

‘We Can Win this Fight Together’: Memory and Cross-Occupational Coordination

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ABSTRACT While scholars have studied coordination across occupational lines, they have yet to theorize how the memories held by those involved in such coordination might influence it. In this paper, we frame occupational groups as mnemonic communities – collectives for whom a shared understanding of the past constitutes their character – to explore the role of memory in cross-occupational coordination (COC). Through qualitative analysis of a South Korean broadcasting company in which COC emerged for the purpose of collective action, we develop a theory of *cross-occupational mnemonic (dis)unity*. Our findings suggest that, initially, cross-occupational relational memories (i.e., memories occupations held of themselves, other occupations and their relationships) constrained COC as they maintained occupational divides. However, one occupation’s efforts to downplay these memories, coupled with an event experienced and remembered across occupational lines, resulted in COC by producing a cross-occupational mnemonic community. These findings extend research at the intersection of occupations and memory by theorizing the mutability of occupational groups, perhaps the most prominent intra-organizational mnemonic communities.

Keywords: cross-occupational coordination, mnemonic community, organizational memory, qualitative

INTRODUCTION

As the prevalence of mnemonic communities (i.e., collectives for whom a shared understanding of the past constitutes their character – Bellah et al., 1985; Zerubavel, 2003) in organizational scholarship gains recognition (Coraiola et al., 2023; Foroughi, 2020),

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occupational groups, or collectives whose members build intra-group relationships to collaborate in producing outputs (Anteby et al., 2016), fit this definition. Alongside recent work explicitly positioning occupations as such (Coraiola et al., 2023), scholars elsewhere note how occupational members often reference a shared past in defining occupational membership (Oborn and Barrett, 2021; Orr, 2006). Furthermore, a rise in cross-occupational coordination (COC) has drastically increased the frequency with which these mnemonic communities interact (Coraiola et al., 2023), as members of disparate occupations coordinate more than ever to develop cross-occupational solutions (DiBenigno and Kellogg, 2014; Koppman et al., 2022; Truelove and Kellogg, 2016; Young-Hyman, 2017).

Framing occupations as mnemonic communities suggests that cross-occupational interactions, like those involving other forms of mnemonic communities (i.e., cities, organizational fields, societies), are influenced by their distinct memories (Coraiola et al., 2023; Do et al., 2019; Zerubavel, 2003). However, as Coraiola et al. (2023, p. 378) write, ‘missing from these discussions is the recognition that other mnemonic communities inside the organization may have different memories of the past’. While scholars have studied factors influencing COC (boundaries of expertise – Farchi et al., 2023; occupational time pressures – Oborn and Barrett, 2021; i.e., humour – Pouthier, 2017), we have yet to consider the role of memories constructed within, and influential to, these mnemonic communities. For instance, while administrators may remember an initiative’s failure as a loss, nurses might view it as emblematic of their proud resistance (see, Bartunek et al., 2006), thus influencing potential future coordination attempts between them. These differences likely spark dynamics unaccounted for in studies of COC, thus suggesting limitations to our understanding of it.

We view studying memories during COC as theoretically and practically important. Theoretically, scholarship on ecologies of memory, or ‘communities of memory (e.g., *occupational communities*, religious communities, racial communities) that intersect within and between an organization’s boundaries’ (Coraiola et al., 2023, p. 374, emphasis ours) suggests memory-based resistance when members of different mnemonic communities meet (Do et al., 2019; Foroughi et al., 2020; Lyle et al., 2022). However, extant COC scholarship tends to adopt an ahistorical perspective, considering how occupations reckon with differences in power (DiBenigno and Kellogg, 2014; Young-Hyman, 2017) or norms (Oborn and Barrett, 2021) without considering memory-based differences nor the means through which occupations resolve them. Theorizing the role of memory would explain how different understandings of the past across occupational groups influence occupational members’ ability to work across boundaries (see, Do and Lyle, 2022). Practically, the increase in multi-occupational organizations – and the accompanying increases in COC within them (Truelove and Kellogg, 2016) – suggests that managers must, now more than ever, oversee such work. Unveiling memory-based impediments and enablers of COC would offer managers tools to improve coordination amongst these mnemonic communities that might otherwise contest memories to the point of inertia.

Therefore, in this paper, we attempt to answer our research question (*How do memories restrict and facilitate cross-occupational coordination?*) through qualitative analysis of a South Korean broadcasting company. We theorize a process of *cross-occupational mnemonic (dis)unity* through which occupations contest coordination by resisting occupational memories,

see its potential by acknowledging their newfound importance, and – given the right conditions – form a nascent mnemonic community that disrupts established occupational boundaries.

We aim to contribute to a burgeoning line of scholarship at the intersection of Organizational Memory Studies (OMS) and occupations (e.g., Anteby et al., 2016) in three ways. First, we theorize why past- and future-focused appeals prove variably effective in enabling COC. We agree that focusing on shared future goals can partially enable COC (e.g., Striković and Wittmann, 2022), especially when certain occupations resist memories proffered by others to secure their participation (Coraiola et al., 2023), while highlighting limitations of this approach without a shared experience from which to form shared memories. Second, we theorize how the ‘near past’ (Schultz and Hernes, 2013, 2020) can, given certain conditions, act as touchstones for a nascent mnemonic community as individuals position near past events as transitions from prior to current arrangements. Third, enriching work on the benefits of mnemonic communities (Do et al., 2019; Lyle et al., 2024), studying a nascent one revealed their potentially destructive power as they disrupt existing mnemonic communities (i.e., established occupational groups).

We begin our exploration by reviewing research on occupations and mnemonic communities, presenting arguments that support the idea of treating the former as a type of the latter. Next, we discuss COC and emphasize the importance of considering the role of memory throughout such coordination. We then outline the case of TelvCorp, the qualitative means through which we analysed it and our theorizing explaining the role of memory during COC.

OCCUPATIONS AS MNEMONIC COMMUNITIES

Anteby et al. (2016, p. 187) define occupations as ‘socially constructed entities that include: a category of work; the actors understood – either by themselves or others – as members and practitioners of this work; the actions enacting the role of occupational members; and the structural and cultural systems upholding the occupation’. This definition frames occupations as encompassing work accomplished by individuals and a set of systems that maintains boundaries around it, including societal beliefs regarding an occupation’s area of expertise (Walsh et al., 2023) and patterns of identification constructed by members (Pratt et al., 2006). Memory has also been posited as a barrier demarcating occupations, as members develop or inherit memories of what makes them distinct from others (Orr, 2006), thus suggesting that occupations might be theoretically framed as mnemonic communities.

Developed within the field of social memory studies (Connerton, 1989; Halbwachs, 1992/1941), a mnemonic community denotes a group engaging in mnemonic practices (i.e., remembering, forgetting and/or representing – Anteby and Molnar, 2012; Coraiola and Derry, 2020) that signal the importance of a shared past to their present and future character (Coraiola et al., 2023; Olick and Robbins, 1998; Zerubavel, 1996, 2003). For instance, South Bend, Indiana (Do et al., 2019) and Eugene, Oregon (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013) can be considered mnemonic communities as memories of their

Studebaker Factory and University of Oregon track team have featured prominently in their functioning and plans, illustrating how they are not simply concerned with, but rather ‘constituted by their past’ (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 153). Mnemonic communities also exist as organizations (Anteby and Molnar, 2012), organizational fields (Coraiola et al., 2018), and industries (Forbes and Kirsch, 2011) that construct, and are constrained by, memories of a past members need not experience directly (Zerubavel, 1996).

Given this definition, some scholars have begun considering intra-organizational occupational groups as mnemonic communities. Most notable are Coraiola et al. (2023, p. 374), who theorize that occupational communities – groups of occupational members working within an organization – are constituted by their own interpretations of their organization’s past. For instance, the distinct memories lawyers and historians construct of an identical event might create the mnemonic divides between them necessary to classify each as its own mnemonic community (see, Lyle et al., 2022). Supporting this contention is the work of Orr (1990, 2006), whose studies of repair technicians at Xerox identified a role for the retelling of an occupation-specific version of the past through ‘war stories’ – narratives in which technicians shared with occupational newcomers their memories of solving past issues. These narratives both positioned occupational practice ‘as a relic of the past’ (Orr, 2006, p. 10) and maintained the community of technicians as ‘these stories signif[ied] their active participation in the community and the identity and reputation they derive[d] from it’ (Coraiola et al., 2023, p. 389).

Furthermore, occupational groups have long been characterized by features reflective of mnemonic communities. For instance, veteran occupational members reference past practice to justify occupational norms and socialize newcomers (Carr et al., 2006) while occupational divides are often founded in memories of past occupational relationships (i.e., interactions amongst and between occupational members – DiBenigno and Kellogg, 2014; Young-Hyman, 2017), memories that recent work casts as likely to differ across occupations (Coraiola et al., 2023).

EXTANT PERSPECTIVES ON CROSS-OCCUPATIONAL COORDINATION

Despite evidence of occupational groups acting as mnemonic communities, most work on COC does not explicitly consider memory. Rather, scholars in this area have increasingly considered, often sequentially, various other *barriers* and *enablers* of COC (Bechky, 2003). Regarding barriers, scholars traditionally examined power differences, such as those between engineers and marketers (Truelove and Kellogg, 2016), nurses and patient care technicians (DiBenigno and Kellogg, 2014), physicians and case managers (Pouthier, 2017) and engineers, technicians and assemblers (Bechky, 2003) as granting certain occupations greater voice in COC’s shape and function.

