

## ❖ ONE ❖

THE STYLE AND PRACTICE  
OF OUR ACADEMIC WRITING

Writing this book underscores that whatever else we may be as researchers and scholars, we are at the core a profession of text writers. The knowledge our various disciplines have assembled about organizations is composed and maintained in written texts. As scholars who study organizational phenomena, our research efforts are known, in large part, through our written products. The papers and monographs we write stand symbolically for the data gathering and analytic efforts we put into our scholarship. In addition, as we are all too aware, our ability to be individual members in good standing in the profession revolves around the ability to write our disciplines' texts; our careers, visibility, and professional mobility are all implicated in our writing (Frost & Taylor, 1995).

Indeed, knowledge-creating professions (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991) constitute themselves and maintain organization and power through networks of texts, such as journals, books, newsletters, that frame and select the topics and issues paid attention to. In addition, those individuals who are in positions to decide on the disposition of these texts, such as editors and members of editorial boards, are widely viewed as enjoying considerable professional power. Moreover, embedded in these texts are taken-for-granted assumptions, a field's normative traditions, concerning what we write and how we do so. Like it or not—and sometimes we do and sometimes we don't—in this profession, we are about writing. And this writing sets the terms of much of our work lives.

Yet, in spite of the pervasiveness and significance of writing in our professional lives, there remains a troubling absence of discussion about writing. Very few books and articles, and even fewer formal disciplinary forums examine the writing endeavor. Significantly, this ignorance about writing occurs at our disciplinary peril. When we overlook and compartmentalize the writing enterprise, we constrain our abilities to portray situated human life in work organizations and to develop new lines of sight in our theorizing efforts (Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2004).

Consequently, in this first chapter, we look directly at the “writing” enterprise in the context of our professional activities. Our discussion juxtaposes the predominant style of writing that we find in journal articles as unadorned and disembodied, with the experienced nature of writing as a complex practice in the process of creating knowledge. In doing so, we hope to provoke and open up dialogue on what we take for granted in our writing activity.

## THE PREDOMINANT STYLE OF ACADEMIC WRITING: UNADORNED AND DISEMBODIED

What is this genre known as a research article, which is the major form of communicating knowledge in many scientific disciplines? What kind of writing distinguishes it? The more typical answer is that academic writing in journals is a straightforward account of researchers’ investigations of some aspect of organizational life. Socialized into our disciplinary community, we come to understand this writing as an impersonal and detached demonstration of the results of our investigative procedures, as well as an explanation of the work’s significance to existing knowledge.

Following conventions in the “sciences,” the writing in these reports is generally taken to be minimally expressive so that discovered phenomena can be reflected as clearly as possible in the text. This is a “windowpane” model of language (Brooks & Warren, 1938) in which scientists carefully avoid in their scientific prose “all associations, emotional coloring, and implications of attitude and judgment” (Brooks & Warren, 1938, p. 4). Such non-ornamental prose is well suited to an understanding of the journal article’s function as transferring information gleaned from the field to the library—that academically removed knowledge repository. This Kantian perspective on writing, as Richard Rorty points out, construes writing as an “unfortunate necessity” (1982, p. 94), a sort

of reluctant intermediary between an investigated field and disciplinary knowledge. Similar views have been articulated by scholars who study organizational phenomena. For example, Pinder and Bourgeois (1982, p. 646) urge researchers to “deliberately strive” to avoid all literary tropes in their writing in order to “tie scientific communication to observable phenomena by way of direct reference and ostentation.” These authors urge us to tell the simple truth, plain and unvarnished, about the aspects of organizational life we observe.

## EXPERIENCING THE PRACTICE OF ACADEMIC WRITING

Yet, experiences indicate that the practice of academic writing is neither plain nor simple. It is a way of writing that we have had to learn. Based on discussions with colleagues over the years, we suspect that very few of us start out by knowing how to write the “academic speak” of our profession. Rather, we become socialized into the language and writing practices that symbolize the culture of science and that are traditionally transmitted across generations of academics.

