defined as the process of reorganising, restructuring, and redesigning work processes and job functions to bring about breakthrough improvements in performance. The organisation's focus is to change mindsets and persuade members to embrace characteristics, traits, attitudes and behaviour that are deemed to be beneficial to the organisation.

Organisations are essentially designed to accomplish unified corporate purposes, and so become primary sites for the application of managerial control aimed at creating identity as well as constructing ideological change:

Organisations, by their very nature, are persuasive enterprises [that] must . . . (1) maintain a system of communication, (2) communicate a common purpose, and (3) secure the essential contribution of members. These key elements of organisation can easily be translated in terms of communication networks, shared "visions," and individual motivation,

respectively, . . . , The central concern of organisations is control . . .  
[which] manifests itself primarily through symbolic means; . . . the  
“system” is in fact a set of symbols (rules, policies, job descriptions, etc.).  
(Cheney & Mchillan, 1990, p. 98)

The aim of this study as outlined in Chapter 1 was to examine the discursive construction of ideology and identity as a means of exercising organisational control in organisational change management. Sample texts of discourses (in the form of presentations known as ‘Sharing Sessions’, articles in the company’s newsletters and memoranda circulated by the Human Resource Department) of an institution as instances of the dominant discourse of organisational change were analysed for the construction of changes in ideology and the construction of ‘ideal’ member identities and their implications to organisational control.

The theoretical framework on which the analysis is based draws on insights from theories of ideology and identity construction developed in the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Theories on power, identity and discourse that explicate the relationship between identity in discourse and control are mainly drawn from works within CDA. Other than that, organisation studies provide insight into the processes of organisation, organisational change, organisational identity, and identity regulation. The study adopts a critical stance in its analysis, where the exercise of power in discourse, especially where it is obscured, is emphasised to reveal the potential of ideological change and identity construction in effecting control over organisational members.

The main conclusion of the study is that the organisational change discourse (termed as ‘discourse of transformation’) deployed by the management in its organisational change initiatives actively constructs an ideology and ‘ideal’ member identity that are sanctioned by the organisation. The prescription of beliefs, attitudes, motives, values, and behaviours as characterising the ‘ideal’ ideology and ‘ideal’ member is intended at procuring members’ obedience and conformity with organisational goals and objectives. The discourse (as deployed through the ‘Sharing Sessions’, written articles and memoranda) determinedly constructs, aligns or realigns and positions the ‘ideal’ member to view reality only from the point of view sanctioned by the organisation.

The discourse of transformation in the study which refers to the ‘Sharing Sessions’, articles in the organisation’s newsletters and the memoranda disseminated by the Human Resource Department of the organisation produce and reproduce the same theme or message; to promote a change in mindsets to embrace change, to work as a team to move the organisation forward and to be innovative and ‘think-out-of-the-box’. The discourse is replete with the word ‘change’ and the motto for the organisation’s change initiatives which is ‘Moving Forward’. The unified message which resonates in the discourse of transformation serves to effectively do ideological work as well as to promote ‘ideal’ member identities.

This chapter summarises the main findings of the study, and the implications for organisational control. Finally, the study’s limitations are briefly discussed and directions for future research are suggested.

## **9.2 The construction of ideology and ‘ideal’ member identity as constructed in the discourse of transformation and its implications for organisational control**

Control is a central organisational function. It is a means by which work processes, resources, behaviour and motivations are coordinated and directed towards the achievement of an organisation’s goals. This study is concerned with the construction of ideological change and identity as a means of organisational control, through the discursive positioning of members in the dominant discourse of the organisation during organisational change.

The analysis indicates that ideology and identity construction feature strongly in the discourses of the organisation undergoing a process of change. The ideological change and identity of members are actively constructed and oriented in the direction that would lead to the realisation or conformity to organisational objectives. Various discursive strategies are identified as the means by which the ideological change and member identities are constructed. The analysis of these strategies reveals a process of ascribing and prescribing group membership, relationships, attitudes, beliefs, motives, values and behaviours for members. The discourse of transformation, namely the ‘Sharing Sessions’, the articles in the newsletters as well as the memoranda collectively construct ideological change and identity. They complement and supplement each other. In the following sections, the change in mindsets and the construction of the ‘ideal’ member identity are summarised.