Recent work, however, has considered a wider web of occupational differences. Most notably, Anteby et al. (2016, p. 205) observed how occupational groups make ‘claims against other occupations to negotiate and change jurisdictional boundaries

around the content of their work'. This focus on socially constructed barriers separating the norms and expertise of one occupation from another (Anteby et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2023) has shifted focus towards examining how seemingly inconsequential differences might interrupt COC. For instance, Oborn and Barret (2021, p. 33) studied different 'temporal orientations' between 'surgeons' pragmatic, hurried approach to running the MDT [multidisciplinary team] planning meeting, or the oncologists' more protracted and lengthy approach', as impeding coordination. Koppman et al. (2022, p. 1632) explored how the influx of women into male-dominated occupations 'transformed competition between symmetric occupations into a hierarchical relation in which women (and their occupation) ceded status to men (and their occupation) in exchange for cooperation' while Farchi et al. (2023) viewed the desire of some occupations to break down occupational boundaries as a potential inhibitor of COC.

Regarding enablers, many stress the importance of developing a superordinate, cross-occupational identity (i.e., shared sense of central and distinctive features irrespective of occupational membership – Jehn and Bezrukova, 2010) through methods including 'gripping' and 'joking' (Pouthier, 2017) and identifying demographic similarities (DiBenigno and Kellogg, 2014). Others stress the importance of recognizing and respecting occupational boundaries, as did Bechky (2003, p. 314) in studying how 'members of these [occupational] communities provide solutions that invoke the differences in the work contexts', Farchi et al. (2023) by showing how recognition of – and respect for – occupational boundaries allows those involved in COC to anticipate and capitalize upon unique expertise, and Oborn and Barrett (2021) in framing awareness of occupational temporal orientations as a step towards effective coordination.

MEMORY IN CROSS-OCCUPATIONAL COORDINATION

While these barriers and enablers to COC are undoubtedly rooted in the past (i.e., past cross-occupational interactions and/or historically-informed norms of occupational practice, including temporal structures – Oborn and Barrett, 2021; Pouthier, 2017), scholars have yet to consider how an occupation's designation as a mnemonic community – one with specific memories misaligned (or perhaps directly opposed to) those of other occupations – influences such coordination. Importantly, memory itself often serves as a barrier and enabler of coordination across communal boundaries (Coraiola et al., 2023). Regarding barriers, mnemonic differences (i.e., an 'old guard' of organization members sharing a founding story that a 'new guard' neither shares nor values – Foroughi, 2020) can prevent work from occurring across communities as they dispute or protect memories (e.g., Mahalingam et al., 2019). Regarding enablers, a willingness to co-construct memories (Mena and Rintamäki, 2020) often enables coordination, as when generations develop a shared understanding of a defunct manufacturer's legacy to inform their future (Do et al., 2019) or a fire management agency creates a shared memory of bushfires across communities that spurs broader awareness of their potential danger (Reid and Beilin, 2014).

While these studies suggest a role for memory in COC, the relational nature of occupations operating within an organizational context make this role difficult to predict. As occupational groups tend to work with and observe each other over time (Denis et al., 2007), they tend to develop memories of each other and their interactions that influence factors including trust (i.e., relational schema, Baldwin, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Ragins and Verbos, 2007) and expected behaviours (DiBenigno and Kellogg, 2014; Pouthier, 2017; Truelove and Kellogg, 2016). These memories likely influence COC in ways different than coordination between other mnemonic communities that do not harbour such longstanding relational memories. Furthermore, the ongoing nature of COC – wherein memories formed before *and* during it influence its character (Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009) – suggests it is not only memories occupations bring to COC but those they form while coordinating that matter (see, Do and Lyle, 2022). Inattention to memories in COC leaves us ill-equipped to predict the shifting nature of these memories and their ultimate impact.

In summary, our review indicated that occupational groups fit the definition of mnemonic communities. Despite insights from the OMS literature regarding ways in which memory could impact coordination, the unique features of occupations within organizations pose challenges for predicting this influence. We thus asked how memories restrict and facilitate COC and designed a study to seek answers.

METHODS

We chose to build a case study of an organization in which memory and COC were observable, attending to processes through which COC unfolded and grounding insights in the data we gathered (Eisenhardt, 2021). Furthermore, an in-depth, qualitative approach appeared suited to studying the processes we sought to uncover (Van Maanen, 1998).

Research Context

We chose to analyse the case of TelvCorp (pseudonym), a South Korean public broadcaster, for two reasons. First, as a global television and radio broadcaster, TelvCorp offers a range of services including setting industry standards, developing technologies, managing infrastructure and providing content. These realities ensure TelvCorp employs multiple occupations largely demarcated between functions, six of which we identified in our field work: reporters (R), current affairs producers (CAP), camera journalists (CJ), entertainment and drama producers (EDP), engineers and technicians (ET) and administrators (A).

Secondly, while we initially geared our study towards understanding how occupations retain jurisdictional boundaries, an unexpected strike offered an opportunity to observe COC and the salience of memories during it. As we began data collection, TelvCorp held a longstanding reputation of integrity bolstered by prestigious awards won by reporters and producers. Aspiring journalists had chosen TelvCorp as their preferred media outlet for eight consecutive years (2000–8), with many of TelvCorp's reporters

mentioning pride in their prestigious image rooted in their self-described democratic, risk-taking culture.

As such, reporters viewed action taken by South Korea's recently elected conservative government (2008) as constituting a threat (Table I). TelvCorp's members, especially reporters, believed the now-ruling party had replaced their CEO with a pro-administration figure in March 2010 to gain more favourable coverage. Reporters then accused this CEO, ironically a reporter himself, of promoting executives and managers to monitor the production of news programmes and remove pieces perceived as critical of the government. Anger, specifically amongst reporters, led to a 170-day strike in 2012. From a theoretical perspective, we observed how non-reporters (who, as we explain below, acted similarly through this process despite their own occupational divides) moved from hesitancy to join the strike towards coordinated participation in it. Furthermore, interviews conducted with reporters and non-reporters surfaced a theoretically interesting evolution of memories, wherein groups moved from disagreements founded in disparate occupational memories to unity founded in a shared, cross-occupational one.

Data Collection

Our examination began with the first author's pilot study at TelvCorp and another public broadcaster to understand occupational boundaries in broadcasting (2010–11).^[1] The strike took place shortly after the pilot study concluded, thus prompting further investigation. Including the pilot study, data collection occurred between January 2010 and December 2013 and comprised interviews as our main data source and observation and artefacts as secondary data.

Interviews. We conducted 55 semi-structured interviews with 44 informants over this period. As the pilot study revealed pre-strike differences across occupational groups, we employed purposeful sampling (Suri, 2011) by interviewing members from each of the six occupational departments. We refer to participants using a number from 1 and 44 alongside prefixes denoting occupational membership (R, CAP, CJ, EDP, ET, A). Tenure ranged from one to 25 years (average of 7.6 years) with key informants interviewed twice or more (Table II).

To gather rich, comprehensive information on the evolving dynamics of the strike, we first recruited leaders of TelvCorp's Reporter Group (RG) and labour union. Through these conversations we attempted to better understand occupational relationships alongside why, and how, they decided to strike. We then widened our recruitment to RG members and union executives, who referred members of other occupational groups (i.e., snowball sampling) during the early phases of data collection. While this technique risks selection bias (Pratt, 2009), union executives appeared willing to direct us to a range of individuals given their expressed interest in gathering outsider perspectives on 'cross-occupational morale' during the strike. To further minimize selection bias, we recruited interviewees through the first author's network (developed during the pilot study) and contacts made during non-participant observation. Interviews lasted from one to three hours and followed a semi-structured protocol covering reasons for joining TelvCorp,

Table I. Timeline

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Organizational environment</i> | <i>Top management</i> | <i>TelvCorp union & workers</i> |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
| Preliminary phases | Conservative President takes office TelvCorp's Current Affairs (CA) program triggers anti-government movement Government files criminal and civil suits against CA producers | Management issues public apology for TelvCorp's CA program | CA producers initiate picketing in protest of management's apology |
| Phase 1 | February–April 2010 Government appoints pro-government, former reporter as TelvCorp CEO | New CEO reshuffles senior executives in journalistic groups New senior executives in Reporters Group intervene in selecting news items and editing reporting | Union organizes a month-long strike against management changes Reporters Group holds a vote of no confidence in the newsroom director |
| Phase 2 | March–December 2011 January 2012 | | Reporters Group stages walkout in protest of managerial intervention Union calls for and initiates an organization-wide strike Reporters begin public awareness campaign by holding street rallies |
| Phase 3 | January–March 2012 April 2012 May 2012 July 2012 | Management declares strike illegal and fires head of Reporters Group Management fires union leaders from ET and CAP Top executives release plan for restructuring and explicit penalization of militant strike participants. Management fires two union leaders and suspends 10 union executives from A, EDP, and CJ | Union declares end of the 2012 strike |

Note: Grey boxes denote no substantial action.