For example, as members of the profession, we pick up that special anonymous disciplinary code in which “it is concluded that,” and only “the data,” not researchers, “suggest” anything. Yet, extensive use of the passive voice keeps the researcher out of the text (Gephart, 1986) as well as makes the writing cumbersome and obtuse. During graduate studies, Karen Locke can remember submitting a course paper in which she was present in the first person, “I, therefore, conclude . . .,” only to be told that it was unacceptable. Being present in the text in that way was a violation of the professional code that required her to write in the disembodied voice of scientific demonstration. She had to learn to write herself out of her texts and let “the findings speak for themselves.” By doing so, she symbolically adhered to, and transmitted, the view of writing as straightforward reporting of observed phenomena.

Certainly, if the writing of scientific work does not come naturally, then neither does the reading of it for audiences outside these disciplinary boundaries. As we are all too well aware, many of the practices associated with the scientific style obfuscate our points. Ironically, the straightforward reporting that is a hallmark of academic writing is anything but straightforward! This inaccessibility of our writing is particularly troublesome in applied disciplines like management, health, or information technology where we often have two audiences for our work. Presumably, we would like not only academics, but also professionals and

managers to read and comment on our work. Paradoxically, in conforming to our implicit assumptions regarding a scientific style of writing, our writing may well discourage other audiences from engaging it.

In the years since we first began to write about writing, doctoral students in particular have shared with us their experiences in learning how to write in the academic style. Recently, in conducting a doctoral class on writing, we asked students to share their experiences of writing in the academy. Here is some of what they had to say as they worked to satisfy the demands of producing this particular writing genre.

The [academic] paper is a much more lengthy writing process than my earlier writing. . . . So, many times I find it to be a daunting task to sit down and write.

Writing the scholarly paper is definitely challenging for me because it is quite alien to the way I generally write. I didn't know where and how to incorporate my insight and the template was something that made me write in a very conscious manner; hence I was never happy with the way the paper flowed.

It is somewhat mechanical in nature, and in many ways restricting.

Sometimes I felt that what I really wanted to say or communicate never came through in the final draft. The language is still a bit alien to me, so it's not by nature that I think in those words. When I write what I want to express the way that I am most comfortable, it seems really simplistic and not scholarly enough.

I struggle with how well the ideas should be developed before starting to write. I lose ideas that aren't written down clearly.

This work is different from what I did earlier because then I didn't think I had to confine myself to any particular theoretical framework. . . . There was no particular template that my paper had to conform to, nor any definite style to adopt.

As readily discerned in our discussion thus far, disciplinary writing is neither plain nor simple and straightforward. Rather, like the work of writing more generally (Dillard, 1989; Elbow, 1981; Lamott, 1995), it is highly particular, demanding, and complex professional work. As noted by others, it is

also a more social, complicated, and human performance than the prevailing narrow positivist conception allows (Czarniawska, 1999; Hunter, 1990; Richardson, 1990). When we sit in front of our terminals with our piles of field notes, transcripts, and analytic memos, expecting to “just write it up,” as Van Maanen (1988) indicates he was told to do, we discover all too clearly that it’s not that simple. Writing is far from an easy, “isn’t-it-obvious” process, and in implying such, the injunction to “just write it up” masks the choices, challenges, joys, and frustrations involved in composing qualitative research.

### **Write It Up, But *What* Do We Write?**

First, this injunction implies that the meaning around which the manuscript will be oriented lies already formed, waiting to be picked up. Yet, what we convey in our writing is not the stream of recorded conversations and actions, nor the carefully produced analytic tables, but rather the significance of these details of organization life for broader phenomena, processes, and theories. Contrary to the windowpane assumptions of findings as self-evident, we never yet have had a piece of data tell us its significance!

As well, the injunction belies the artful and often arduous process of writing the field data for what they all mean. As we work with the field notes, transcripts, and analytic memoranda through which we document and pattern our experience in the field, what we are doing is thinking about that experience in order to make some sense out of it and to gain some insight into particular phenomena, processes, and theories. In our sensemaking efforts, we think about the field experience in relation to other comparable situations, and in relation to what other researchers and scholars have said about similar situations. Conversely, we also think about other researchers’ theories in light of our particular experiences. We do not write up all that we saw, heard, or were told. Rather, we write up what all of our thinking and comparing has led us to believe our field experience means (Watson, 1995) for our understanding.

