APPLIED THEORY

SUMMARY

- Proposes William Riker's *heresthetic*, or "structuring the world so you can win," as a strategizing method
- Suggests that this approach will better position technical communicators to succeed in the global information economy

From Wordsmith to Communication Strategist: Heresthetic and Political Maneuvering in Technical Communication

PATRICK MOORE AND MELINDA KRETH

THE NEED FOR HERESTHETIC

A constant refrain in recent essays about the future of technical communicators is the need for more strategic awareness. In her article on the future of technical communication, Barbara Giammona (2004) cites several leaders in the profession who point out the need for strategy: "IBM's Andrea Ames calls herself an information strategist" (p. 352); Neil Perlin says technical communicators must become involved in "'strategic direction setting'" (p. 352); George Hayhoe says, "'if we don't demonstrate how we add value, that we are a strategic part of the business, we are doomed'" (p. 353); Saul Carliner says, "'We've screwed up our profession by focusing on perishable skills and taking the focus away from the strategic, intellectual skills'" (p. 354).

In another article, Judith M. Herr (2004) cited the discussion on an STC networking list-serv, in which Tom Leah Martin said, "I've actually started to notice that the technical communication jobs that are staying here or being newly developed are getting more sophisticated and strategic" (p. 15). Herr also quotes R. Ivan Linderman as saying that "It is the difference between tactical and strategic positions; between providing a commodity, and not. . . . If we want to stay in this arena, we need to become strategic; become project managers/document designers rather than document writers" (p. 15).

Even when technical communication experts do not explicitly refer to "strategy," they refer to the heart of strategizing: the complex awareness of the variables that must be understood and brought into play against an opponent when planning to achieve a goal. For example, when discussing single-sourcing projects, Robert Kramer (2003) says that "single-sourcing adds a new layer of complexity to the writer's job, expanding authoring duties to include a range of technical and data management skills not typically found on most technical communication course syllabi" (pp. 328–29). In his article on using human performance technology in technical communication, Michael Hughes (2004) says,

> *The impact is that technical communicators now need a broader set of skills and need to expand their education and training to include areas such as organization development, behavioral psychology, and statistical analysis needed to assess performance improvement. The payback for acquiring these additional skills, however, will be an increase in the real and perceived value their resultant solutions deliver. (p. 374)*

In their article on seven professionals who evaluated their Master's program in technical communication ten years after graduation, Wilson and Ford (2003) heard their infor-

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mants repeatedly mention how they needed more information about the variables involved in working in business. One informant (Alan) said, "It would also have been helpful to have a basic understanding of the product life cycles, project management, the differences between an engineering-driven and marketing-driven company, and things like the pros and cons of working in marketing *vs.* engineering *vs.* QA departments" (p. 149). Wilson and Ford observed that "The listserv participants express the wish that they had been trained in interviewing methods (perhaps something more akin to ethnographic methods), business culture and fundamentals, marketing, planning, scheduling, and budgeting" (p. 152).

The days of being grammar cops, wordsmiths, and software applications experts are not over for technical communicators, but those skills are diminishing in value as the global information economy becomes more cost-conscious, profit-driven, and focused on designing and delivering better experiences to individuals, groups, organizations, and entire cultures. Today, technical communicators who add value to their organizations do not merely write and edit documents. We must manage situations, events, and the interactions and experiences of individuals, groups, and cultures. We must manage complex strategies involving people, projects, goals, priorities, institutional rules and politics, national and international standards, cultural conventions, relationships between diverse technological platforms, and a variety of constraints. To do all of those things means, among other things, that we must know how to neutralize or offset the attempts of others to manage those same variables when those people interfere with our goals.

To accomplish these goals, technical communicators today and tomorrow must use *heresthetic*—we must structure the world so we can win.

For a variety of reasons, students in academic technical communications programs are not likely to learn a great deal about the kinds of strategies cited above.

1. Such strategies are not addressed in most technical communications textbooks—which tend to focus almost exclusively on rhetorical strategies, which today are necessary but not sufficient—nor are they commonly written about in articles published in technical communication journals.

2. Technical communication programs do not typically require students to take coursework in such fields as organizational management/politics, business information systems, public administration, or administrative law, courses that are frequently required by students in other business and technology professions.

3. Although students can get a feel for the need for heresthetic by reading case studies of technical communications situations and by reading professional narratives (such as Savage and Sullivan 2001), these case studies and narratives are largely anecdotal—that is, there has been no systematic attempt to analyze them as a group in terms of non-rhetorical theories and to develop heuristics of heresthetic strategies that students can take with them into the workplace. For the most part, technical communications educators seem to assume that even if such knowledge of heresthetic strategies is relevant or desirable, students will "pick them up" in the workplace through some kind of organizational osmosis. We argue that heresthetic strategies need to be given as much emphasis in technical communication curricula as strategies of persuasion and that technical communication researchers need to pay more attention to this much neglected area of study from the field of political science.

Because the subject of heresthetic strategy is so complex and our space is limited, we will narrow our focus to managing events: we will apply William Riker's (1986) ideas about heresthetic (that is, analyzing people, alternatives, dimensions, and methods of choosing) to some problems in business and in the academy. We focus on a general strategy for managing events within institutions. We do so because a typical problem in the working world is coping with political resistance. Often, a person can use persuasion to diminish political resistance, but what happens when your opponents reject your arguments and evidence, attempt to outmaneuver you, undercut your effectiveness on your job, sabotage your reputation, or try to fire you? How do you maneuver around a hostile audience who cannot change (for legal or economic reasons, for example), or who will not change (for reasons of ideology or financial gain, for example)? What can you do when your opponents appear to have legitimacy on their side?

One way to maneuver politically against political resistance is using heresthetic. We define heresthetic in more detail later in this essay, but, briefly, heresthetic is "structuring the world so you can win" (Riker 1986, p. ix). Understanding heresthetic is important because many problems cannot be solved by persuasion. Many people refuse to be persuaded, often for good reason. In this essay, we suggest some alternative assumptions.

In the next section, we present two scenarios, one about technical communicators, the other about academic infighting over a computer lab. Then, after we define the "politics of impurity" and the limits of critical rhetorical theory, we devote a section to defining heresthetic. Next, we apply some of the insights from that approach to the two scenarios. Then, we sketch some general approaches to political maneuvering. Before concluding, we discuss a research agenda for helping students and practitioners make the transition to communication strategist, and we discuss the ways technical communication will change in the near future.

TWO SCENARIOS

The single-sourcing project

The new management at your software manufacturing company is concerned that the training, marketing, support, and documentation departments may not be able to keep up with the rising need for written materials. To save money and increase productivity, they want to move to single sourcing. Because you supervised a single-sourcing project in your previous job, the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company tells the new Chief Operating Officer (COO) to assign you, the head of documentation, to manage the project. You and the heads of marketing, training, and support all report to the COO, who reports to the CEO. The new CEO wants to see some results within three months, by the end of the first financial quarter (31 March). She wants end-of-month progress reports beginning 31 December. The COO writes a memo explaining all of this to you and the heads of marketing, training, and support. To help the head of marketing save face (he thought he should have the job because of his higher rank) the COO copies no one else on the memo. It is now 15 December.

A problem starts immediately. The head of marketing, Mel Court, resents your appointment as single sourcing project manager, because he is more powerful and because marketing has typically had more status in the company than training, support, or documentation. This new focus on increasing productivity threatens his power because it may reduce the number of people and projects under his control, and it may obligate him to share resources with other managers.

Within two hours of receiving the memo from the COO, you meet privately with Mel to try to emphasize the need for consensual problem solving, for building group trust, and for having the four groups collectively brainstorm about how to adapt the company's communications processes to the changing corporate and market environments. You try to work out an agreement to cooperate about the project, but Mel appears defensive and politely stalls you, even though he knows the constraints.

Shortly before seeing you, Mel had arranged with the company e-mail administrator to set up a special listserv for the marketing, training, and support groups, but excluding the documentation group, and he began sending messages to those people to arrange meetings about the single-sourcing project. He did not tell you about the special listserv or the meetings. You found out because one of your documentation department members lunches regularly with some people from marketing.

In Mel's e-mails, he has set up the agenda for the meetings and for managing the process of single sourcing. His agenda focuses on making sure people in their existing jobs keep most of their responsibilities. You wanted the groups to focus on collectively defining the present and future communication needs of the company as a whole. Mel is more concerned about his own power.