Table II. Interviewee data

| <i>Occupation (# of informants)</i> | <i>Before strike (Apr. 2010 ~ Dec. 2011)</i> | <i>During & after strike (Feb. 2012 ~ Dec. 2013)</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--------------|
| Reporters (14) | 2 | 17 | 19 |
| Current affairs producers (6) | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| Camera Journalists (4) | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| Entertainment and drama producers (8) | 2 | 8 | 10 |
| Engineers and technicians (8) | 2 | 8 | 10 |
| Administration (4) | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| Total (# of interviews) | 9 | 46 | 55 |

work activities, memories, interests and ongoing experiences. Interviews also included questions regarding occupational boundaries (i.e., ‘With whom do you interact to complete work? Who would you consider members of your occupation?’), which we analysed to investigate whether, and later affirm that, these occupational groups were as distinct as their departments would imply (Anteby et al., 2016). All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Observation. Non-participant observation took place primarily during the strike. The first author shadowed 12 rallies and public awareness campaigns organized by the union at TelvCorp’s headquarters and various locations across Seoul, focusing intently on interactions between occupational groups as they gathered for, and disbanded after, rallies. He took detailed notes to allow the authorship team to better understand the events and collected 12 strike-related materials including posters, fliers, pamphlets and signs. He also recruited ten rally participants for interviews, thus further reducing selection bias. The prolonged nature of these observations helped the first author develop close relationships with interviewees, who in turn invited him to 16 informal gatherings and social activities. This informal observation allowed us to understand social cognitive processes involved in the strike while granting us more personal insights into the experiences of individual participants.

Archival data. In addition to materials gathered at rallies, we collected 45 newsletters and 75 newspaper articles, many issued or written by internal and external stakeholders to present positions during the strike. We also followed traces of informants on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and the TelvCorp blog (69 posts) with their permission. This data provided a living record of social interactions amongst TelvCorp’s members, which often included the construction of memories (Tables III and IV).

Table III. Observations and archival data

| <i>Data category</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Number</i> |
|------------------------|--|---------------|
| Field observation (28) | Rallies at TelvCorp's HQ (1 ~ 2 hours) | 8 |
| | Public awareness campaign in the streets, handing out fliers and pamphlets to the public (1 ~ 2 hours) | 4 |
| | Social gatherings at bars and restaurants near TelvCorp's HQ (3 ~ 4 hours) | 16 |
| Documents (132) | Posters, fliers, pamphlets and signs | 12 |
| | Newsletters of the union and occupational associations (e.g., Reporter Group, E&T Association, etc.) | 45 |
| | Newspaper articles and participant interviews with the press | 75 |
| Social Media (69) | Twitter and Facebook postings by participants | 19 |
| | Company blog postings by participants | 50 |

Table IV. Data sources for multi-level analysis

| <i>Level of analysis</i> | <i>Types of data</i> | <i>Use in analysis</i> |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Individual level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews throughout data collection (2010–13)^a • Postings on company blog, Facebook, and Twitter • Memoirs and columns in newspapers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding individuals' sense of organizational and occupational membership • Insights into individuals' motivation for joining the strike and experiences of it |
| Occupational group level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews throughout data collection (2010–13), especially with executives of occupational associations for historical perspectives^a • Field notes (occupational social gatherings) • Minutes of general meetings • Weekly and monthly magazine & newsletters issued by occupational associations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying key historical events for each occupation • Understanding the values, relationships and reputation of each occupational group • Exploring shifting intra-occupational social relations • Analysing occupation-specific narratives of the strike |
| Cross-occupational group level | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews throughout data collection (2010–13), especially with former presidents and union leaders for historical perspectives^a • Field notes (cross-occupational social gatherings, street rallies) • White paper and weekly publications issued by union and management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying key historical events across unions • Exploring shifting inter-occupational social relations • Analysing cross-occupational historical narratives of the strike |

^aGiven how individual cognition can both influence – and be influenced by – evolving social dynamics (Do et al., 2019), interviews were used as part of our analysis for all three levels.

Data Analysis

We began by developing descriptive open codes through multiple reviews of raw data (Locke, 2001). While we expected to identify codes related to memory given the first author's field work and our familiarity with OMS, their frequency surprised us. For instance, open codes included reporters contrasting a proud past with the current crisis, remembering themselves as historically responsible for establishing TelvCorp, remembering the CEO and managers as 'bad apple' reporters, and sharing this constructed memory with non-reporters. This process also highlighted nuance in occupational relationships, as non-reporters (CAPs, CJs, EDPs, ETs, As) responded similarly to reporters' sharing of memories. We then abstracted open codes to create theoretical axial codes (See Table III, Locke, 2001). For example, we drew on explorations of nostalgia (e.g., Foroughi, 2020; Suddaby et al., 2023a) and relationships amongst mnemonic communities – particularly how they share and respond to memories (e.g., Coraiola et al., 2023) – to enfold the aforementioned open codes into the axial code 'Occupational Nostalgic Imposition', which theoretically captured reporters' efforts to construct a pollyannish memory of their place in TelvCorp and impose it upon non-reporters to gain their backing (Coraiola et al., 2023).

Up to this point, all textual data were in Korean, and as such the first and third authors coded it in their original language. As we began developing these axial codes, we translated relevant quote data into English with the assistance of a bilingual research assistant and a generative AI application to share them with the second author. All three authors then discussed and revised these codes and explored relationships amongst them to offer a larger, theoretical story (Charmaz, 2006; Locke, 2001). In doing so we constantly revisited open and axial codes alongside related literature. For instance, 'Occupational Nostalgic Imposition' appeared both temporally and theoretically connected to 'Occupational Mnemonic Resistance', defined as an occupational group's vocalized disagreement over another's memory (i.e., Booth et al., 2007). We thus paired them and, through further reference to OMS and our interpretations, created the dimension *cross-occupational mnemonic disunity*. This process generated two additional dimensions: *occupational evangelizing* and *cross-occupational mnemonic unity* (Table V).

Mapping codes' emergence onto our timeline helped us understand their ordering (Cloutier and Langley, 2020), while further reliance on extant literature helped clarify theoretical connections between them (Eisenhardt, 2021). For instance, a search for theoretical connections between the first and second dimension led us to review the strategic contingency model of power (i.e., Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977), after which we framed the perceived need to evangelize (i.e., sing the praises of) an occupational group that resisted a memory proffered by another as rooted in shifting power dynamics. This step helped us develop a processual model of cross-occupational mnemonic (dis)unity (Supplementary materials).

FINDINGS

TelvCorp's strike offered a story in three phases. The first, cross-occupational mnemonic disunity, included reporters imposing a nostalgic occupational memory (i.e., one primarily constructed and represented by a particular occupational group^[2]) onto non-reporters.

Table V. Data structure

| <i>Open codes</i> | <i>Axial codes</i> | <i>Theoretical codes</i> |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporters contrast proud past with current crisis Reporters remember themselves as historically responsible for establishing TelvCorp Reporters remember CEO and managers as ‘bad apple’ reporters Reporters share this constructed memory with non-reporters | Occupational Nostalgic Imposition | Cross- Occupational Mnemonic Disunity |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-reporters remember themselves as peripheral to TelvCorp Non-reporters remember reporters as egocentric and impudent Non-reporters remember unfair interaction with reporters | Occupational Mnemonic Resistance | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporters rhetorically diminish their own importance to TelvCorp while heightening that of non-reporters Reporters promise to commit to the prospective strike and support non-reporters during it | Occupational Evangelizing Rhetoric | Occupational Evangelizing |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-reporters accept that reporters will act with – rather than above – them during the prospective strike Non-reporters accept that reporters will support them during the prospective strike Non-reporters join the strike in hopes of gaining recognition | Occupational Evangelizing Acceptance | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong event (i.e., initial firings of union leaders) remembered similarly across occupational lines as a ‘sign of war’ Participants develop an ‘us vs. them’ (i.e., strike participants vs. management) mentality | Cross- Occupational Storying | Cross- Occupational Mnemonic Unity |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared memories of initial firings unify strike participants across occupational lines by giving purpose to their actions Shared memories of initial firings spark ideas amongst strike participants for future collaborative action | Nascent Mnemonic Community Emergence | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reporters and non-reporters organize coordinate strike events by utilizing their unique skills and abilities Reporters and non-reporters come to reassess and appreciate the distinct characteristics of each occupational group | Cross- Occupational Coordination | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants ‘other’ non-striking occupational members Intra-occupational social bonds erode | Intra- Occupational Exclusion | |

The second, occupational evangelizing, saw reporters respond to critiques of their memory by offering rhetoric praising and enhancing the significance of non-reporters to TelvCorp broadly and the strike specifically, rhetoric that secured participation but fell

short of sparking COC. The final phase, cross-occupational mnemonic unity, saw the construction of a memory across occupational lines that enabled COC while eroding established occupational bonds.

Phase #1: Cross-Occupational Mnemonic Disunity

We define cross-occupational mnemonic disunity as a state in which occupational groups contest COC based on cross-occupational memories. Such disunity became apparent as reporters constructed, and attempted to share with non-reporters, a nostalgic view of TelvCorp as essentially founded and protected by the Reporter Group (RG).