### **9.2.1 Ideological change**

The appropriation of various discourses within the discourse of transformation serves to do ideological work. The discourse of transformation is the umbrella term to subsume the various types of discourses identified. Eight types of discourses are identified in the analysis in Chapters 5 and 6. The discourses that are deployed are the discourses of marketisation, imperatives, pain, involvement, change, sharing, leadership and personal effectiveness. The discourse of transformation advocates practices for promoting shifts in mindsets and/or consciousness as the principal method to address change dynamics. Organisational transformation requires a change in consciousness.

Organisations need to continually reinvent themselves in response to an ever changing and continuously more complex environment. The mandate for organisations is to 'change or perish'. The organisation in the study is on the threshold of a massive reengineering or restructuring process. In order for the organisation to survive it needs members to change their mindsets or ways of 'thinking, 'being' and 'doing'. It has to seek a common ground where the dominant approach is to get simultaneous agreement among members by constructing a legitimate version of reality.

The discourse of marketisation sets out to invoke a change in understanding of the current reality of academic institutions. Private academic institutions are currently deemed as business enterprises and so institutional members of the institution such as academicians have no choice but to play the role of marketers. Marketing of the

institution and its programmes of study are not the sole responsibility of the marketing division alone. Everyone has to be involved in marketing.

Discourse of imperatives directs and exhorts members to change their mindsets and attitudes, such as attitudes towards marketing and gives directives to leaders in the organisation on how to effect change in their subordinates. Leaders as the catalysts of change have to be mindful of their role in the process of change.

Discourse of pain highlights the fact that although change is painful and uncomfortable, it is inevitable. The metaphor of the eagle clearly explains this idea. The eagle undergoes a process of transformation that takes one hundred and fifty days in order for it to live up to the age of seventy. An eagle's life span is only about forty years. The process of transformation is a slow and painful one in which an eagle breaks its own beak against rocks, pulls out its talons which become curved and so is unable to catch its prey, and pulls out its feathers which become heavy and cling to its body. The metaphor serves to highlight that although change is painful, it is necessary.

Involvement of members in the organisation's processes is promoted through the discourse of involvement. When members are involved, they will feel a sense of ownership towards the organisation. This will motivate them to be committed, dedicated and loyal members of the organisation. The discourse of change highlights that change is inevitable and continuous but nevertheless is a necessity for survival. For change to take place there must be a change in understanding, mindsets, and work orientations. Some of the requirements for change to take place are

adaptability, and the right attitude. The analogy of the iceberg is effectively used to illustrate the importance of having the right attitude. The barriers to change and the consequences of not changing are also described in the analysis.

The discourse of sharing does more than the sharing of information; instead it is euphemistic for teaching or training. The 'Sharing Sessions' are sites for mind control. The selection of topics for the sessions serves to do ideological work. The setting of the sessions in the auditorium of the institution where all employees were expected to assemble and listen to the presentations monthly was carefully orchestrated by the top management. The national anthem followed by the singing of the company song and then the institution's song was a method to psychologically orientate and reorientate members to uphold, and sustain allegiance to the company.

Discourse of leadership sets out to empower leaders in the organisation to effect change among members. Lists of directives and the essential characteristics needed for good leadership are stressed. Since leaders are the catalysts for change in an organisation, they have to be good role models and exemplars for the members. The example of the Dragon Boat Race clearly illustrates this. Leaders are akin to the coxswain in a boat race who determines the direction and pace of the race.

Discourse of personal effectiveness sets out to stress the fact that personal effectiveness can be extended to the organisational level. If a member is personally effective as an individual, then he or she becomes an asset to the organisation at large.