The company has a history of preferring consensual agreements among its employees and departments, and Mel seems to be creating a coalition with the marketing, training, and support people to enable them to vote down any ideas that you and your documentation group develop. This voting process is informal, but such votes have rarely been overruled by the senior management. When senior management overruled a departmental vote four years ago, the group rebelled: one senior manager lost his job and the senior management acquiesced to the feelings of the department affected. On another occasion, however, senior management overruled a vote, spent considerable time explaining how the original vote was based on misleading information, and ultimately assuaged the hurt feelings of the department members who were overruled. Given Mel's maneuvers and the other variables in the single-sourcing project, what do you do?

Refurbishing the computer lab

You are the director of professional communication at a midsize public university. You work in an English department with 15 full-time literature faculty, four (including you) full-time professional communication faculty, and five full-time composition faculty. Five computers in your aging lab have had hard-drive failures in the past year, and last week two more failed in the first week of fall term.

You now have classes of 20 students each who must share a dozen computers. Everyone is complaining, and last week, a shoving match occurred when two students quarreled over a computer. You need $32000 USD for new computers, new software, and updated licenses for the other software you are using, but money is short because of state cutbacks. You want to tap the department's emergency funds account, which is set aside for "exigent circumstances." Unfortunately, your department chair says no.

The English department's governance document says the emergency funds account is controlled by the department's five-person administrative committee, which is led by your chair, a Shakespeare scholar finishing his first three-year term as department head. He is up for reelection in the spring term. By university regulation, the dean of your college must approve the election of your department chair, even if her or his election is unanimous.

The other committee members include you, the director of freshman composition, the department's medievalist, and a cultural studies professor whose classes occasionally use the computer lab. You have been at the university for six years, but you do not know the cultural studies professor well at all; she is not around the office much, and is very busy, does not answer her e-mail, and apparently does not

answer the phone either. She is notoriously aloof.

The cultural studies professor misses the first meeting of the administrative committee because of a dental appointment. You lay out your case to tap the emergency funds account. The freshman composition director backs you. The chair and the medievalist, however, say that your request would wipe out the emergency funds account for the year, and they say that they have an opportunity to get a lifetime subscription to the Early English Books Online (EEBO) service for $32000. They say that the subscription will be a great investment for the department's master's students in the literature and cultural studies program, and it would serve more students than your computer lab, which will need replacing anyway in a few more years.

The meeting stalls on that point, but you all agree to meet again in two weeks when the cultural studies professor can attend. In the meantime, you finally get through to her and discover to your surprise that she sides with you. But she says she cannot confront the chair directly by voting him down on that issue in a meeting. She is up for promotion this year, which requires the chair's signature, and she wants a way to minimize her disagreement with him.

You also reread the department's lengthy governance document carefully. In the section on the administrative committee, you find this statement, "By a majority vote of the administrative committee, it may assign any item that it discusses and any potential financial decision involving any of its accounts to another standing committee in the department that has more expertise on the item under discussion." What do you do?

THE "POLITICS OF IMPURITY" AND THE LIMITS OF CRITICAL RHETORICAL THEORY

There has been and still is something of an ideological split between technical communication practitioners and academics. As Blakeslee and Spilka (2004) have noted, "the relationship between academia and industry in technical communication has always been somewhat strained. . . . [M]any practitioners in industry lament that academic research often lacks relevance to workplace realities and is of little value to them. . . ," whereas "many academics are concerned about the apparent dearth of a theoretical foundation for workplace practice, about the overly practical nature of practitioners' work and interests, and about the perception that practitioners simply do not welcome academic input or involvement in their work" (pp. 82–83). Part of the problem is that many academics within the field of technical communication are too committed to forms of critical rhetorical theory that exclude all other relevant non-rhetorical theories and strategies.

For example, some critical rhetorical theorists share the view of Carolyn Miller (1996) that "rhetoric is the suasory dimension pervading all discourse, to different degrees and in different ways" (p. 483). But such a view is of limited use in coping with some forms of political resistance because it assumes that all discourse is persuasive (or *should* be). That assumption ignores two important things:

1. Some people cannot or will not be persuaded. Typically, advocates of critical rhetorical theory do acknowledge that some people cannot be persuaded. They often accuse those people (such as scientists, technologists, business people) of dominating others (see, for example, Wells 1986 and Blyler 1994). However, critical theorists do not have useful strategies for coping with people who reject their arguments and critiques. Because they lack such strategies, their arguments and critiques are not effective in some situations.

2. Resources are limited. Some advocates of critical rhetorical theory also acknowledge that resources are limited, but others choose to ignore economic constraints in their theorizing. For example, Sullivan (1990) wants to define technical communication as "social action," but he sees social action as "free from the economic constraints of the workplace" (p. 378). Because workplace professionals must cope with limited resources, persuasion-based critical theories lack useful strategies for helping those professionals manage people who use claims of insufficient resources to reject arguments and critiques. Persuading a large majority of people to vote a certain way may require too many resources (such as time, money, energy, goodwill). For that reason, a more economical strategy may be to persuade fewer people, or to go around the people who resist.

This approach will make many critical theorists uncomfortable (see Wells 1986; Sullivan 1990; Blyler 1994; Katz 1992; Berlin 1996; Johnson-Eilola 1997; Moeller and McAllister 2002). It limits or ignores certain rules that many academics take for granted in ideal speech situations. White (1988) lists these rules as follows:

- *Each subject is allowed to participate in discourse.*
- *Each is allowed to call into question any proposal.*
- *Each is allowed to introduce any proposal.*
- *Each is allowed to express attitudes, wishes and needs.*
- *No speaker is to be hindered by compulsion.*
- *[The goal is] Universality in agreement concerning outcomes. (p. 56).*

Deciding to persuade fewer people or deciding to circumvent people who resist our goals in institutional environments ignores all six of these rules in the name of economic efficiency. Even our reference to "economic efficiency" will offend many critical theorists. For example, Cohen (1989) effectively disallows economic considerations in his own framework for institutional deliberation. He believes that each participant should be able to

> *put issues on the agenda, propose solutions, and offer reasons in support of or in criticism of proposals. And each has an equal voice in the decision. The participants are substantively equal in that the existing distribution of power and resources does not shape their chances to contribute to deliberation. (p. 23)*

In addition to circumventing political resistors, we will show how a heresthetic approach forces strategists to analyze costs carefully, especially money, a process that many academics find uncomfortable because it involves objectifying people (see Dragga and Voss 2001; Dragga and Voss 2003). But we argue that to become an expert at communication strategy and political maneuvering, one must embrace what Richard Miller (1998) has called the "politics of impurity." In *As if learning mattered,* Miller explains that academic cultural critics are enamored with their utopian visions and "the alluring image of themselves as free-thinking individuals whose mental work escapes the logic of the marketplace"(p. 28). Images of free-thinkers transcending the logic of the marketplace are fantasies, because people in the working world perform in conditions that are always heavily constrained. As a result, critical intellectuals have trouble with the nuts and bolts of organizational change, for example, reforming universities. As Miller explains,

> *[A]ll intellectuals who commit themselves to reforming the academy immediately get caught up in an inescapable structural contradiction: the moment the reform effort moves from the planning stage to implementation, the intellectual is in danger of becoming entrapped by the bureaucratic machinery necessary for designing, delivering, and then assessing the new educational product or experience the proposed reform seeks to make available to those en route to the academy. (pp. 202–203)*

Miller then explains what happens when compromise enters the worlds of intellectuals:

> *Confronted with such seeming dirty work, teachers at all levels regularly convene to lament that "education is now being treated as if it were a business," determinedly ignorant of the fact that . . . education has been a business for well over a century and is sure to remain one for the foreseeable future. Because bureaucratic detail and business interests are seen to be inimical to our fond notions about the pursuit of knowledge—ideally a selfless act, a spiritual adventure, a pure quest for truth—discussion about how to discriminate between different ways of carrying out the business of higher education has foundered. (p. 203)*

It is difficult to see how academics who are unable to recognize the need to dirty their hands with the impurity of political maneuvering (or who are unwilling to *admit* that they regularly participate in such maneuvering) are up to the task of preparing technical communication practitioners who will need to become effective political maneuverers within their organizations.

Technical communication practitioners and technical communication faculty need more productive discussion about how to maneuver politically and carry out communication strategies within their organizations. In the field of technical communication today, however, there is not much useful research or discussion on these matters, in part because of the domination of critical rhetorical theory within technical communication theory and pedagogy, and because of the invalid assumption that political maneuvering is inherently unethical. For many contemporary critical rhetorical theorists, political maneuvering is distasteful and held in as low regard as Plato held rhetoric.