Reporters: Occupational nostalgic imposition. The evocation of nostalgia amongst reporters began as managerial actions led them to contrast the current situation with a proud past. Specifically, reporters began sharing amongst themselves a memory of having essentially established and retained TelvCorp by defending journalistic values (i.e., autonomy, unbiased reporting) when they were threatened. For instance, reporters recalled and shared the RG's work in the 1980s – when South Korea operated under a military regime – to lay the groundwork for what TelvCorp would become ('we fought so hard not to repeat it', R7). One reporter said:

'Actually, seniors tell me with this level of oppression, all former reporters have gone out [on strike]. During [the previous administrations in the 70s and 80s], reporters kept going on strike. Whenever that happened, they went on strike and passed a vote of nonconfidence ... this was the basic thing in the past'. (R3)

The shared memory of having established TelvCorp as 'the unbiased witness of the age' (Choi, 2012) – in tandem with the sense that this proud history might soon come to an end – led to calls for a strike to overturn current executives and managers to recapture this proud past. The RG publicly proclaimed, 'If you're a proper journalist, you should feel a heavy responsibility for today's situation and fight for freedom of speech against management' (Archive, 2012).

Complicating this memory, however, was that many within the current leadership team, including the CEO and public relations director, were reporters themselves with, in some cases, over 30 years of RG tenure. Reporters thus faced a dilemma wherein those who threatened their proud past also constituted it. Reporters thus refined their understanding of their occupational memory amongst themselves to mitigate the impact of this violation by dividing reporters into two camps: the senior executives they sought to overturn – who they framed as 'bad apples' – and the RG at large. In essence, reporters constructed an intra-occupationally supported memory of the CEO and executives from the RG as long-time outcasts, consigned to the newsroom's 'back benches' (R4) due to their lack of ethics and capability. Informants often described them as incompetent 'power lovers' (R4) who gained positions through blind loyalty to the CEO. A reporter summated the belief that the CEO promoted those whose careers languished in the RG:

‘The CEO placed people with no journalistic abilities as department heads... These individuals are aggressive, seeking payback for the years they spent as outcasts. They’ve got a lot of resentment from being completely ignored. Totally careerist. That’s why in our culture they were left behind. They really believe that they were recognized for their abilities, that’s why they’re devoted to him’. (R2)

Reporters thus divided those with integrity who historically sought to uphold journalistic values from those without such integrity who were responsible for it. This memory allowed those currently in the RG to frame themselves as the ‘true reporters’ (R4) that had upheld their historic responsibility to TelvCorp. Having felt they solved this historical wrinkle, reporters largely assumed that non-reporters would join the strike due to a shared view of reporters as having protected TelvCorp throughout its history. One informant recalled:

‘Personally, we [reporters] thought at first that everybody [non-reporters] was going to be on board, because it wasn’t just our newsroom that was dealing with the network CEO. ... We had always sacrificed our work and won and were going to again lead the charge and everybody else was going to follow... it was not the case’. (R4)

Non-reporters: Occupational mnemonic resistance. However, our data revealed that non-reporters resisted this occupational memory, viewing this nostalgia as inconsistent with their memories of themselves, reporters, and their interactions with them (i.e., relational memories).

Regarding non-reporters’ memories of themselves, reporters’ telling of how they essentially founded and defended TelvCorp conjured non-reporters’ memories of their own lack of historical agency. For example, memories reporters shared of proud involvement in strikes during the 1980s and early 1990s forced non-reporters to confront their unpleasant and even shameful memories of having had little effect on them. One technician recalled:

‘When I hear “techies at TelvCorp are also journalists”, it doesn’t really sink in. When you think of press freedom, journalists can think of one clear memory: the photo of Sohn Seok-Hee [a former reporter] striking in ‘92, and the photo of him in handcuffs, and that’s all they need. When you show them that picture and say, “We are one”, and “You are the heir to this tradition”, it’s very inspiring. But we don’t have that. Our seniors joined the ‘92 strike, but it’s the journalists on TV at the center of the frame. We were in the background’. (ET5)

These memories led non-reporters to view their potential involvement in another strike as meaningless, a far cry from the ways in which reporters hoped these memories would instil in them a sense of urgency and purpose. An administrator lamented:

‘We have a lot of accountants from big companies. Such high-level talents come in only because of a love for broadcasting. Yet, as soon as they get here, they realize this organization revolves around reporters. ... When you see something like that, you naturally realize that administrative and technical jobs are useless here’. (A1)

Regarding non-reporters' memories of reporters, nostalgic imposition surfaced a counter-memory of reporters as historically egocentric and impudent. Non-reporter groups commonly remembered reporters' actions during previous strikes, especially more recent ones, not as reflecting a historic desire to protect TelvCorp but as 'self-righteous pursuits' (EDP8) from those 'cunning in pursuing their collective interest' (CAP2) and 'lacking empathy for others' (ET3). Even those who expressed shared values with reporters during the pilot study (i.e., current affairs producers, camera journalists) responded sarcastically to reporters' nostalgia, particularly their attempts to distance themselves from the CEO and executives from their own ranks. Many saw this memory as an oversimplification, as the 'bad apples' (R4, R6) argument overlooked a culture in the RG that produced these unqualified leaders. A producer commented:

'Who do you think the current CEO is? He came from the Reporter Group. Although he had not been a key member of the group, he was obviously part of the network in the community. Including the director of public relations, there are problematic figures in top management who are former reporters ruining the organization. Why is it? It is because of their culture in the Reporter Group'. (EDP7)

This memory underlaid a perception that reporters were not entitled to lead resistance against management. One entertainment show producer said, 'They've made their bed, now lie in it' (EDP8), echoing the memory that longstanding characteristics of the RG, not just a handful of self-interested reporters, were to blame for the current crisis.

Regarding non-reporters' memories of interactions with reporters, they often recalled how reporters had recently interacted with them only to use them for their own purposes. This relational memory proved perhaps the most substantial barrier to COC. For instance, the current affairs group remembered being the first to oppose looming managerial intervention in early 2009 and, when they faced discipline for their actions, having received little assistance from reporters who had not yet chosen to strike. One senior CAP said:

'We shared our feelings about the Reporter Group: "You guys were silent when management was squeezing us around the neck. Now, you ask for our help because the public is turning away from you? Should we follow your lead whenever you want us to do so?'. The sentiments of this sort were so prevalent among us that I thought collective action would never pan out'. (CAP2)

Relatedly, many remembered reporters' initial commitment to, then seemingly quick abandonment of, a failed strike in 2010:

'The union held a meeting where all union members gathered to decide whether to continue the strike or not... One thing that struck me was that reporters tended to be in favor of terminating the strike. There were rumors that they wanted to get back to work with the election season on the horizon, whereas we had stopped our programs to join the strike and our ratings plunged. For what did we sacrifice our programs?'. (EDP4)

This memory painted reporters as only interacting across occupational lines when, and for as long as, they felt it benefitted them personally, a far cry from reporters' nostalgic memory. A technician shared his department head's concerns founded in memories of this same strike:

'Those at the top in our group prevalently asserted that we needed to be more cunning like reporters. This was regarding the fact that our occupational group was totally devastated by the end of the previous [2010] strike. People who had stayed with the company for a long time predicted, based on their past experiences, that enthusiastic participation in the strike would lead to the destruction of our group, a sort of after-typhoon'. (ET4)

In sum, managerial action led reporters to construct a nostalgic occupational memory of themselves, one that glossed over inconsistencies (i.e., executives being former TelvCorp reporters), as founders and defenders of TelvCorp. Sharing this memory with non-reporters, however, sparked memories of their lack of importance, reporters' egocentrism and impudence, and reporters having interacted with them to pursue selfish goals. We characterize this sequence of actions as *cross-occupational mnemonic disunity*, wherein COC fails to materialize following stark misalignment of occupational memories. Said one producer, 'why do we always have to move as if we are receiving orders from the reporting department?' (EDP3).

Phase #2: Occupational Evangelizing

Having seemingly recognized their failure to spur COC through nostalgic imposition, reporters appeared to alter their approach by attempting to establish it through *occupational evangelizing*, which we define as a rhetorical strategy through which one occupation rhetorically enhances the relative importance of others. Despite continuing views of being historically significant to TelvCorp's proud past, reporters shared an understanding that the strike could not succeed without an organization-wide showing of support (i.e., Coleman, 1990), an understanding that granted power to non-reporters. These actions had an intended effect of gaining participation though they stopped short of spurring COC, a distinction we explain below.

Reporters: Occupational evangelizing rhetoric. Reporters chose to address concerns raised in relational memories through rhetoric praising and heightening non-reporters' significance in two ways. First, seemingly responding to non-reporters' memories of themselves as historically peripheral and reporters as historically central in defending TelvCorp (i.e., self and other memories), reporters rhetorically diminished their own importance to successful collective action and heightened that of non-reporters. One reporter acknowledged the comparatively lower visibility and impact of their work in the current media landscape, particularly when contrasted with the influential position held by entertainment and drama producers:

'Reporters do not have the power we used to have. The public did not even notice that we walked out because not many people watch news programs these days. When popular entertainment shows are not televised, people will wonder what's happening

to TelvCorp. We felt helpless and sorry just waiting for those producers to cancel their programs and join the strike'. (R2)

Another said, 'strikes that viewers do not feel are meaningless... In fact, most viewers don't know much about reporting, as long as it goes out by simply copying other news nowadays. However, it is important for viewers that a favorite drama keeps running (without re-running earlier episodes) or that a favorite TV show continues. The era has come when producers are weapons' (R10). Reporters thus addressed self and other memories not by disagreeing with non-reporters, but rather positioning them as more crucial to defending TelvCorp than their memories would have them believe. Said one reporter to a group of ETs:

'There is a rumor that the management are looking to hire replacement reporters in place of strikers. In the long run, it's going to be noticeable, but in the short run, viewers won't know the difference because a lot of what we do is routine and standardized. However, when the lighting, CG, and sound crews stop working, it's a different story. The quality would drastically go down, and it's very noticeable. There would be a higher chance of a broadcasting accident'. (R11)

Second, seemingly addressing memories of negative interactions, reporters framed themselves as more equal to non-reporters and thus willing to support them in ways they previously had not. One said, 'we emphasized to them [non-reporters] that at the rallies, "This time reporters will go all the way", "There will be no case of reporters returning to work first". That way, we appealed to them that it would be different from the last [2010] strike' (R4). One reporter expressed a similar commitment in writing to the current affairs producers...