Furthermore, even after we discern meaning in and derive insights from our fieldwork, we still encounter difficulties. This is especially the case when we write journal articles. Typically, our data surface many issues that we find important and worthy of telling. However, because a journal article imposes significant spatial constraints on our writing, we cannot tell all the meanings and insights we discerned; we must make choices. In a real sense, we have to set aside aspects of our investigative experience that, although important to us

and even integral to our experiences of field life, do not help us to develop the particular meanings and insights we have chosen to write about. The tradeoff between conveying some or all of the meaning discerned in the field experience stands in starkest relief when we write for journals with space limitations; though it is also present to a lesser degree in writing books.

For Karen Golden-Biddle, this tradeoff is most vivid. Although she has published from her dissertation fieldwork (Golden, 1992), she has had difficulty figuring out how to tell in journal article form what, to her, is the central insight from her fieldwork; that in a large, Fortune 500 organization, managers appreciate the practices and beliefs developed by past generations of managers, and actively transmit and seek to enact them in the present. Early manuscripts telling this story met with colleague skepticism. How, they question, can a Fortune 500 organization survive in today's changing environment when it is oriented to the past? For her, an important difficulty in telling this story is the lack of space in a journal article to sufficiently detail what constitutes the traditional cornerstone of this organization while articulating the most insightful theoretical storyline.

To the extent that we choose to develop and write about particular meanings disclosed in our fieldwork, we obviously regard what we write about as constructed. Few among us today would accept the proposition that researchers go into the field to gather up the pieces of reality lying around waiting to be gleaned. We appreciate instead that researchers, as well as organization members, shape the experienced reality. In much the same way, we reject the notion of writing as a transmission of an objective reality. We agree with the literary critics Booth (1961) and Iser (1978, 1989); sociologists Bochner and Ellis (1996), Gusfield (1981), and Richardson (1990, 1994); and management theorists Czarniawska (1999, 2004) and Van Maanen (1995) that the hand of the writer and the eyes of the reader shape all written work, even that in science. Our written products are crafted works.

### **Write It Up, But *For Whom* Do We Write?**

The injunction also conceals the readers for whom we write: the particular disciplinary community making up the audience for the journal article. As such, our audience is a sort of a concealed, though highly significant participant in the writing process. There's no getting around it; all manuscripts are addressed to a particular audience (Burke, 1950; Booth, 1961; Iser, 1978;

Richardson, 1990). When we choose to direct our work toward mainstream academic journals, we privilege an academic audience over others. In turn, our selected audience exerts its influence over our writing. Our professional community sets the topical boundaries for our writing, broadly delimiting the phenomena that fall within a selected domain of study. Our audience also broadly sets out manuscript structure and progression: the movement from literature review, to methods, results, and a concluding discussion. Those disciplinary writing conventions allow readers to consider our work as coming from one who is a member of the scientific community. To shun the use of such established forms and formats is potentially to deny our work a forum within the profession (Lyne, 1993).

So, we address the research findings to a general audience of scholars studying organizational phenomena who, as we have indicated, have their own compositional conventions and, of course, insider language. But more specifically, with regard to any given manuscript, we write for an audience of researchers and scholars also interested in the particular organizational processes, phenomena, and theories addressed by the putative work. Our respective discipline, like any other disciplinary community, is composed of small overlapping social systems delineated by interest in a particular phenomenon or idea, “‘specialties,’ ‘problem domains,’ ‘research areas,’ ‘research networks’” (Knorr-Cetina, 1981, p. 9) or “schools of thought” (McKinley, Mone, & Moon, 1999; Ofori-Dankwa & Julian, 2005). Typically, our work is directed toward one or perhaps two of these specialty audiences.