The distinction that best captures the politically impure assumptions of heresthetic and the assumptions of persuasion-based rhetorical theories is outlined by Steven Pinker (2002) in chapter 16 ("Politics") of *The blank slate.* Pinker distinguishes the tragic vision, which corresponds roughly to our heresthetic position, from the utopian vision, which roughly defines the position of those critical rhetorical theorists who view persuasion as "pervading all discourse" (Miller 1996, p. 483).

Pinker bases his distinction on a similar one advanced by Thomas Sowell (2002) in his book, *A conflict of visions.* Sowell contrasts constrained and unconstrained visions, and adds that some philosophers adopt positions that are hybrids of the two. Pinker agrees that "Not every ideological struggle fits [Sowell's] scheme" (p. 287). Here is how Pinker (2002) contrasts the tragic and utopian visions:

> *In the Tragic Vision, humans are inherently limited in knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, and all social arrangements must acknowledge those limits. "Mortal things suit mortals best," wrote Pindar; "from the crooked timber of humanity no truly straight thing can be made," wrote Kant. The Tragic Vision is associated with Hobbes, Burke, Smith, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, the jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., the economists Friedrick Hayek and Milton Friedman, the philosophers Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper, and the legal scholar Richard Posner. (p. 287)*

> *In the Utopian Vision, psychological limitations are artifacts that come from our social arrangements, and we should not allow them to restrict our gaze from what is possible in a better world. Its creed might be "Some people see things as they are and ask 'why?': I dream*

> *things that never were and ask 'why not?'" The quotation is often attributed to the icon of 1960s liberalism, Robert F. Kennedy, but it was originally penned by the Fabian socialist George Bernard Shaw (who also wrote, "There is nothing that can be changed more completely than human nature when the job is taken in hand early enough"). The Utopian Vision is also associated with Rousseau, Godwin, Condorcet, Thomas Paine, the jurist Earl Warren, the economist John Kenneth Galbraith, and to a lesser extent the political philosopher Ronald Dworkin. (pp. 287–288)*

Persuasion-based theories of rhetoric that ignore constraints on resources and assume that the human brain is highly malleable are strongly associated with the utopian vision. Such theories assume that most people—except for many working in science, technology, and business—can be persuaded, and so political maneuvering and strategy are unnecessary. If some obstacle arises, simply gather all interested persons to discuss the situation, and they will be sufficiently malleable and have enough resources to reach a consensus eventually. Critical theorists generally assume that most interested persons—again, except for scientists, engineers, and business people—will be persons of good faith and integrity and will be motivated by a desire to maximize benefits to all concerned (see, for example, the essays by Wells 1986, Sullivan 1990, and Blyler 1994).

When persuasion has failed, we believe that non-utopian approaches to conflict management will be useful in most organizations. We prefer "non-utopian" to "tragic" because it avoids some of the negative connotations associated with "tragic," and because it better captures the fundamental pragmatism of our approach. Non-utopian approaches to conflict management and political maneuvering assume that people are not so malleable or inherently good, and that resources are scarce in many situations, so there may not be time to settle every conflict to everyone's satisfaction.

Because some people cannot or will not be persuaded and because scarce resources should not be wasted, non-utopian thinkers believe that societies must control destructively uncooperative people by limiting their freedoms or by maneuvering around them. Non-utopian thinkers also recognize that such maneuvering is not always successful and that it is neither ethical nor unethical. Like rhetoric, non-utopian heresthetic strategies are only as ethical as the ends for which they are employed.

Assumptions about whether resources and people are constrained or unconstrained significantly influence the direction and focus of communication analyses. If resources are unlimited and people can be persuaded, then the study of discourse should rightly focus narrowly on the art of persuasion. But if resources are scarce and if few people can be persuaded, then communication analysis must consider other elements of communication situations. In addition to persuasion, some of those elements may include

1. Managing non-verbal resources (such as time, money, personnel, material goods, energy, determination)
2. Manipulating variables in institutional environments (for example, hierarchies of power, organizational priorities, communication channels, political connections)
3. Applying the techniques of heresthetic
4. Manipulating non-persuasive communications, for example, such instrumental genres as rules, procedures, schedules, standards, policies, laws, and budgets

If resources are constrained in communication and if many people cannot or will not be persuaded, then communication analysis needs to expand beyond persuasion to consider other elements of human experiences, environments, and cultures.

This essay is not the place to discuss all of the elements of human experience or of non-utopian communication theory. However, we discuss several of those elements in the next section on heresthetic, and we suggest other resources in our later sections on a research agenda and the ways technical communication is changing.

DEFINING HERESTHETIC

Riker (1986) invented the term *heresthetic* in his book, *The art of political manipulation.* Heresthetic is "structuring the world so you can win" (p. ix). As he explains, the term is based on the "Greek word for choosing and electing" (p. ix). Heresthetic is about formulating and executing a strategy: manipulating people, events, objects, rules, and the like so that you can get what you want.

Riker (1986) distinguishes heresthetic uses of language from other usages.

> *Logic is concerned with the truth-value of sentences. Grammar is concerned with the communications-value of sentences. Rhetoric is concerned with the persuasion-value of sentences. And heresthetic is concerned with the strategy-value of sentences. In each case, the art involves the use of language to accomplish some purpose: to arrive at truth, to communicate, to persuade, and to manipulate. (p. x)*

But Riker later came to see heresthetic as not necessarily involving language, for example, casting a vote or walking out of a meeting in protest. In today's working world, knowing how to work with and around people, rules, institutions, governments, hierarchies, deadlines, budgets, communication media, and technologies is an important constituent of social and personal success. Effective workers of any kind—

managers, academics, administrative assistants—must know how to think and act strategically.

Although Riker (1986) focuses on ethical uses of heresthetic in his book, heresthetic can be applied to ethical or unethical ends. For example, Cochran (2002) describes one dubious use of heresthetic when he discusses the case of Abner Louima, the Haitian immigrant who was sodomized by police officers in New York City with a broken toilet plunger handle. The police officer's union had a rule that "prosecutors and police department officials could not speak to police officers about cases in which they were suspected of misconduct for two days" (p. 143). The purpose of the rule was simple: "it gave the cops time to get their stories straight with each other. It gave them time to make sure everybody told the same story to investigators" (p. 144). If the police officers had their stories straight, they would improve their chances of avoiding prosecution for their actions.

Ultimately, however, several police officers were prosecuted and convicted in the case, thanks to Cochran and other attorneys. Unscrupulous people can strategically apply rules, procedures, traditions, and laws to gain advantages over other people. We shall look at some other unethical applications of heresthetic later in this essay.

Riker (1986) maintains that "Heresthetic is an art, not a science" (p. ix). Heresthetic has no ancient set of principles equivalent to Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* but there are plenty of examples throughout history to illustrate the use of heresthetic, both in politics and in military strategy. But Riker attempts to elevate heresthetic to the level of *techne* (τέχνε) as defined by Moeller & McAllister (2002). In fact, one aspect of their definition of *techne* as "the Art of Cunning" is in many ways quite similar to heresthetic (p. 199). We might also define it as "politically savvy or shrewd."

Riker says that "the literature of heresthetic is fugitive, consisting mostly of occasional comments and stories in books about politics and politicians" (p. ix). He hoped his book would provide "more copious illustrative instruction" (p. ix). After 12 stories of applied examples, Riker concludes his short book with a succinct model of heresthetic based on "a simple and rather specialized form of the social choice model" (p. 143). That model has four constituents:

1. *People, who are characterized by a set of values and tastes, by the ability to order these tastes, and by the ability to take appropriate action in light of the ordering;*

2. *Alternatives, which are conceivable choices for society and which are defined as possible combinations of locations on one or more dimensions in a geometric model of the political world;*

3. *The dimensions themselves, which are standards of measurement for relevant variable properties of alternatives and tastes, and;*

4. *Some methods of choosing, here [i.e., in Riker's book] majority rule. (p. 143)*

In the next four paragraphs, we discuss briefly each of these four constituents: *people, alternatives, dimensions,* and the *methods of choosing.*

People are crucial in heresthetic because their needs drive the process of heresthetic to its ultimate goal in any given situation, their values and tastes define the lengths to which they will go, and their individual strengths and limitations present to themselves and to other heresthetic ians some of the dimensions of the heresthetic problem to be solved.

Because heresthetic is all about people choosing among **alternatives,** there is no heresthetic if there are no alternatives. One quality that makes heresthetic ians effective is their ability to invent other and better alternatives even when given many poor choices. The saying, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade," is based on the common awareness that clever people can turn bad events to their advantage.