'We would like to express our gratitude to the CA producers and radio producers who have supported our walkout, and we hope to overcome this current threat with a unified "huddling" of union members, much in the same way that the penguins of the south pole huddle together to overcome the extreme cold'. (R6, Head of Reporters Association, *UM Newsletter Special Issue #4*, 31 January 2012)

... while another spoke to non-reporters during a meeting:

'A broadcast organization is like a living organism. If an arm is cut off, or a leg is taken off, the effect is felt throughout the entire body... I went to a lot of meetings of other occupational groups and tried to convince them, "We're in this together. If we're going to live together, we have to fight together"'. (R3)

Likely wary of the strength and consistency of non-reporters' memories, reporters further endeavoured to fulfil this promise by reminding each other that non-reporters would be observing them to ensure these promises were kept:

'We circulated a lot of messages internally encouraging each other to show up [for rallies]. In the past, when we've gone on strike, some people just stayed home and

didn't show up to rallies, or even traveled abroad. This time, there was a strong sense of "let's do it right" especially because other occupational groups were watching us'. (R1)

Taken together, reporters' *occupational evangelizing rhetoric* sent a message that non-reporters were, contrary to their memories, as (if not more) important as reporters.

Non-reporters: Occupational evangelizing acceptance. The strength and consistency of this rhetoric underlaid many non-reporters looking to the future while largely downplaying their earlier-espoused relational memories. Indeed, many non-reporters concluded that 'reporters look different this time' (A1) and believed they were willing to stand with – rather than above – non-reporter groups. Of particular significance were non-reporters' observations of the head of the RG (R6), who had long been seen as the epitome of the elitist reporter 'walking on the Golden Path' (R3, R5, CAP3). He declared how he would 'fight like a tough weed until the end' (*RG Newsletter*, 14 January 2012), and his declaration and subsequent actions made a strong impression:

'The negativity surrounding reporters was much severer than now. It did not get any better until they saw with their own eyes how reporters fought this time. Amidst the shift in their view on reporters, the head of the Reporter Group was at the center. He was elite in the newsroom and believed to be the anchor of our flagship news program. Few expected him to spearhead the struggle against management'. (ET3)

Non-reporters also accepted reporters' promise to listen to and support them through this strike. For example, a producer expressed appreciation for the visit of one reporter to hear concerns and unite them around a common cause:

'There was a veteran reporter (R4) in union leadership. One of his roles was to visit each one of the occupational groups and persuade them to join reporters' walkout. He was convinced we could oust the CEO through a strike given the favorable political landscape [of South Korea]... He was so convincing on the political landscape as to make many of us feel less nervous about the strike'. (EDP7)

However, while reporters' intention for striking (i.e., restoring TelvCorp's journalistic integrity) remained the same through this process, their evangelizing rhetoric appeared to underlie a starkly different reason for striking amongst non-reporters who primarily viewed participation as an opportunity to gain recognition within TelvCorp. For instance, many non-reporters who remembered their role in TelvCorp as 'second-class citizens' (A3, ET5) saw the strike as a chance to prove the importance of their having 'an equal voice' (ET3). This opportunity served as a driving force, with one technician saying:

'Technicians can't help but be weaker parts within the company. And so, to exaggerate a little, it was an opportunity to show our organized power as technicians, its

necessity... we can imprint on people's minds that "we actually do try hard", and that the technicians' group "do such and such duties". So, the technicians' group becomes something that is needed by the union. In the organization, as an extension to this, it's a show of force that the technicians' group is a needed existence'. (ET7)

These differences in rationale for participation also manifested behaviourally. For instance, non-reporters – namely drama producers and administrative staffs – gathered near TelvCorp's headquarters without reporters to confront top management on their way to and from work to shout for their resignations. Many saw these actions as showing their significance, a sentiment summated by one producer: 'if you look at the history of broadcasting companies in any country in the world, we are the only case where entertainment producers and drama producers participated in a strike' (CAP2). Others, including a group of entertainment show producers, organized intra-occupational retreats – including one to the suburbs of Seoul (EDP6) – to discuss how they might use the strike to enhance their organizational standing. Observations showed non-reporters arriving at, departing from, and meeting after rallies amongst themselves.

In conclusion, occupational evangelizing rhetoric swayed non-reporters to join the strike as it framed memories of themselves, reporters and their interactions with them as relics of the past. However, this focus resulted in these two groups developing different reasons for participating and remaining separate in their activities during the early phases of the strike. Reporters and non-reporters had thus yet to show signs of COC.

Phase #3: Cross-Occupational Mnemonic Unity

COC finally emerged in a form of *cross-occupational mnemonic unity* (i.e., the state in which occupational groups engage in coordination based on shared memories). This unity included cross-occupational storying of a shared past, the emergence of a nascent mnemonic community, COC and intra-occupational exclusion.

Reporters and non-reporters: Cross-occupational storying. After several weeks of participating with differing objectives, an event was commonly experienced and remembered similarly by reporter and non-reporter strike participants (e.g., Do and Lyle, 2022). TelvCorp's management, in a press release on 28 February 2012, labelled the strike an 'unprofessional act of sabotage' and took decisive disciplinary measures, most notably firing the leader of the RG (R6) and, in the following weeks, strike leaders from non-reporter groups as well.

These firings came as an utter shock to strike participants across occupational lines, as most had never seen nor expected such a drastic measure during their organizational tenure. Viewing the firings as a violation of historical precedent, the union issued a statement which defined the event as 'the biggest press massacre since the military regime' (TelvCorp Union statement, 2012, 6), with a senior reporter adding, 'I am appalled that journalists can be fired for calling for "press freedom" in a democratic society, which

had only happened under the ruling of military governments in 1970s and 80s. It is a “declaration of war” to turn the clock back to the dark days (of military ruling) and take control of ‘TelvCorp’ (R4).

Compounding this sense of shock were the close, personal relationships between strike participants and those fired, especially as TelvCorp’s union leadership comprised at least one fired member of each occupational group with whom its members had direct relationships before joining the cause. Informants, especially junior participants, recalled their memory of working with fired union leaders when they knew them only as occupational colleagues, thus enhancing their anger towards management. One drama producer said,

‘It is the tradition of TelvCorp to put the aces in each field on programs directed by a rookie producer. He (union leader, sound engineer) was the first choice for all producers because he is not only excellent with sound but also comfortable with younger producers. When he became a union executive in 2011 and left the production, many producers lamented, “he got stuck in the union because he was too nice to take no for an answer”. Now that it’s fired, how did you think strikers take that? “We need to win this fight and get him back to the production studio”. Like that it became very simple and clear’. (EDP5)

The novelty (i.e., unexpectedness) and criticality (i.e., personal relevance) – or strength (Morgeson et al., 2015) – of this event led participants to form a shared understanding of the firings as ‘an act of murdering our own family members’ (CAP1) and label the CEO a ‘serial killer’ (R4, ET5). Said one entertainment and drama producer:

‘I feel so resentful. I can’t stand by and ignore the fact that the organization has been irretrievably harmed by some god-forsaken people. I sincerely hope to see the final day when this place is returned to its original state, and to see these people (top management) walking out of the organization’. (EDP3, from his Facebook page)

The accounts we heard of this event – and its place in TelvCorp’s history – embodied the mnemonic practice of *storying*,^[3] wherein a community collectively composes an ongoing narrative of their shared past. Unlike in prior work, wherein a group remembers a past that generally pre-dates the tenure of a portion of its members, these firings were commonly experienced by all strike participants (i.e., *near past* – Schultz and Hernes, 2013). Amidst these emergent conversations arose a labelling of the event as a ‘call to arms’ leading participants – without reference to occupational membership – to adopt an ‘us’ (strike participants) versus ‘them’ (management) perspective. This ‘call to arms’ also marked a transition from a previous notion of ‘us’ (non-reporters) versus ‘them’ (reporters) that preceded and existed during the initial stages of the strike. Participants often recounted the events by sharing a deep sympathy for those fired and a strong resentment towards management, as one producer described:

‘The management fired a total of 6 people... they did things that would incite emotion from the people on strike, like transferring employees, organizational reform, and even getting rid of whole departments. They got rid of anywhere [we] could return to. And on top of that they hit us with dismissals... We couldn’t stop the strike out of pure loyalty. A colleague next to me had been fighting to the death (dismissal) and failed, and to abandon that and step on what he had done, we couldn’t possibly do that’. (ET5)

Reporters and non-reporters: Nascent mnemonic community emergence. Beyond this storying and the narrative transition within it, strike participants began showing signs of having become a mnemonic community, or group for whom a shared past constitutes their character (Coraiola et al., 2023). In the near-term, reporters and non-reporters developed a shared understanding of the strike based on this memory. A union leader terminated shortly after these initial firings detailed this understanding and its rootedness in participants’ shared memory:

‘After the dismissal of union executives including me, people started to become desperate. There was an explosive response – we held a three-week campaign on the streets. And such an explosive response was exciting. Members really gave their all. Famous announcers, reporters, drama producers were holding pickets up in places like Gangnam, just imagine.