Again, some examples might clarify. Karen Locke can still quite vividly remember sitting with pages and pages of carefully worked out analyses, documenting and explaining the patterning of comedic episodes in a tertiary care hospital (Locke, 1996). Certainly, she had a tale to tell about doctors, patient anxiety, and comedy; the topic of organizational humor had received only scattered and erratic attention. She had a tale for which only a small, some would say marginal, audience existed—as the very modest literature on organizational humor attests. However, she demarcated a broader audience for the work by recasting doctors as service providers and patients as coproviders in the service delivery process, and by embedding a research account about one aspect of hospital life in a broader discussion of emotionality in client-provider relationships.

Karen Golden-Biddle remembers conversations with Trish Reay and Kathy GermAnn that focused on how best to tell the story of a change initiative in a health organization that was undertaken by active and persistent individuals

across organizational levels. They had pages of data and analyses of individuals' efforts and actions. Highlighting the agency of these individuals as internal actors who were implementing macro-level change enabled them to demarcate an audience for the work in organizational and institutional change (Reay, Golden-Biddle, & GermAnn, in press).

Thus, writing necessarily incorporates the question, For whom do we write? The meanings we choose to develop and articulate in our work must be directed toward and lay claim to a specific audience within the disciplinary community. Furthermore, while an audience finds engaging the details of work life in particular organizations that qualitative research yields—whether those details describe an Israeli high-tech corporation (Ailon-Souday & Kunda, 2003); a funeral home (Barley, 1983); a publicly funded teaching hospital in Australia (Cheek & Gibson, 2003); a corporation's Web site (Coupland & Brown, 2004); large, international manufacturing companies (Markus, Majchrzak, & Gasser, 2002); community-based family practice organizations (Miller, Crabtree, McDaniel, & Stange, 1998); the emergency departments of level 1 trauma centers (Morse & Pooler, 2002); a large software company headquartered in The Netherlands (Orlikowski, 2002); a bill collection agency (Sutton, 1991); and so on—our disciplinary audiences are primarily motivated by interest in theory. Such audiences, constituted along particular theoretical lines, are interested in these details, but primarily as they relate to theory (Langer, 1964). Our disciplinary manuscripts are addressed toward particular theoretical lines that interest us and our readers.

Becker (1986), Huff (1998), McClosky (1990), Rankin (2001), and others use the metaphor of a conversation to describe the theoretical interests and literature-building activities of our disciplinary audience. As members of academic communities, we have audiences interested in and writing about a broad range of topics and issues, including high-technology acquisitions and knowledge transfer (Ranft & Lord, 2002), the introduction of change in primary care practices (Miller et al., 1998), the relationship between technology and structure (Barley, 1986), suffering and the construction of self (Charmaz, 1999), the decision-making process involved in the search and selection of aged care facilities (Cheek & Ballantyne, 2001), and so on. When we write our work, we use the discussion of existing literature to locate the study in a particular conversation. Yet we are not just looking to join or eavesdrop on (Becker, 1986) these conversations. Rather, we need to create space to make our own contributions (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997; Mone & McKinley, 1993). As

researchers working with qualitative data, we bring together the meanings and insights from our experiences in the field with the various possible theoretical conversations to help produce and shape the literatures of interest.

### **Write It Up, But *Under What Terms* Will Our Writing Be Granted a Disciplinary Audience?**

Finally, the injunction to write it up veils the terms under which our work will be given a reading by a particular community of scholars. We do not join and contribute to the literature until our work is published, and disciplinary communities have admission requirements for inclusion in this “public” theoretical discourse. Certainly the work must be judged to be in some sense “true,” that is, to authentically depict the situation studied (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993), but it must also be significant. As researchers, we must craft our experience in the field so as to contribute theoretically; to make a difference in extant literature (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997).

Taken all together, then, the injunction to write it up conceals how we shape field notes and analytic memoranda in light of existing work in our academic discipline. It also masks the considerable work involved in the crafting of our story; how we integrate and develop theory and insights derived from our engagement with the field to make a difference in, and contribute to disciplinary writing. Ultimately, the injunction masks the production of research reports as human constructions intended to persuade a particular community that what they have to say is both “true” and important to the domains we study. In unmasking and unpacking “just write it up,” then, we see that individual researchers shape and form the findings, invoke and delimit an audience who will be interested in the work, and seek to convince the audience that their work makes a difference in our understanding of a particular organizational phenomenon. Writing is thus revealed to be a much more active, creative, and human process than the “window pane” model would have us believe.