The **dimensions** of a situation can be anything: time, distance, money, rules, the number of voters, the issues of a political campaign, the limitations of a technology, the limitations of a system of governance, the limitations of the people involved in the situation, a person's or culture's or institution's values, and so on. When Riker (1986) discusses dimensions, he mentions the "standards of measurement for relevant variable properties of alternatives and tastes" (p. 143). Because our approach extends Riker's application of heresthetic beyond counting votes in democratic organizations, some of the dimensions that we discuss (such as accessibility) will not be measurable by any standardized, numerical scale.

Each of Riker's 12 examples involves voting in some sort of institution of majority rule. In our analysis, however, the **methods of choosing** in heresthetic are not limited to majority rule. Although all of our examples will involve institutions and social situations, one method of choosing is personal: an individual prefers one alternative to another because of personal taste, ideology, a sense of moral obligation, a desire for self-advancement, a desire for revenge, and so on. In some of our examples, one person will choose what is best for her or him, and then manipulate the dimensions of the situation to his or her advantage. Majority rule may not ultimately decide whether a person gets his or her way; a single powerful individual (such as a president or dean) may decide.

In the next section we apply these four constituents of heresthetic to the two earlier scenarios.

ANALYZING THE TWO SCENARIOS

Examples of heresthetic could be multiplied indefinitely. To take just one, in June 2003, several news organizations

described the case of Senator Larry E. Craig from Idaho, who used the traditions of the U.S. Senate to block the promotions of hundreds of U.S. Air Force officers to force the Air Force to deliver four C-130 cargo planes to the Idaho Air National Guard (Schmitt 2003). Riker (1986) himself has 12 examples in his book, and we have mentioned several others (such as the police officers in the Abner Louima case) earlier in this essay. We now analyze the two situations that we mentioned at the opening of this essay.

The single sourcing project

The single sourcing project involves two situations of heresthetic: one headed by Mel Court, and the second by you, the head of documentation. We apply Riker's four-part model of heresthetic (that is, people, alternatives, dimensions, and methods of choosing) to each situation.

Mel's heresthetic maneuver Here is how we can analyze Mel's approach to the problem using the heresthetic method.

- **People** Mel Court is used to getting his way. He has been a power in the old company regime, which had just been bought out, and he thought he still had a lot of clout. He knows well the heads of training and support, because they have been around for a long time, and they typically go along with him in every decision. He thinks that he knows the new CEO and COO well enough, and though he does not know you well at all, he is not concerned because he figures that your power does not match his. He knows that employees typically go along with what the managers want, though he has to explain things to them carefully so they understand his rationale and so they understand that their jobs will be secure and their status will not be reduced. Mel expects no resistance from the non-managerial employees.
- **Alternatives** Mel has several alternatives: he can follow the wishes of the CEO and COO, and cooperate with you, even if it means that he might lose power. But based on his personal ambition and his reading of the people involved in the single-sourcing project, he chooses to go around you and try to take over the project.
- **Dimensions** Time, legitimacy, and controlling communication channels are key dimensions that Mel exploits. He is aware that few people know who has been assigned to head the single-sourcing project and that many of the employees are worried that they might lose their jobs or have their responsibilities diminished. The previous owners have been bought out precisely because they had made a small profit, and the new owners think the company could be streamlined and refocused to create more profits. Mel also knows that people resist change. Mel thinks that if he is quick, he can assuage anxieties enough to gain the popularity to influence people to back him against you. Even if he ultimately loses, he thinks that he will look like the savior of the employees and thus have considerable legitimacy. So he quickly maneuvers to control the communication channels by establishing the special listserv that excludes documentation and by scheduling a meeting.
- **Methods of choosing** Mel's heresthetic unfolds against the background of three methods of choosing.
  - Everyone is aware that departmental members can vote, an arrangement that is backed to some extent by institutional tradition and by the awareness that management does not like to alienate the employees.
  - Everyone knows of management's power to hire, fire, and make decisions, which is undercut somewhat by everyone's awareness that angry employees will not be productive.
  - Individuals can personally choose to act if they feel their choice is validated for some reason, for example, a personal sense of legitimacy within the organization.

Your counter-heresthetic maneuver Here is how you might counter Mel's approach to the problem using the heresthetic method.

- **People** As director of documentation, you are alternatively bemused and angry at Mel's slightly paranoid tactics. You suspect that Mel is a little scared, and you are very sure that the new CEO and COO are under the gun from the new owners to boost profits and productivity, and to expand into new markets. Mel is close to the former (and now departed) management of the company, the same people who have been careless about spending and who have been forced to sell to the new owners. You suspect that Mel does not have so much credibility with the new CEO and COO that he can ignore their orders. You know about the anxieties of the employees in all four departments, but you also know that they are in no danger of losing their jobs if they increase their productivity. Single-sourcing will help them, but more importantly, it will help the company cut costs and cope with the expected increase in workload from the new markets. You simply need to get your message across.
- **Alternatives** You have two general alternatives: do nothing or challenge Mel. That choice is easy, but it leads to several other alternatives. How should

you challenge Mel? You could confront him directly with his insubordination and his tactics of exclusion, or you could go around him to the higher management and the employees. Since you have already tried and failed to reason with him, you decide to go around him. That leads to several other alternatives: Do you go to the CEO, the COO, the employees of the four departments, the company e-mail administrator, all of those people, or some combination of those people? For the moment, you decide to contact only the COO. You suspect that she will be annoyed with Mel's insubordination, and you suspect that she will not like you to go over her head to the CEO. After all, the COO is your boss, and you want to show her the respect that Mel has not.

- **Dimensions** Like Mel, you have to cope with three important dimensions: time, legitimacy, and communication channels. As soon as you find out and verify your employee's information about the listserv that excludes the documentation group, you contact the COO about the situation. You explain what Mel did, and you take 10 minutes to explain how your approach (that is, emphasizing consensual problem solving, building group trust, and brainstorming collectively to adapt the company's communications processes to the changing corporate and market environments) will reduce anxiety, build morale, promote effective solutions, and make the employees feel like they are owners in the new arrangement.

The COO likes what you say, and she goes immediately to the company's e-mail administrator to include the documentation department on the new listserv. Right after that visit, the COO goes to Mel to tell him to stop his interference. The COO then writes a new memo that explains that the CEO has made you the director of the single-sourcing project. She copies the memo to everyone (managers and employees) in all four groups, and she sends it simultaneously to everyone on the newly reconstituted single-sourcing project listserv. You also send a message on the new listserv calling a meeting for the next day and briefly explaining your agenda, which includes a short description of consensual problem solving, building group trust, and the brainstorming process. You also say that the COO is very interested in this project and will be attending the meeting.

- **Methods of choosing** In your heresthetic maneuver, you exploit only two of the three possible methods of choosing available in this situation: 1) management's power to hire, fire, and make decisions; and 2) your personal choice to act on principle. Voting is not an issue in your strategy, though it might be if you had mishandled the situation.

The outcome Here is how the situation would play out.

In the end, Mel is outmaneuvered and has to back off or risk losing his job. The managers and employees of the four departments are somewhat startled by the rapid succession of events in one working day, but at the meeting the next day, the COO diplomatically explains that she had created a communication mix-up and then turns the meeting over to you. You explain your past experience managing a single-sourcing project, and how well it had worked, how much everyone (including the company) had profited from it, and you start the group along the process of single sourcing. After hearing your presentation, and after participating in some of the group-building and brainstorming activities that you had prepared, everyone (except Mel) warms to the new ideas, and looks forward to the next meetings on the single-sourcing process.

Refurbishing the computer lab

Like the single sourcing project, refurbishing the computer lab involves two situations of heresthetic: one led by the department chair, and the second by you, the director of professional communication. Again, we apply Riker's four-part model of heresthetic to the situations.

The department chair's heresthetic maneuver Here is how we can analyze the department chair's approach to the problem using the heresthetic method.