If you look previous strikes, everybody sits in a straight line, and the head of the union makes a speech, and then there are the endorsement speeches of several dignitaries, and then people scatter. That’s the old way it was done. We hadn’t been able to escape this.

But things changed [after the dismissal]. There were 500 people each day at rallies. That was quite fascinating. We held so many rallies. If we had always just sat there and just said things, then I doubt that so many participants would have come. They came and joined the rallies because they felt sorry. Because they saw that their colleague next to them had come to stick it out with their bodies. Because they felt sorry for those who got fired. They, just voluntarily, were texting things like, ‘why hasn’t someone come today?’. And then they came to have hope, a hope that we can win this fight together’. (ET1)

These actions suggest that the meaning of ‘strike participation’ had transformed following the emergence of this shared memory, thus indicating that the memory of the firings – despite its relative newness – had begun constituting the character of the strike participant group. We also encountered evidence of strike participants’ post-strike plans being shaped by this shared memory of being called to arms. Importantly, participants began viewing the strike not as an episode, after which they would return to working primarily with their occupational colleagues, but the beginning of a new chapter of COC at TelvCorp. One reporter revealed:

‘This strike should not remain an isolated event or episode. We should take this as an opportunity to reflect on how to put in place practices and systems that will prevent what happened to us over the past year from reemerging in the future. Personally, I think that we should institutionalize such measures’. (R6)

Another reporter saw the strike as marking what would come to be known as a transition for TelvCorp and South Korean labour alike:

‘The strike made me realize the ineffectiveness of one voice unheard by others. We had trouble getting the message across to other groups in the organization. We also found it difficult to make our voice heard by the public in the street, even though we belong to the social elite in Korea. I could not even imagine how painful the non-standard or blue-collar workers, who have been staging street rallies for years, would be. The first news item after our strike will be stories of those marginalized workers uniting’. (R1)

Importantly, many strike participants developed shared understandings not only of what they would accomplish through continued COC but *why* they would accomplish it. For instance, many non-reporters began adopting reporters’ stated cause for action (i.e., restoring journalistic integrity) after the initial firings as a reason for continuing their work in support of one another. Said one technician:

‘At first, “the public value of the press” sounded foreign to us. But chanting the slogan over and over got us thinking, “how is it related to our job?”. We then realize that *delivering* good content is as important as making good content. That’s what we are going to strive for, including reducing gap areas for viewers and transmitting clearer scenes through 4k and 8k systems to benefit the public’. (ET7)

Entertainment show producers vocalized a similar shift in their promise to enlist reporters to produce meaningful content. One said, ‘This experience affirmed pride that TelvCorp’s entertainment programmes are different. Though we promised to the public to resume our shows after the strike, how can we now make entertainment that’s just funny? Laughter is important, but social meaning should be our differentiation’ (EDP2). Strike participants thus appeared to base their rationale for current and future action in the shared memory of this ‘call to arms.’

Aside: Nascent mnemonic community endurance. Before continuing the story of TelvCorp within our study window (2010–13), it is important to note the longevity of this mnemonic community and its continued reliance upon stories of these firings as a founding event of sorts^[4]. For instance, about a year and a half after the strike ended, an engineer shared how ‘when he [union leader/engineer] was fired during the strike, it felt like a piece of my arm fell off. He was the senior colleague I respected the most... I don’t have that piece of my arm back’ (ET8). Post-strike, members of this community also began collectively petitioning for the reinstatement of those fired, stating, ‘the normalization of TelvCorp will be complete when they return and we

can hug them in a circle' (Newsletter, 3 May 2013), and 'the first step to regaining the trust of the news organization is the return of the exiled reporters and the restoration of the union' (Newsletter, 7 October 2013). One administrator described the post-strike endurance of this community as follows:

'We have common memories. Handing out flyers together, going outside when it's cold together and trembling. ... So, for example, in the past, people between occupations would talk about obvious things, the same topic in the same language [within each occupation], but once there was a common word called strike, we started to speak a common language. For example, punishment, termination, victim or something like that? That's talking about a common theme in a common language. I think it has the effect of resetting the [inter-occupational] conflict'. (A1)

This evidence suggests that this group did not simply develop a superordinate identity for purposes of COC but rather began seeing – and continued to see – their past as setting them apart from other organization members and binding them together despite occupational differences.

Reporters and non-reporters: Cross-occupational coordination. Returning to our story, the emergence of this mnemonic community encouraged action as reporters and non-reporters within it began collaborating. A union bulletin released after the initial firings read:

'This strike will determine the fate of TelvCorp. We, the union, staked everything on this battle. It will be the CEO or our union collapsing. Setting aside the occupational groups you belong to, we are all members of TelvCorp... It feels like it's a bit late, but reporters already initiated their fight. Now, it's time for all of us to stand up' (*Union Special Newsletter #2*, 'The future of TelvCorp is on the strike', 30 Jan 2012).

This memory thus seemed to catalyse the first instances of what could be considered COC, as strike participants from various occupational backgrounds coordinated in response to this 'call to arms'. For example, producers worked with reporters to introduce flash mob activities at various protest locations, a strategy not previously attempted in TelvCorp's strikes and one embraced across occupational lines:

'It must have looked fun to other strike participants. For the rally programs, we would stage something similar to a show, or play it out like a game, as we had always done at work. Entertainment show producers would get together to plan. The general opinion from other occupational groups was "How can they do that? Producers are so creative! They must be naturally gifted at partying because they are entertainment show producers". I think we were evaluated as being particularly talented at having a good time. We just did so since it was much fun to us as well'. (EDP6)

Occupational leaders also met to discuss the strengths of each occupational group most relevant to the strike, with one head of the ET department saying:

‘We knew that producers were designing the specifics of the rallies as well as producing YouTube content for the union. Reporters were recruiting influential figures into the rallies. And our job was to fill the rallies with our bodies’. (ET3)

Collaboration brought about a broader reassessment and appreciation for each occupational group’s unique qualities within the community. For example, non-ETs re-evaluated their negative perceptions of ETs, namely their collectivistic/hierarchical culture, following the firings:

‘The engineering department has no ammunition. For us producers, programs are our leverage. This results in their having a strong tendency towards “doing something as a group together”. They are strong at solidly coming together in one voice that is geared towards making their presence known. So, during the strike, it seemed that the greater agenda for those guys was to show a greater force of unity. It helped enormously the union and all of the participants during the strike. It was the guys from the groups that would account for the most numbers in the rallies, filling up the places’. (EDP5)

One administrator similarly recalled a newfound appreciation from others in his interactions across occupational lines: ‘When I first went to a rally, people from other groups were saying things like, “you might be a spy sent by management” or “the dog of power is here”. Yet now they really value my presence and expertise in HR. They’ll come to me at rallies and say, “My manager is threatening to discipline me, how do I respond?”’. (A3).

Reporters and non-reporters: Intra-occupational exclusion. While COC further bonded strike participants, it had the unintended consequence of eroding occupational bonds as a social divide emerged between occupational members who did and did not participate in the strike. One participant described non-participants as leaving ‘stains in all our hearts’:

‘Whether it be acute criticism, or even cold disdain, the traces that she (non-participating occupational colleague) left remained as stains in all our hearts. Although we are unsure as to how we will meet her again, after the strike ends, it is highly regretful that we know nothing can return as it did before’. (*TelcoCorp Online Bulletin Board*, 25 May 2012)

While non-participants were previously regarded as ‘being responsible for their work’ (EDP4), ‘secretly working as a source of information in the office’ (A2) or ‘financial supporters for the strikes’ (EDP5) – often treating currently unpaid strikers to meals and drinks – they were now accused of silence as their colleagues risked their livelihood. Participants concluded that non-participants prioritized their careers over the cause,

hoping to receive managerial rewards for their silence. The union leader compared the strike to a litmus test:

‘The relationships within occupational groups were never harmed during past strikes... We have never been in a situation that reached the extent of having to make a decisive choice. But this time we scraped the bucket. We reached the last straw. “What do you actually think?”. Then you really see what their thoughts are... those who joined the strike had so much time to question the thoughts of the people who had remained at the office to work, and what had led them to remain there, and so, inevitably, there was anger’. (ET1)

The act of participating in the strike became a defining criterion for participants to evaluate occupational colleagues. One participant said the strike had assisted in ‘weeding out’ individuals they perceived as negative influences (CAP3). In conjunction with the ‘us-versus-them’ mentality directed towards management, those who did not take part in the strike were no longer considered part of the ‘us’ group, despite sharing the same occupation:

‘If you think about the current situation of the strike, it can be said that we’ve crossed the river of no return. If one has not joined the strike so far, it means that he or she sided with the “other side”, with management, with a different mindset than us. It’s becoming someone who can’t be with us in the future’. (CAP3)

DISCUSSION

These findings led us to develop a processual model of cross-occupational mnemonic (dis)unity (Figure 1). The first phase – cross-occupational mnemonic *dis*unity – involves a lack of mnemonic consensus as a focal occupation – in our case, reporters – imposes memories on another to mobilize support for an initiative (*occupational nostalgic imposition*) and encounters resistance based in unfavourable relational memories (*occupational mnemonic resistance*). The resulting disunity impedes COC due to a misalignment of memories between occupations.