### **THE STYLE AND PRACTICE OF ACADEMIC WRITING: INTERESTED AND PERSUASIVE DISCOURSE**

As our preceding discussion hints, even when our research articles provide coherent stories that point to particular theoretical contributions, they are not

automatically construed as knowledge. They have to be accorded the status of knowledge, that is, be seen as true and significant, first by a small group of reviewers representing our disciplinary community, and then by the wider community itself. What counts as knowledge, then, is a matter of disciplinary consensus (Aronson, 1984; Latour, 1987; Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Rorty, 1967). Whether the research will count as knowledge or not depends on whether it is subsequently incorporated into other research reports as part of the literature review summarizing what we know about a given topic. Only when it is cited, and its findings are used in future published papers, will a piece of research have achieved the status of contributing to knowledge in the field. If intended readers seriously challenge it, or even worse, completely ignore it, then its claim of knowledge will have been denied (Gilbert, 1976; Winsor, 1993).

Accordingly, we can view journal articles as proposals directed to particular audiences for them to legitimate our grounded and theoretically relevant claims as knowledge (Aronson, 1984; Gilbert, 1976). As proposals of knowledge, they require adjudication and some accrediting action on the part of their disciplinary audience before they are accorded the status of knowledge. When we submit and publish our work, then, we are putting out proposals that constitute a link between us as authors and our audience (Cozzens, 1985). Further, our knowledge proposals are constructed as, and intended to be taken as, authoritative (Spector & Kitsuse, 1977). Our authority to write is disclosed in the presentation of “data-informed insights,” in the author’s exposition of the history of knowledge development in the area (as well as delineation of problems in it), in the account of the investigative and analytic operations performed, and so on.

In addition, we do not simply lay out knowledge proposals for our audience to take or leave. As we have already indicated, our audience’s accrediting actions are highly sought after. We write from an interested perspective; we have a personal stake in the outcomes of our work. At the same time that we write to explicate our theoretically relevant insights, we write to shape and advance them as claims to knowledge. We construct our research products with an eye toward audience reaction, and in so doing, write to persuade others of the contribution of our work.

Interestingly, until the late 1970s, most academicians considered scientific texts to be nonpersuasive. Science was viewed as a special discourse operating outside the domain of rhetoric (Selzer, 1993). Whereas artists were thought to persuade through language, scientists were thought to persuade through logic and evidence (Gusfield, 1981). Rhetoric was and, unfortunately still today, is considered something of a dirty word: one that automatically invokes the

qualifying adjectives *mere* and *empty*. This image of rhetoric, however, rests on an essentially monologic view of texts (Billig, 1993; Mulkay, 1995). It presents authors as omnipotent, delivering their powerful words to a hapless readership who can only deliver up their highly sought accreditation with “tears, cheers, and helpless admiration” (Billig, 1993, p. 122). What a glorious writer’s fantasy! Of course, this distorted image of rhetoric overestimates the effect our texts have on our readers at the same time that it underestimates the effect our readers have on our texts.

For some time now, the view of scientific writing as a-rhetorical has been challenged by an understanding of such writing as indeed rhetorical by virtue of its constructing theoretical arguments intended for an audience (McCloskey, 1994). During the past decades, a number of disciplines have turned a rhetorical lens on their own writing practices. For example, research traditions and new conversations have developed in anthropology (Clifford, 1983; Geertz, 1973, 1988; Marcus, 1980; Marcus & Cushman, 1982; Marcus & Fischer, 1986), in economics (McCloskey, 1985, 1994), and in sociology (Atkinson, 1990; Edmonson, 1984; Hunter, 1990). More recently, organizational scholars, too, have analyzed their own texts (Calas & Smircich, 1991; Czarniawska, 1999, 2004; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Kilduff, 1993; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997; Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Van Maanen, 1988, 1995; Watson, 1995).