- **People** The department chair thinks he knows all the people on the five-person administrative committee, but he is busy, and he misjudges the cultural studies professor, whom he rarely sees but who he thinks will side with him because she is applying for promotion to full professor. The department chair is also aware that the dean of the college is a stickler for following the governance documents of each department in her college. Unfortunately for the department chair, he forgets this crucial procedural statement in the department's lengthy governance document: "By a majority vote of the administrative committee, it may assign any item that it discusses and any potential financial decision involving any of its accounts to another standing committee in the department that has more expertise on the item under discussion."
- **Alternatives** The department chair has two obvious alternatives: allow you to tap the department's emergency funds account or not allow you to tap the funds. He can also stall, but the committee is supposed to meet to solve these problems, and he cannot avoid such a meeting or the dean will reprimand him. He wants another term as chair, and he is up for reelection the next term.
- **Dimensions** The department chair mistakenly be-

lieves that the situation has no significant dimensions. He thinks he knows how all the committee members will vote, and it never occurs to him that he will be outvoted. He believes that he and the medievalist will present their case for buying a lifetime subscription to the Early English Books Online (EEBO) service, the cultural studies professor will go along, and they will win any vote by 3 to 2.

- **Method of choosing** For the department chair, the operative method of choosing in this situation is majority-rule voting.

Your heresthetic counter-maneuver Here is how we can analyze your approach to the problem.

- **People** As director of professional communication, you know the people on the committee roughly as well as the department chair. You are aware of the dean's insistence on following departmental governance documents, you know the department chair wants to be reelected and needs the dean's approval, and you know the cultural studies professor likes to use the computer lab. At first, you do not know which way she will vote, but you are determined to track her down and find out.
- **Alternatives** You have two alternatives: acquiesce to your department chair's rejection or fight back. Once you decide to fight back, you have more alternatives, one of which is to try (or not try) to persuade key people to vote your way, and another is to reconsider (or not reconsider) all the dimensions of the situation to see whether there is some way to outmaneuver your department chair. You choose to pursue the cultural studies professor to the bitter end and to reread the department governance document carefully.
- **Dimensions** You are aware that the situation has several important dimensions, and you apply them to your advantage. The first dimension is time. You stall so you can track down the cultural studies professor and think of other alternatives and dimensions to exploit. One of those alternatives is to try to persuade the dean, but you decide to hold off on that until you track down the cultural studies professor. The second dimension is the governance document. When you read the rule that says the administrative committee can assign any potential financial decision to another standing committee, you know immediately what you will do. The third dimension is determination: you are determined to do whatever it takes—within the law—to get your computer lab refurbished.
- **Method of choosing** The operative method of choosing in this situation is majority-rule voting. But there are two other methods of choosing that influence the department chair indirectly, though they are in the background. One of these is the dean's administrative authority to disapprove of the department chair's reelection for cause. The chair cannot overrule the governance document or tamper with the cultural studies professor's promotion application without incurring the wrath of the dean. The second method is the determined choice of an individual to get her computer lab refurbished. Individuals in bureaucracies always have the power to oppose the status quo, so long as they are prepared to take the heat.

The outcome Here is how the situation would play out.

When the administrative committee reconvenes to discuss your application for the money from the emergency funds account, the chair is surprised to find himself outvoted. He has not tracked down the cultural studies professor as you have. You even bring a copy of the department's governance document to show the chair. The administrative committee votes 3 to 2 to send the decision about the emergency funds account to the composition and professional communication committee, on which the chair has a vote. But everyone knows that committee will vote him down 4 to 1.

He is so annoyed that he calls the dean, but you have beaten him to the punch: you called the dean yourself two days earlier to discuss the situation about the computer lab, the emergency funds account, and the cultural studies professor's worries about her promotion application. The dean said that so long as you follow the department's governance document, you and the cultural studies professor will be fine. You get the emergency funds and a refurbished computer lab, though your department chair is a bit frosty toward you for two months.

TECHNIQUES FOR POLITICAL MANEUVERING

The two cases of heresthetic discussed above suggest some of the many aspects of political maneuvering. One important aspect, of course, is persuasion, which figured into both situations. There is much more to say, but because of limitations of space, we sketch in this section only a few of the techniques of political maneuvering.

In social environments governed by majority rule, Riker (1986) himself suggests three broad categories of political maneuvering: "agenda control, strategic voting, and manipulations of dimensions" (p. 147). People obtain control over the agendas in their organizations by becoming leaders in the democratic voting process. In that way, they can influence what kinds of issues are brought up for discussion and voting at meetings.

Strategic voting, as Riker (1986) says, typically involves

"the defeat of an apparently certain winner" (p. 149), often by vote trading. Sometimes, strategic voting means voting for someone you like less well to prevent someone you dislike a lot from winning. For example, three candidates in a primary election are running for your party's nomination for a governorship. The first candidate is honest, plain, and very liberal; the second is honest, plain, and somewhat conservative; the third is very devious, charismatic, and somewhat liberal. You like the first candidate the most, and you detest the third candidate, whom you have caught lying repeatedly. You know that the first and third candidates have considerable support, and you believe that the first candidate is likely to gain a narrow plurality of votes in the primary election. Because you fear that no candidate will win a clear majority in the primary election, you vote for the second candidate to be sure that any runoff election will be between the first and second candidates and that the third candidate (the one you dislike the most) will be blocked from the runoff election. Of course, the anticipated result in this example of strategic voting may not occur if you have misjudged the situation.

Manipulations of dimensions in majority rule can involve anything. Several of Riker's examples involve adding new issues to a situation to change a person's incentive to vote. In our two scenarios, timing is crucial. In the first scenario, Mel Court moves rapidly, but in the second, the director of professional communication stalls. Similarly, legitimacy is important. Mel Court lacks legitimacy for his actions, while the head of documentation moves quickly to assert and support her legitimacy to the COO. In the scenario about refurbishing the computer lab, the governance document gives the director of professional communication the right to act as she does.

As we said earlier, this essay extends Riker's explanation of heresthetic beyond majority rule. To be successful in our extended version of Riker's heresthetic, it is still important to consider the constituents of his four-part model: people, alternatives, dimensions, and methods of choosing. But we give special attention to ways in which resourceful individuals can manipulate the rules (that is, instrumental discourse) of their institutional environments, how they can take advantage of timing, and how they can use accessibility to achieve their goals.

Using the rules

The most important aspect of the institution's rules is for people to know them thoroughly. Institutional policies, procedures, governance regulations, and other forms of instrumental discourse (such as parliamentary procedures) establish the limits of an individual's operations in an organization. Knowing the rules of the organization can help people achieve their goals. For example, in May 2003, members of the Democratic party in the Texas legislature demonstrated their knowledge of the rules when they left the state en masse for Oklahoma. The Republican majority of the legislature wanted to pass a redistricting plan that would adversely affect the number of Democratic party legislators, so the Democrats left the state to ensure that a quorum would not be present in the legislature to enable the Republican party to pass their plan (Copelin 2003).

Knowing the rules of the Texas legislature probably saved a few Democrats their jobs. Even if a powerful person breaks the rules in an organization, a resourceful person who knows the rules and who keeps good records can use that violation against the powerful person. Books on whistleblowing (such as Miceli and Near 1992, and Glazer and Glazer 1989) present many examples of ethical resistors who used the rules and gathered evidence to expose misconduct.

Knowing the process for changing the rules is also important. Article V of the U.S. Constitution describes how the Constitution itself can be amended. Organizations typically have amendment policies written into their constitutions or bylaws. If the existing structure of rules permits unfair imbalances of power or other abuses, and if enough people are determined to correct the abuses, those people may use the amendment process to effect changes that will eliminate or diminish the injustices.

If people in an organization want to change the rules, it is important to understand how the changes will affect later events. There may be unintended damaging results, and some people may understand the ramifications of those unintended results very quickly and use them to their advantage. One example of an unethical heresthetic that grew out of unintended results was the exploitation of the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act of 1982, which deregulated the savings and loan industry in the U.S. The act increased the amount of the U.S. Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation's (FSLIC) insurance from $40,000 to $100,000 USD per account, it allowed savings and loan institutions (S&Ls) to offer money market accounts and to invest more money in riskier commercial loans.

In the same year, the U.S. Congress passed a resolution that enabled one person (instead of 400) to own an S&L outright. These and other changes in the law enabled unscrupulous people to loot the S&L industry of over $200 billion USD in the mid to late 1980s (Pizzo, Fricker, and Muolo 1989). Any time people want to change the rules in an organization, it is important to discuss potential outcomes and discuss how the new rules could be abused. People who want to change rules should expect others to question them closely about how the changes might be manipulated unethically in the future.

Using timing

Timing (akin to the ancient Greek *kairos* or "opportune moment") is very important in political maneuvering. There are three general strategies that involve timing: speeding up, slowing down, and being on time. We saw examples of the first and second of these strategies in the scenarios that we used earlier. Slowing down is an especially important political strategy. Legislators use the strategy of filibustering to delay or even block legislative appointments or votes on bills. As the case of the Texas Democrats showed (Copelin 2003), legislators can also leave town to delay a vote on a controversial issue. Hostile or uncooperative coworkers in many environments use intentional delays to prevent work from being performed in a timely fashion to discredit their political opponents. Finally, developing a reputation for getting things done on time is an important aspect of one's personal reputation, and having a good reputation is a way to get things done in organizational settings.