When the focal occupation views the resisting one’s – in our case, non-reporters – support as critical to the initiative’s success, the focal occupation will be compelled to address it through *occupational evangelizing rhetoric*, narratives that contradict existing relational memories to praise the significance of the resisting occupation and influence its members to downplay earlier-espoused relational memories (*occupational evangelizing acceptance*). However, this occupation-specific focus results in both groups maintaining distinct motivations for participation in ways that prevent full engagement in COC.

Cross-occupational mnemonic unity only occurs as both the focal and resisting occupations experience a strong event. Its novelty and criticality, alongside overlap between occupational and cross-occupational groups (i.e., occupational colleagues working in union leadership roles) encourages the occupations to undertake *cross-occupational storytelling*, which creates the necessary conditions for a *nascent mnemonic community* to arise in which both

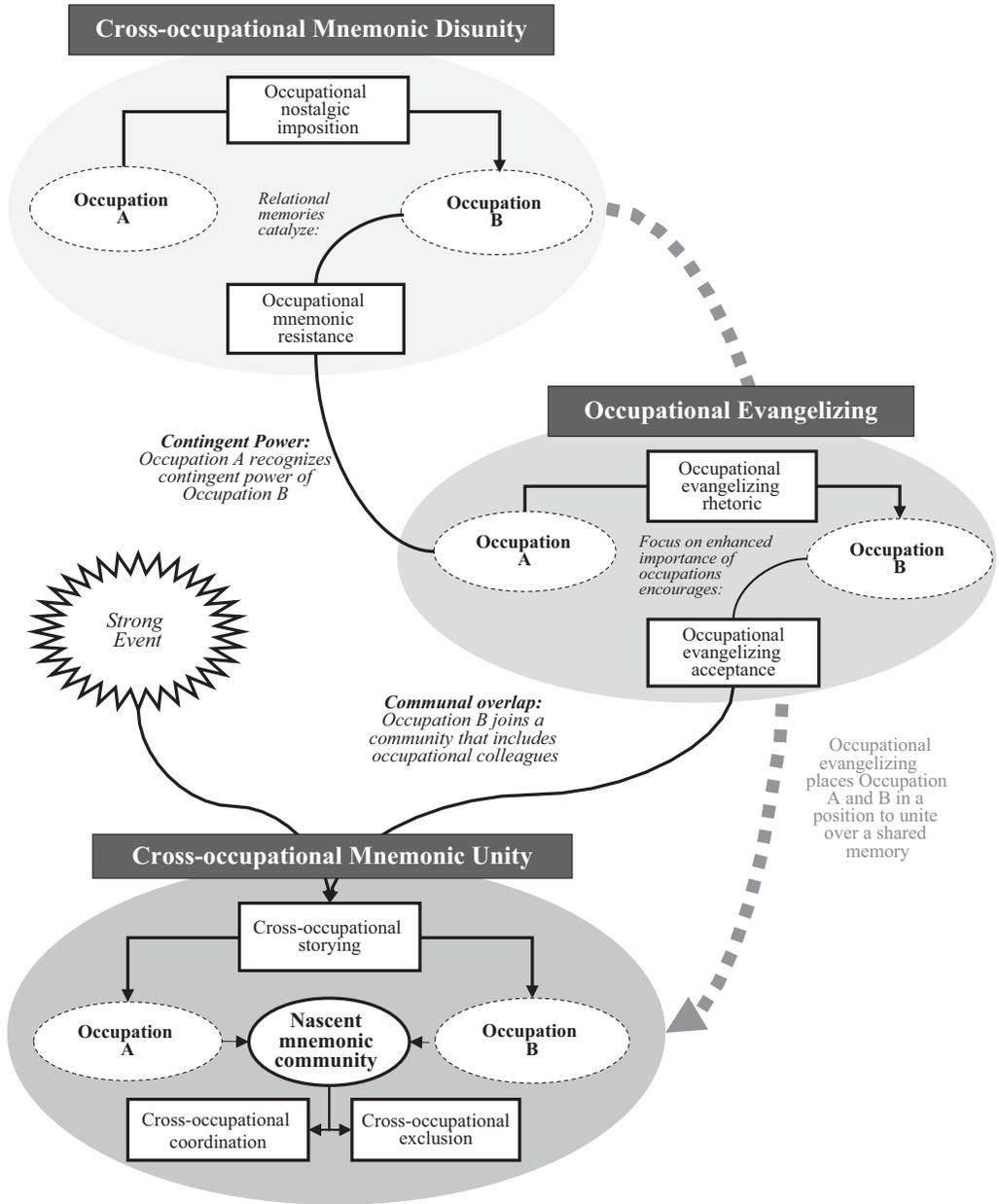


Figure 1. Theoretical model of cross-occupational mnemonic (dis)unity

occupations consider their shared past as a defining element. This unity encourages collaborative action, as focal and resisting occupations join forces to organize events for the initiative (*cross-occupational coordination*). Such unity might unintentionally strain established occupational bonds as members of this new community disparage outgroup members, even those from their own occupation (*intra-occupational exclusion*).

Implications for Research at the Intersection of OMS and COC

As our findings suggested an inextricable nature to memories and occupations, we aim to provide theoretical implications for those studying both. Our primary implication is that organizations, as noted in recent work (Foroughi, 2020; Foroughi et al., 2020), contain several, likely competing interpretations of the past. We view this splintering as potentially rooted in occupations' relational memories, which capture how they collectively remember (1) themselves in relation to other occupations, (2) others as their own entities, and (3) their interactions with them (i.e., relational schema consisting of self-, other-, and interaction schema, Baldwin, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Ragins and Verbos, 2007) and make difficult the realization of a coherent organizational memory.

Interestingly, however, these distinct memories were seemingly represented without affecting organizational outcomes until the threat of managerial intervention (2008–10). For instance, it might be expected that continued, lower-level COC – such as multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings (Oborn and Barrett, 2021) and smaller projects involving members of disparate occupations (Farchi et al., 2023) – might surface mnemonic differences and disrupt ongoing coordination. This dormancy of occupational memories might be explained as they, and their differences, become more salient to COC as its scale and uncertainty increases. Much like organizational identity, memories may be 'most likely to be explicitly discussed when ambiguity, change, or disagreement impair the utility of routinized processes' (Ashforth and Mael, 1996, p. 29). For example, while reporters and producers may not think to discuss mnemonic differences when coordinating during an MDT, the uncertainty of a strike leads them to discuss the wider range of points on which they must agree to promote a favourable outcome.

Per this observation, organizational memory itself might be more accurately defined as a constellation of memories, held by various mnemonic communities, that co-exist within those communities until the sharing of one such memory across communities retains, strengthens or diminishes mnemonic divides. We encourage scholars to investigate this 'punctuated equilibrium' view as we continue to grapple with and further study organizational memory.

It is also likely that, as in our case, the scale of COC necessary for larger and more uncertain initiatives leads occupational groups to use the past strategically, as shown in studies of rhetorical history (Hatch and Schultz, 2017; Lyle et al., 2022; Suddaby et al., 2010), in ways simply not done in more routinized COCs. That is, while memories might be constructed and represented within occupational groups, these groups do not meaningfully encounter memories of other occupations until critical moments in organizational life. These differences suggest that disparate occupational memories, despite their limited influence on organizations during times of relative stasis, can spring to life in ways that potentially disrupt organizations when their continued functioning is perhaps at the greatest risk (cf., Booth et al., 2007).

Relatedly, we find interesting outcomes regarding occupational evangelizing, an approach theoretically consistent with much of the literature on creating readiness for change by empowering groups through positive framings (e.g., Armenakis et al., 1993; Oreg et al., 2018). We find some support for the utility of this approach in the context of COC, especially when attempts to initiate coordination by imposing occupational

memories are resisted. Key here is a resisting occupation's necessity, or contingent power (i.e., Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977), in the eyes of an imposing one. Per Hargrave and Van de Ven (2006, p. 878), 'conflict tends to remain latent or to be squelched by dominant actors until challengers can mobilize sufficient power by engaging in political strategies and tactics of collective action to gain support for their demands.' Non-reporters thus gained influence by virtue of the importance of their mere presence in helping reporters present a united front, thus necessitating reporters' pivot from past- to present-focus. Evangelizing also likely proved easier to reporters than compromising their memory or co-constructing a new, cross-occupational one through substantial investment (Booth et al., 2007) over longer time horizons (Fine and Hallett, 2014). The affective charge of memories marked by nostalgia or nostophobia (Do et al., 2019) might further compound an occupation's unwillingness to reconstruct their memory, as groups are generally unwilling to alter memories that evoke in them strong emotions (Anteby and Molnar, 2012; Foster et al., 2011).