The above authors have noted that, even when we adhere in our writing to the strictest conventions of science, even when we remove all personal associations, use technical terms, rely very heavily on presented data, and so on, our texts are nevertheless persuasive. They persuade our audience that we are competent scientists whose work and findings are credible. For example, when Knorr-Cetina (1981) describes how research chemists fashion a textual linearity out of a nonlinear research process, she provides an example of how these authors persuade by adhering to the conventions of presenting the research process. Similarly, March and Simon’s (1958) foundational text, *Organizations*, has been praised for its avoidance of rhetorical devices like figurative language (Pinder & Bourgeois, 1982). However, as Kilduff’s (1993) analysis of this work aptly demonstrates, while the authors clearly stated that they were sacrificing the literary in favor of a scientific style, they nonetheless relied on various textual strategies to configure as severely limited and inadequate, prior research and theorizing on organizations. There is no escaping rhetoric in our writing. As soon as we frame ideas and craft theoretically relevant insights into claims for presentation to some audience, we are engaging in rhetoric or persuasive discourse.

Paying attention to the textual construction of our grounded theoretical insights does not undermine their truth value. Such attention simply provides us a more sophisticated perspective from which to read, and to write, them. Our choice does not concern whether to write persuasive discourse. That is given. Instead, it concerns how conscious we will become of our rhetorical efforts in knowledge making. Incorporating a rhetorical understanding in our work enables us to demystify and become more reflexive about our own and others' writing. It also better situates us to look outward and make a difference in our writing. We agree in this regard with Bazerman (1996), who adeptly articulates,

We have so stigmatized rhetoric and so compartmentalized our ideas of writing that we only engage in the great welter of our communicative world behind our intellectual backs. Our ideals of knowledge that escape the particularity of our human circumstances are so strong that those who call our attention to the creative role of situated strategic communication seem to do so only to debunk those institutions that produce knowledge and authority. But to examine carefully and sympathetically the rhetorical travels of knowledge in society is not to debunk our ideals of knowledge, but to understand more about the possibility of knowledge to make a difference in the world . . . (p. viii)

Indeed, for those who read disciplinary texts with an eye on their textual practices, it does not take long to discern literary elements. These range from those that are quite small to others that are more figural in the text. Let's consider some examples that provide a taste of the relationship between the disciplinary knowledge we generate and how we use language to convey that knowledge. As an illustration of more diminutive literary elements, look at the use of a single qualifying word to help the following articles construct consensual theoretical positions within various conversations (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997).

Many researchers have commented on the poor fit between the requirements of processes with the characteristics of EKPs [emergent knowledge processes] . . . and existing IT application types, such as executive information systems (EIS) and expert systems (ES). For example . . . (from Markus, Majchrzak, & Gasser, 2002, p. 184)

There is a considerable literature on the importance of workplace relationships for individuals' careers . . . (from Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000, pp. 1026–1027)

The resistance of clinical practices and physicians' behavior to change is well documented . . . (from Miller et al., 1998, p. 370)

There is considerable agreement among those who have studied mentoring that in order to understand fully the nature and impact of this developmental relationship, it is necessary to examine how it changes over time . . . (from Kram, 1983, p. 609)

A growing amount of literature suggests that organizational identifications are important for both individuals' and organizations' well-being . . . (from Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001, p. 393)

Theorists largely agree that individual power in organizations is the ability to control others, to exercise discretion, to get one's own way. (from Biggart & Hamilton, 1984, p. 540)

In the above examples, the authors assert that scholars share similar perspectives about some aspect of organizational life in order to theoretically position their own study. Accordingly, the use of the qualifiers, *considerable . . . largely . . . many . . . virtually . . . well . . . growing*, in each of these claims permits the authors to highlight that significant agreement does indeed exist among scholars, without, of course, asserting that the stated claims are unassailable.