When thinking strategically or planning changes in policies, it is important to understand how time can be used against you. To head off any heresthetic that involves delays, it is important to establish precise time limits in procedures, bylaws, and other instrumental documents and then to enforce them. To head off any heresthetic that involves speeding up actions, you should act promptly yourself, or you should be sure that your political allies keep you informed of anyone who is attempting to race ahead of you.

Using accessibility

Access is the ability to connect or communicate with people, resources, or data to exchange information or other resources. Manipulating access is the ability to make connections in the face of resistance, to prevent others from making connections, or to complicate, distort, or misrepresent the communications that result from accessibility. In the two scenarios that we looked at earlier concerning the single-sourcing project and refurbishing the computer lab, each of the major players had considerable power in his or her organizational hierarchy, and as a result, each had considerable access.

The subject of manipulating access is very complex, and to keep this section brief and focused, we discuss four variables: a) distance, b) gates and gatekeepers, c) data complexity, and d) deniability.

There are at least four kinds of distance involved in manipulating access in institutions: physical (or geographic), administrative, psychological, and technological.

- In the case of **physical distance**, communicators may be thousands of miles apart, which might prevent easy connection unless an effective technological solution exists.
- **Administrative distance** describes a person's position in an institutional hierarchy. In the single-sourcing and the computer lab scenarios, there is relatively little administrative distance between the key players, so there are no significant delays in access time.
- **Psychological distance** typically involves trust, admiration, and frequent, open, and clear communication. People who want to be accessible and who want access to others encourage people to trust them, to admire them, and to communicate with them frequently, openly, and clearly.
- A final type is **technological distance.** That is, users may be only inches from their data and unable to read it because they lack the appropriate tools or knowledge. That is the situation, for example, of people who do not know the commands to access files on a computer system.

These forms of distance strongly impact political maneuvering because people cannot or will not communicate if there is too much distance and no technology, encouragement, or knowledge to bridge the distance. Politically adroit actors can turn aspects of communications access to their own advantage.

Gates and gatekeepers can enable or prevent access. A gate is a point where someone is admitted to or excluded from a resource or a repository of information (Shoemaker 1991, pp. 2, 9). A gate might include the door to someone's office, the password security system on a banking Web site on the Internet, or the regulations that say that applicants for admission to a university must meet certain requirements. A gatekeeper is typically the person who enforces the rules—the copyright owner who grants or refuses a request to use a photograph, or an editor who accepts or rejects an article for publication. When gates are technologies or genres of discourse, users must know their strengths and weaknesses to manipulate them.

When gatekeepers are humans, political operators must also know their strengths and weaknesses to manipulate them, and they must also know what the political repercussions will be if one goes around a gatekeeper. The most common way to manipulate gatekeepers is to establish cooperative relations with them. Politically astute people can use goodwill earned in this way to access important information or to prevent others from accessing it.

One strategy for manipulating access is making the data accessed intentionally complicated. Lutz (1989) has written several books on doublespeak: "language that pretends to communicate but really doesn't" (p. 1). One kind of doublespeak is "simply a matter of piling on words, of overwhelming the audience with words, the bigger the words and the longer the sentences the better" (p. 5). If people or organizations make their data or communications very complex, then they can put on a show of openly

presenting the data to journalists, the public, shareholders, or the courts, but people will not understand what they have accessed.

Poorly performing corporations are famous for these kinds of manipulations. In *How companies lie*, Elliott and Schroth (2002) make repeated references to overly complex data, and their lengthy Chapter 5 is titled "The fog of corporate complexity." They remark at one point, "As Enron unfolded, reporters noted that Warren Buffett commented that if he could not understand an annual report, perhaps the company did not intend for him to understand it" (p. 18). Overly complicated data can also be presented graphically. Chapter 2 of Tufte's *The visual display of quantitative information* (1983) presents a lengthy discussion of how overly complicated visual designs lead to confusion.

Deniability is the ability to say or do something in one context and then claim later that you did not. People achieve deniability in at least two situations: when their words or actions can be legitimately construed in several ways, and when there are few or no witnesses to improper acts or the witnesses can be easily controlled or discredited. Being polite is one way to gain deniability, because strategic ambiguity is one form of politeness.

Rockwell International managers were inappropriately polite and ambiguous to their NASA superiors on the morning of the ill-fated launch of the space shuttle *Challenger* in January 1986. Because of running water and freezing temperatures, ice covered large portions of the steel-girder tower that supported the shuttle for its launch. Rockwell International engineers feared that the ice would shake loose during the launch and damage the shuttle. They did not think it safe to launch. However, there was considerable pressure from NASA to proceed with the launch, and when the Rockwell engineers presented their concerns to NASA managers, they used ambiguity to be polite.

In the aftermath of the *Challenger* disaster, it was discovered that the Rockwell engineers had not wanted to launch, but because they had expressed themselves ambiguously to NASA management, the Rockwell engineers and the NASA managers had deniability (Moore 1992). The Rockwell engineers avoided pressure from NASA, but seven people lost their lives as a result.

People can also have deniability when there are no witnesses. For example, in spring 1992, the chief judge of the state of New York, Sol Wachtler, began to harass his former lover, Joy Silverman, because she had broken off their relationship. Judge Wachtler anonymously sent at least 10 obscene and threatening letters to Silverman and her daughter, he threatened to kidnap her daughter, and he made anonymous threatening phone calls to Silverman by distorting his voice with an electronic device. Silverman had friends in high places (she was a fundraiser for President George H. W. Bush), and she contacted the FBI, who finally figured out that Wachtler was behind the threats, gathered evidence, and arrested him in November 1992 (Wolfe 1994, p. 7). Wachtler was able to get away with his acts for a while because there were no witnesses, and the letters and calls could not be immediately traced to him (Wolfe 1994). The Wachtler-Silverman case is more an example of retaliatory sexual politics than organizational political maneuvering, but the analytical frameworks developed in this essay can be applied in other areas of political maneuvering.

Again, knowing and using the rules of one's organization, making use of appropriate timing, and manipulating access are only a few of the many strategies for maneuvering politically. Examples of political maneuvering can be found everyday in the press and in the lives of working people.

RESEARCH AGENDA TO MOVE TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION FORWARD

Because our essay is about strategy and political maneuvering, we focus our research agenda for technical communication on those two subjects. We build our research agenda around three questions:

1. What research on strategy and political maneuvering in other fields can help technical communication practitioners and researchers?
2. How have strategy and political maneuvering been studied recently in the field of technical communication?
3. How can technical communication academics apply heresthetic to empower themselves in their profession?

Each of these questions is worth a lengthy bibliographic essay by itself, a task that we will not undertake here. Before we answer these questions, we briefly discuss a revealing essay by William Hart-Davidson (2001), "the core competencies of technical communication." That essay focuses on some of the same subjects that we address: raising the status of technical communication and its practitioners, developing effective strategies, positioning technical communicators to address future changes in the technological marketplace, and coping with the lack of a theory that would make our expertise more portable in times of technological change.

Hart-Davidson's essay is weakened, however, by its utopian assumptions—that is, by its specific references to how "the 'iterability' of the sign must be infinite" (p. 148), and how "the sign is at once infinitely iterable and inexhaustible in terms of its interpretability" (p. 148). Hart-Davidson explains that these ideas derive from Jacques Derrida's (1977) essay, "Signature, event, context." However, he does not address the psychological or economic problems that arise when signs are infinitely iterable and inexhaustible in their interpretability.

Who has a mind that can cope with infinity, and who pays for the infinity and inexhaustibility of the sign? Hart-Davidson does try to answer those questions vaguely and schematically. He presents several figures (with X and Y axes) that map "the social, ethical, and political discourse of technology" onto "flexible, cross-context strategies" and "situated strategies and tactics" (p. 152). "Technical communicators," as Hart-Davidson explains, "capture and represent practices that are situated, context dependent, and tailored to a particular group of people in an attempt to make these more generalizable, repeatable, and therefore useful in future and unforeseen situations" (p. 151).

One assumption behind this assertion, however, is that technical communicators have sufficient time, money, technology, goodwill, political power, and expertise to "capture and represent practices." A second assumption is that all of the people who work with technical communicators are people of good will. A third assumption is that these people can be persuaded to cooperate with the technical communicators.