The various discourses therefore emphasise the correct attitude towards organisational change. Employees' attitudes towards change are a key component to whether an organisation's change efforts are a success or a failure. When members possess a strong, positive attitude towards change, they are more likely to behave in focused, persistent and effortful ways that support and facilitate the change initiatives that are implemented. As Antoni (2004, p. 198) says, "one has to change the beliefs of organisational members which shape their behaviour, in order to support sustainable organisational change". Organisational members must adopt the organisation's ideology and must position themselves within a system that privileges the effectiveness of the organisation. Discourse of transformation (which is a general term for the oral and written discourses in the study) can be deployed by an organisation to effect change.

In reality, the discourse of transformation in setting out to do ideological work actually controls and constrains members. Members are positioned to adopt the line of reasoning that is promoted and are conditioned to identify with the organisational goals and objectives. This identification with the organisation is a form of unobtrusive control.

### **9.2.2 The characteristics of the 'ideal' member**

In Chapters 7 and 8, the analysis focuses on the construction of the identity of the organisational member. The 'ideal' member is defined as the member who possesses traits, attitudes, and beliefs that are implicitly or explicitly evaluated as 'correct' or

‘preferred’ in the data set. This section summarises the traits, attitudes and beliefs the ‘ideal’ member is expected to have, and draws out the implications of this ‘ideal’ identity on organisational control.

The member identities that are promoted as ‘ideal’ are that of a participative member, team player, adaptable member, innovative member, a single-minded member, a member with the right values and a knowledge worker. A participative member is a co-sharer of responsibilities and involves himself in the achievement of organisational goals, and setting of targets. Participation is tantamount to a proactive contribution to the organisation. The identity of an organisational member as a team member ensures that the individual puts organisational goals ahead of individual goals, and collaborates with others for the betterment of the organisation. Adaptable and innovative members are crucial as they would be open to embrace change, willing to take risks and would be proactive when faced with challenges. Likewise, the ‘ideal’ member identities of a knowledge worker who is willing to share knowledge in the service of the organisation as well as a member imbued with the right values, which include the core values of the organisation; quality, caring and sharing will ensure the continued progress of the organisation.

These identities that are promoted and encouraged through the discourse of transformation serve to align or realign members towards the achievement of organisational goals. Discourse is used as a strategic resource in the construction of ‘ideal’ members. This process is known as identification. Identification refers to the process by which a worker or organisational member’s “beliefs about his or her organisation become self-referential or self-defining” (Pratt, 1998, p. 171). This

means that the worker has internalised the values and defining characteristics of the organisation as part of his own identity.

The findings indicate that changes in ideology and the construction of the 'ideal' member identity are compelling tools of organisational control for an organisation undergoing change. By offering and legitimising an identity as ideal, appropriate, natural, and right, the organisation is able to mask its intention in controlling the mind and behaviour of its members. This ideological power is concealed in the structures of discourse and is not readily apparent to the unsuspecting member.

### **9.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research**

This research offers important implications for organisations, especially when undergoing change. This study's data suggest that the sustainability of ideological change and organisational member identity are critical to the success of change initiatives in organisational change management.

The propositions in this study not only address the limited research in the area of organisational change in academic institutions but also serve as a foundation for further study. The institution in the study is part of a larger organisation whose focus is primarily engineering. The institution, KCUC is under the education arm of the organisation. The change management initiatives which were initiated at the organisational level cascaded down to the institution as well.

This study addresses how attempts are made to change the mindsets of members and the process of the regulation of member identity. It analyses the regulation attempt of the organisation, but not the response of the member towards the regulation attempt. Whether the member of the organisation interprets and comes to adopt the managerially sanctioned member identity and mindset as his own is not examined.

Thus, to examine further the centrality of ideology and identity in the social practice of organisational control in organisational change management, it is suggested that future research take account of the members' own discourses in the organisation undergoing change. Thus, a study on the discursive construction of members' self-identity and their regard towards the organisation, when compared with the results of this study would reveal the extent to which members acquire the orientation of the organisation's discourses as their own.

It is suggested that future research extends the analysis of this study to the discourses of other educational institutions undergoing change as comparison to further illuminate this practice of ideological and identity construction and organisational control.

Finally, this research is one in-depth case study. The transferability of this research is limited because understandings have been drawn from just this company's experience and the review of the literature. Yet, the findings that emerged from the data offer rich opportunities for future study.