A more familiar literary device is the use of metaphor, depicted below in the three examples. The first example, from an article by Connie Gersick (1988), challenges extant group development models based on a hierarchical progression of groups through universal stages, and proposes as replacement, the "punctuated" model. To highlight the distinction between the two models, she draws on the metaphor of a football game to underscore what she found:

It was like seeing the game of football as progressing through a structure of quarters (phases) with a major half-time break, versus seeing the game as progressing in a characteristic sequence of distinguishable styles of play (stages). (p. 16)

This literary device is used both to portray the essential properties of her proposed model and to distinguish it from the prevailing model. At the same time that the metaphor helps to convey the results and theoretical implications of her research inquiries (a phase vs. stage perspective), it also proposes them as a new contribution to the literature on group development.

A second example occurs in the article by Sue Llewellyn (2001), who uses the metaphor, two-way window, as an analytic device to understand the increasingly mediated space between medical and management work. She explains her use of this metaphor as follows,

In this paper, sets of ideas are either embodied in a person—the clinical director—or embedded in an object—the budget. Clinical directors as “two-way windows” are mediating persons as they work through sets of ideas belonging to management and sets of ideas belonging to clinical practice; they will only have a coherent perspective, if these sets of ideas undergo some mutual adaptation. In the process of the budget becoming a “two-way window,” ideas from the world of management and ideas from the world of the clinician become more consistent, in order for the budget to become a coherent object with which both managers and clinicians can work. (p. 602)

In using this metaphor, she highlights and theorizes the role of clinicians (here, physicians) who assume management responsibilities such as budgeting, and more generally the various possibilities for action when the boundaries become more permeable between managers and professionals.

A final example concerns the characterization of the stigma felt by leaders of bankrupt firms:

Tom was extremely nervous. He cleared his throat over and over again. He chain-smoked. He was hunched over. His hands and voice trembled. And, he made an odd sort of hissing noise over and over. He looked psychologically beaten. I felt like a voyeur, spying on Willy Loman. (from Sutton & Callahan, 1987, p. 421)

The authors advance a theory about how bankruptcy spoils the image of organizations and of their top managers. The graphic and dramatic portrayal of organization leaders, as intensely affected by their company’s Chapter 11 status, helps to underscore the importance of studying the stigma associated with bankruptcy. This could hardly be better accomplished than by comparing “Tom” to an almost universally known symbol of personal failure, Willy Loman.

The activity of writing, then, is central to our professional roles as scholars. In this book we develop the view that the stories we discern in our field experiences as well as in the literature have to be authentically crafted and configured. We develop and theorize insights grounded in our field engagement,

and offer them to particular audiences as representing something new and important to existing disciplinary thought. Only when these audiences have certified the work will our writing have made a contribution to the field.

## OUR WRITING TASK

We now understand that the major task of writing our journals' texts involves working out how to convert our field engagement with people's conversations and lives into theoretically relevant insights and claims that are viewed as a contribution by the relevant professional community of readers. This understanding recognizes that the texts we create using qualitative research require us to straddle and bring into dialectic relation two worlds, our academic disciplinary community and the world of the group we studied. This writing task involves four components:

1. Articulating theoretically relevant insights gained from our field engagement with a particular social and cultural world. Contextualizing these insights in people's conversations, lived meanings, and events, orients the texts we write toward that world. At the same time, selecting and framing insights in theoretically relevant terms begins to turn the text back toward the academic disciplinary community to which we belong.

2. Identifying and shaping a contribution site as we connect these insights and extant literature in articulating knowledge claims. We will portray this work as a process of developing a theorized storyline, or plot, for our work that connects the academic and field worlds, and creates a particular theoretical space to which our study will contribute.

3. Authoritatively arguing the uniqueness and value of our theorized storyline by highlighting the literature's limitations and showing how our study addresses those limitations. We marshal our scholarship and particular research insights to persuade our audience that we have something new to add to existing disciplinary writing. In journal articles, we usually have the opportunity to make one major extension or revision to extant literature.

4. Characterizing ourselves as academic storytellers who are members of the professional community in good standing. Hence, we attend to explicating

our methodology, appropriately referencing, and so on. We may also make choices in our writing that further characterize us as individual writers, such as type of argument we fashion, word selection, and so on. In our writing, then, we not only are constrained by the conventions of academic style, but also can shape that style through injection of a personal style.

And we do all of this with our words.