Considerable evidence suggests that technical communicators often do not have sufficient resources or cooperative coworkers to achieve their communication goals. To take two examples, Giammona (2004) talks about "how hard times have been in our profession for the last three years. It's thought that as many as one-third of us have lost our jobs, and most of those are senior level people" (p. 351). Many of the narratives of technical communicators in Savage and Sullivan's collection (2001) discuss conflicts with coworkers (for example, Kendra Potts's "My entry-level life"; Christine Pellar-Kasbar's "What a life"; and Reva Rasmussen's "Madame Mao in the midwest").

We agree with Hart-Davidson's aforementioned goals (for example, raising the status of technical communication and its practitioners, developing effective strategies, developing an appropriate theoretical orientation for technical communication), but not with all of his assumptions about how to achieve them. Although persuasion may work in many situations, we think another important approach to institutional communication is to assume that resources are limited and that some people will not cooperate. We further think that an effective theory of technical communication (or *any* kind of communication) should address the issues of limited resources and uncooperative audiences. We base the three questions of our research agenda on those assumptions.

1. What research on strategy and political maneuvering in other fields can help technical communication practitioners and researchers?

In her foreword to Mirel and Spilka's collection (2002), *Reshaping technical communication*, Janice Redish (2002) says that "A major theme of this new century is going to be *interdisciplinary* scholarship and teaching" (Redish's emphasis; p. viii). We heartily agree. Although limitations of time, space, and expertise mean that our following remarks will be brief, selective, and biased, we think the five authors we discuss in this section have important lessons to teach about strategy and political maneuvering.

Edward Luttwak's *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (1987) may seem an odd resource for political maneuvering in technical communication, but Luttwak attempts "to uncover the universal logic that conditions all forms of war as well as the adversarial dealings of nations in peacetime" (p. xi). Our essay is about the adversarial dealings of individuals and organizations in peacetime, and the "universal logic" of strategy in Luttwak's book has relevance. His vision of strategy will resonate with many technical communicators because he found that the content of strategy "was not the prosaic stuff of platitudes, but instead paradox, irony, and contradiction" (p. xii). As he explains in one of his examples, the best road an army can take in a war (that is, the widest, best maintained, shortest road) may be the worst if that is the road your opponents are watching because they expect you to take it (p. 7).

Among other topics, Luttwak discusses "suasion" and "dissuasion," and he provides some illuminating definitions of strategy. General André Beaufre's definition is especially relevant to technical communication: strategy is "'l'art de la dialectique des volontés employant la force pour resoudre leur conflict' (the art of the dialectics of wills that use force to resolve their conflict)" (Luttwak's translation, p. 241).

Technical communicators certainly use persuasion to accomplish many of their goals, but on occasion they must also use the forces of managerial power, institutional rules, industry standards, and other variables to cope with resisting coworkers, managers, and organizations. Luttwak's ideas can help technical communicators and their teachers develop strategies for coping with their inevitable opponents in the less violent—but no less stressful—organizational workplace.

Robert B. Reich's oft-cited book, *The work of nations* (1991), discusses the transition from high-volume corporations to high-value corporations, and he repeatedly refers to the need for strategic skills. High-value corporations need three kinds of workers, whose skills overlap significantly with those of technical communicators.

First, Reich says that high-value corporations need problem-solvers: "Problem-solvers must have intimate knowledge of what such things [software codes, information, pension portfolios, movie scripts, molecules] might be able to do when reassembled, and then must turn that knowledge into designs and instructions for creating such outcomes" (p. 84).

Second, high-value corporations need problem-identifiers. Problem-identifiers

> *help customers understand their needs and how those needs can best be met by customized products. In contrast to selling and marketing standardized goods—which requires persuading many customers of the virtues of one particular product, taking lots of orders for it, and thus meeting sales quotas—selling and marketing customized products requires having an intimate knowledge of a customer's business, where competitive advantage may lie, and how it can be achieved. . . . The art of persuasion is replaced by the identification of opportunity. (p. 84)*

Third, strategic brokers "link problem-solvers and problem-identifiers. . . . Rather than controlling organizations, founding businesses, or inventing things, such people are continuously engaged in managing ideas" (pp. 84–85). Later in his book, when Reich discusses the education of symbolic analysts (that is, problem-solvers, problem-identifiers, and strategic brokers), he explains that the "symbolic analyst wields equations, formulae, analogies, models, constructs, categories, and metaphors to create possibilities for reinterpreting, and then rearranging, the chaos of data that are already swirling around us" (p. 229). Since technical communicators do so much more than write in contemporary organizations, books like Reich's that focus on the changing workplace can help researchers develop better strategies for coping with those changes.

Another source of information about strategy is the discussion in political science about the merits of theories of democratic choice *versus* the disequilibrium theories of social choice. As David van Mill (1996) summarizes the discussion of Habermas and others, theories of democratic discourse "tell us that through the democratic process we can arrive at consensus, rational outcomes, and even principles of justice" (p. 734). But if the results of the democratic process are to count as fair, "we need an unrestrained discourse setting in which each participant has equal access to debate, equal opportunity to raise issues, voice objections, and enter new alternatives into the discourse. The rules of the setting must not favor any particular participant" (p. 734).

Against the theories of democratic discourse, van Mill sets the disequilibrium theories of social choice. These theorists, who include William Riker and Nobel laureate Kenneth Arrow, also establish roughly the same conditions as those established by the theoreticians of democratic discourse (such as equal access to debate, equal opportunities to raise issues, and so forth). But social choice theorists

> *argue that in a fair majority rule setting where there are three or more participants and three or more alternatives, the forthcoming results can potentially end up anywhere in the policy space. When this is combined with McKelvey's insight that even a slight change in preference orientation can cause a complete breakdown in equilibrium, the conclusion of social-choice theory is that majority rule is inherently irrational and unstable in its outcomes. (p. 735)*

Majority rule is irrational and unstable, because if "power remains equally distributed we are unlikely to reach consensus" (p. 750). People will not reach consensus because "when equal power is combined with alternative preferences there is no guaranteed way to move from deadlock" (p. 750). For example, a small group can control a large legislature by filibustering. Ultimately, van Mill concludes that the only way to obtain stability in a representative government is to have rules that "bring an end to dialog" (p. 751). Unfortunately, as van Mill adds immediately, "the system is not fully democratic" (p. 751).

A few years after van Mill published his essay, John Dryzek and Christian List (2002) published "Social choice theory and deliberative democracy: A reconciliation." Their title says it all: they believe they have found a way to cope with the problems raised by van Mill (1996) and others. Their lengthy essay is too technical and mathematical to explain here, but they base their reconciliation on their belief that if any of the very strict conditions in the impossibility problems of the theory of social choice is relaxed, then there is room for democratic decision-making (Dryzek and List 2002, p. 7).

For technical communicators, the importance of social choice theory and the importance of the essays by van Mill (1996) and Dryzek and List (2002) is that they suggest an analytical framework for planning a strategy, and they identify many of the crucial leverage points to which technical communicators—or anyone engaging in institutional strategizing—can apply pressure for political maneuvering. We briefly discuss some of their leverage points in our next section on the ways technical communication will change.

It is no surprise that the previous works have shown that strategy and political maneuvering play a significant role in warfare, the business world, and political science. However, Dale Sullivan's essay "Keeping the rhetoric orthodox: Forum control in science" (2000) moves the subject of strategy much closer to technical communication. In fact, he published his essay in *Technical communication quarterly*, one of the best known journals in our field. Sullivan discusses how scientists use the strategy of forum control to de-authorize people who oppose the status quo. As he explains in his abstract, it is possible "to see peer review and other strategies as methods by which elites silence or de-authorize voices that pose a threat to their

status" (p. 125). He discusses peer review, public correction, denial of forum, and published ridicule. Before he concludes his essay, however, Sullivan also shows how the same methods of forum control operate in the humanities. His essay is very useful to anyone who is studying the strategic dominance of utopian viewpoints in the humanities.

The five works cited in this section (Luttwak 1987; Reich 1991; van Mill 1996; Dryzek and List 2002; Sullivan 2000) are merely suggestive. But each work has powerful insights into strategy and could be very useful to practitioners who want to enhance their grasp of the subject.