While this pivot appeared sufficient in gaining support from other occupations, there is reason to view such an approach as a necessary – though not sufficient – step in bringing about COC (dotted grey arrow, Figure 1). As our findings suggest, a strong event (Morgeson et al., 2015) about which those engaged in COC can construct a shared memory may determine whether individuals are willing to work with, as opposed to simply in the vicinity of, those from other occupations. This outcome speaks to the power of storying, wherein a community composes a narrative of their shared past (Coraiola et al., 2023). A strong event likely brings together those it affects most in efforts to interpret it (Do and Lyle, 2022; Suddaby et al., 2023b), with the novelty of these efforts themselves further demarcating the time before and after the event for this recently formed group (Walsh et al., 2023). However, for a group to perceive an event as requiring collective interpretation they must first have – at least loosely – come together. Evangelizing rhetoric may thus serve as an important step in spurring COC.

Relatedly, our process model uncovered means through which nascent mnemonic communities form. Importantly, the past to which members of this community referred occurred relatively recently, thus highlighting the criticality of what Schultz and Hernes (2013, 2020) deem the 'near past'. While the past may indeed reflect the 'foreign country' alluded to by Lowenthal (1985), Schultz and Hernes (2020) implicitly draw attention to how all events preceding the present moment are potentially constitutive of memory. Indeed, Becker (2005, p. 103), in her writings on Maurice Halbwachs, observes how 'the weight of the recent past including his own personal past' influenced his very conceptualizations of collective memory. Others, including Danner-Schröder (2020) and Lyle et al. (2022), have similarly conceptualized the past as including incredibly recent events that spur the co-authoring of memories by communities that become and, as our data suggests, remain more central to their story than those that fade 'because of the lack of remembering and the eroding effects of time' (Connerton, 1989, p. 382; Coraiola et al., 2023). In sum, strong events from the near past (i.e., those seen as novel and critical – Morgeson et al., 2015) can form mnemonic touchstones demarcating the transition from a constellation of individuals to a community whose rootedness in the past has just now begun.

Our work also speaks to the strength of occupational boundaries owing to the confluence of events necessary to erode them. As in previous work (Farchi et al., 2023; Oborn and Barrett, 2021; Pouthier, 2017), occupation members and outsiders alike socially

constructed various boundaries around their occupations that delimited one from another and underlaid their at times siloed nature, thus initially impeding COC. Our work suggests the inclusion of another such boundary – one of occupational memories – that delimits occupations and makes coordination amongst them difficult in ways similar to coordination amongst other mnemonic communities. These memories are not limited to the foundational memories of an occupation's place in society (Anteby et al., 2016) nor the memories passed down from a prior generation of occupation members (Orr, 2006) as they can include relatively recently constructed relational memories that determine for occupation members their place in the organization relative to others.

One could conclude from our findings, however, that such boundaries are inherently transient and subject to degradation. While we observed this outcome amongst strike participants, the confluence of factors necessary to reach it indicates their strength. For instance, boundary erosion included the sharing and rejection of occupational memories, a pivot to occupational evangelizing, and a strong event that bridged the gap between occupational and strike membership for a nascent mnemonic community to arise. Indeed, the bridging of established and nascent mnemonic communities – built upon non-reporters who existed in both worlds – seemed vital to investing non-reporters in the event such that they engaged in cross-occupational storying. We thus support contentions that occupational *mnemonic boundaries*, discussed but not named in prior work (Coraiola et al., 2023), prove difficult to dissolve.

Furthermore, while scholars have mapped the positive effects of mnemonic community formation (Coraiola et al., 2023), the emergence of this cross-occupational mnemonic community did not come without cost as existing intra-occupational relationships deteriorated in its wake. While we have theorized the more immediate outcomes of such mnemonic community formation in organizational contexts, other theoretically interesting reciprocal effects might take place once such a community forms. For one, in TelvCorp we witnessed individuals turning against their non-participating occupational colleagues during a strike that, though lasting 170 days, eventually ended and took with it the primary reason for their division. This community might endure, however, should they continue meeting and should the memory itself retain relevance (Foroughi et al., 2020), both of which occurred at least a year and a half following strike termination. This COC likely influenced, and might continue influencing, non-participants as well, instilling and crystallizing in them a memory of participants turning from friend to foe in ways that hamper participant/non-participant relations and productivity moving forward. However, the dynamic nature of memory (Foroughi et al., 2020) suggests these divides may erode without further cause to congregate (Coraiola et al., 2023). These possibilities highlight potential outcomes that we encourage scholars to explore over longer time horizons.

Alternative Explanations

We considered alternative explanations, namely those minimizing the importance of memory. For instance, non-reporters might have initially rebuffed reporters due simply to the perception that they did not need to strike and could not gain much from doing so.

However, we encountered abundant and strong evidence that relational memories of the RG factored heavily into non-reporters' resistance:

'The way several reporters behaved during the 2010 strike really tarnished the image of RG as a whole. They were so good at speaking up at the general meetings of the union that it was hard for a technician like me to speak up. ... Now, they go on another long-winded rant about how we should fight to the end, which makes me out of patience with them. I voted against the strike in the full union vote'. (ET6)

Imposition itself might have also produced resistance from non-reporters as, irrespective of a mnemonic component, imposing an unwanted narrative onto non-reporters drew their ire. However, while occupational barriers could theoretically have produced resistance to any imposed narrative, the responses we observed amongst non-reporters – particularly their immediate and widespread sharing of relational memories – suggested the mnemonic component of this imposition did matter to the process we observed and might more broadly inhibit COC.

We also interrogated whether the memory of a 'call to arms' – not the simple 'othering' of management – explained our findings in Phase 3. Though identifying common enemies has proven to be a powerful tool in developing communities during times of organizational uncertainty (Chreim, 2002), we ultimately eschewed this explanation as strike participants frequently referenced memories of the initial wave of firings when discussing their immediate and longer-term plans, thus suggesting the salience of this memory to their actions. While the development of a common enemy undoubtedly played a role in the emergent 'us' versus 'them' framing, its founding in a resonant memory appeared important to what followed.

Practical Implications

Occupational groups should understand the power of their own memories in sparking COC, as they can be reconstructed and shared to motivate other occupations to join. Unlike reporters at TelvCorp, however, those groups might first share those memories with trusted, non-occupational colleagues before attempting to do so broadly, learning how those memories might be received before sharing a past that could be resisted. Even without such feedback, occupations should consider their historic shortcomings in COC, weaving them into their occupational memory and giving concrete examples of their intentions to behave differently moving forward.

Managers should consider the importance of shared memories to COC. While evangelizing rhetoric might convince occupations to join a multi-disciplinary team or complete a near-term project, successful execution of more substantial COC may require cross-occupational storytelling. While remaining wary of its potentially destructive outcomes (i.e., the dissolution of occupational bonds), encouraging those involved in COC to construct shared memories might motivate their present and future endeavours (Do and Lyle, 2022).

Boundary Conditions and Limitations

As we have focused on COC that serves a shared political objective across occupational boundaries, examining COCs with various goals (i.e., introductions of new technology or product development) would certainly be valuable. However, our contextual focus does not inherently diminish our study's contributions as the occupational resistance we found – and theorized as rooted in relational memory – appears common across forms of COC (O'Mahony and Bechky, 2006). While we anticipate similar patterns of interactions and mnemonic dynamics during COC as a focal occupation attempts to bring another on board, future research could examine how the mnemonic processes of COC could differ depending on its goal.

Furthermore, while we examined mnemonic processes at the occupational group level, organizational and individual level factors likely influence our findings. For instance, some informants mentioned how HRM practices, such as the annual mass hiring of new college graduates, helped them build cross-occupational relationships. Relatedly, several cited TelvCorp's homogeneous workforce and progressive organizational culture as an enabler of past COC. Future research could explore how organizational practices and individual differences interact with mnemonic dynamics at the occupational group level to shape coordination.

CONCLUSION

Do et al. (2019, p. 1326), investigating memories in a communal context, referred to them as 'the capricious seamstress's needle, one that wove in and out of the very fabric that held the community together'. In TelvCorp we identified a similar capriciousness, as occupational memories were constructed, contested and, eventually, created together. While this process alone proved theoretically interesting, so too did the ways in which it sparked the emergence of a nascent mnemonic community and the dissolution of occupational bonds that, at the outset of the strike, seemed impenetrable. Our work suggests a critical role for memory in the study of occupations and the ways in which they, much like the memories they co-author, shift over time. We now turn, as did the nascent mnemonic community at TelvCorp, to the future to see what memories the OMS and COC fields will jointly create.

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NOTES

- [1] While the pilot study did surface heterogeneity within occupations (i.e., certain occupational members disagreeing regarding the values central to their work), we found nearly universal agreement regarding jurisdictional boundaries. We thus felt that the discrete occupations within TelvCorp mapped well onto its departmental divides.
- [2] We focus here on *an* occupational memory, rather than occupational memory more broadly, which can be defined as the shared interpretations surrounding a suite of events that forms an occupation's current and future character (Coraiola et al., 2023; Oborn and Barrett, 2021).
- [3] Storying is an extant term in the OMS literature, first coined by Coraiola et al. (2023, p. 379) to describe 'the recounting of the past as a narrative'.
- [4] Here we draw upon data from our continued field work in TelvCorp, which as of this writing is still ongoing.

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