2. How have strategy and political maneuvering been studied recently in the field of technical communication?

Many readers of the previous section may have had a sense of déjà vu. Anyone who has been a professional for any time has engaged in strategizing. Thinking strategically (that is, marshalling many resources against an opponent to achieve a goal) is already important in many areas of technical communication. For example, Mackiewicz and Riley (2003) discuss linguistic strategy in their essay on how technical editors balance clarity and politeness. Moore (1999) discusses how to apply six variables (the players, the players' goals, stakes, resources, values, obstacles) when coping with people who cannot be persuaded in organizations. Haselkorn and colleagues (2003) discuss the "strategic management of information" in their essay on expanding the scope of technical communication. Skelton (2002) discusses learning strategy in his essay on managing the development of information products. In their book, *Writing a professional life*, Savage and Sullivan (2001) devote a section of six essays to the subject of office politics. Although it is not our purpose in this essay, a thorough bibliographic search of technical communication scholarship for the past few decades would find scores—if not hundreds—of other essays that discuss strategy.

Most of the aforementioned articles focus on smaller-scale applications of strategic thinking. But strategy more commonly applies to larger-scale activities that may include many people, several geographical environments, different technological platforms, multiple organizations, and several cultures. Such large-scale issues require book-length treatments like these: *Managing your documentation projects*, by JoAnn Hackos (1994); *Building learning communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom*, by Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt (1999); *Beyond borders: Web globalization strategies*, by John Yunker (2002); *Managing enterprise content: A unified content strategy*, by Ann Rockley, Pamela Kostur, and Steve Manning (2002); *The cultural imperative: Global trends in the 21st century*, by Richard D. Lewis (2003); and *High noon: Twenty global problems, twenty years to solve them* by Jean-Francois Rischard (2002).

Any one of the above works could be the starting point for more research. For technical communication faculty who want to develop a more general theory of communication strategy along the lines of Luttwak's general theory, these works would be important sources of examples for fleshing out and validating their analytical frameworks.

3. How can technical communication academics apply heresthetic to empower themselves in their profession?

Technical communication academics do not use terms like "heresthetic" in their publications, but they are by no means amateurs at thinking about strategy and political maneuvering, nor are they amateurs at using strategy and political maneuvering in their own institutions to gain power. The recent two-volume work by Kynell-Hunt and Savage, *Power and legitimacy in technical communication*, is about *The historical and contemporary struggle for professional status*, the subtitle of Volume 1 (2003). The subtitle of Volume 2 is even more on point: *Strategies for professional status* (2004). These two volumes include many essays that discuss how technical communicators have maneuvered in the past against various opponents and how technical communicators in the future should position themselves.

Blakeslee and Spilka's essay "The state of research in technical communication" (2004) offers some general goals for research in technical communication—for example, being consistent, systematic, and thorough in approaching research (p. 76), creating a coherent body of research (p. 76), agreeing on key questions in the field (p. 77), and encouraging more research and less talk about research (p. 78). They present practical ideas for increasing the power of technical communication faculty: finding new forums for reporting research (p. 86), joining industry associations and committees (p. 87), identifying the key people to work with in forming alliances (p. 87), and developing guidelines to help faculty win more research grants (p. 88).

Mirel and Spilka's important anthology, *Reshaping technical communication: New directions and challenges for the 21st century* (2002), has specific references to strategy and the need for strategy in technical communication. They explain in their introduction, "As a whole, the field must become associated with strategic planning and decision-making that reaches beyond publication departments into product management, product design and development, and cross-disciplinary research projects" (p. 4). Several of their essays (such as those by Dicks and by Faber and Johnson-Eilola) offer specific suggestions about strategy.

Yet in speaking of what their contributors have written, Mirel and Spilka also recognize their limitations: "the con-

tributors have not yet addressed some important issues that will be crucial to our professional growth and success" (p. 5). Among others, two of those unaddressed issues are the following:

- *Political strategies within our workplaces to increase our value, influence, and authority*
- *Skills in moving through the processes of forming-storming-norming-and-performing in working jointly on innovations and being able to reap creativity from a healthy dissonance among perspectives (p. 5)*

We believe that heresthetic can present some political strategies to increase the value of technical communicators in organizations, and to help them move through "the processes of forming-storming-norming-and-performing." One focus of our research agenda is to apply heresthetic to specific situations in academia, industry, and academy-industry collaborations. Another focus is to develop a more a general strategy that applies better to technical communication situations in the global information economy.

WAYS THAT TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION WILL CHANGE AND HOW IT SHOULD POSITION ITSELF

Technical communications students are taught early in their education to recognize the need to analyze the rhetorical situation to respond to it effectively, and they learn a variety of heuristics for doing so. For example, most technical writing textbooks include extensive lists of invention questions or revision checklists that students are expected to consider to understand technical communication audiences, contexts, and tasks so that they can produce documents that effectively conform to the demands of the rhetorical situation. Other textbooks include a variety of case studies for students to analyze and that often require students to evaluate rhetorical outcomes.

But students also need to be taught how to recognize and analyze heresthetic situations, situations in which people cannot or will not be persuaded and that demand other non-rhetorical strategies. Many business and administrative communication textbooks do a better job of addressing these kinds of issues than do most technical writing textbooks (for example, Locker 2003 and Guffey 2002), although even they don't provide specific principles that are as widely applicable as Riker's and others.

An example of a heuristic for students based on Riker's model might look like this.

- What **people** are involved in the heresthetic situation (including you), and how do their needs drive the process of heresthetic to its ultimate goal? What are their values and tastes, and to what extent do their values and tastes define the lengths to which they will go to get what they want? How do their individual strengths and limitations create for themselves and for other heresthetics some of the dimensions of the heresthetic problem to be solved?
- What **alternatives** are obvious? What other or better alternatives might be available? How might a seemingly bad situation be turned to your advantage?
- What **dimensions** are relevant to the situation? Time? Distance? Money or other tangible resources? Rules, policies, procedures? The number of voters or decision-makers? The number and type of limitations (of a technology, the limitations of a system of governance, the limitations of the people involved in the situation, a person's or culture's or institution's values, and so on)?
- What **methods of choosing** are available (or can be made available if they don't already exist)? Authority (for example, the boss decides)? Majority rule by formal voting? Informal consensus? Personal opinion (that is, an individual prefers one alternative to another because of personal taste, ideology, a sense of moral obligation, a desire for self-advancement, a desire for revenge, and so forth)?

Students can also use Riker's model of heresthetic analysis when they try to solve problems concerning technology. An example of a heuristic for technology and heresthetic based on Riker's model might look like this.

- What are the characteristics of the **people** involved in the technological situation? Are they experienced users or beginners? Will they have to repair, maintain, or troubleshoot the technology in addition to using it? Are they cooperative, hostile, competitive, dishonest (potential hackers)? Are they motivated or unmotivated? Are they native speakers of English or whatever language is being used? Will their cultures affect how they choose or use a technology? Is their reading level low or high? Will they need acute perceptual and motor skills to use the technology? Can people with disabilities use the technology?
- What technological **alternatives** are available? Will these alternatives involve different media (pen and paper, television, radio, computer interface), channels (audio, video, multimedia), different forms of hardware (screens, computer memory, disk media, keyboards, and so forth), different kinds of interfaces (human-human, computer-human, computer-computer, programmable), or different operating systems, information architectures, and delivery systems for text? Will these alternatives involve system, applications, graphics, or security software? Will the technology be open-source or proprietary?
- What **dimensions** of a technology are relevant? Are dimensions of cost, connectivity, expandability, ease of use, security, accessibility, physical size (such as handheld, laptop, desktop), physical environment,

complexity, availability of technical support, efficiency, and legality (some technologies cannot be shipped beyond national borders) relevant to solving the problem?

- What **methods of choosing** are available? Who chooses: individuals, groups, or a powerful authority, or does a computer program choose based on a selection algorithm?

Another example of a heuristic for students based on social choice theory and the ideas expressed in the essays by van Mill (1996) and Dryzek and List (2002) would focus on how to plan a strategy. When planning a strategy, it is important to understand the preferences and views of people, groups, and organizations involved in the situation, and it is crucial to get the key players to reveal their preferences early in the process. It is also important to understand the structure or hierarchy of preferences.

- What do the customers, competitors, allies, organizations, and cultures want most in a situation, interaction, or technology?
- What are the issues or dimensions that prevent people from structuring their preferences, and how can those issues or dimensions be addressed to encourage a clear expression of the hierarchy of preferences?
- What are the alternatives that key participants will accept?
- Can all the participants agree to accept a standard schema for assessing individual interests and a mechanism for making decisions (Dryzek and List 2002, p. 26)?

Perhaps some day soon, all technical communications textbooks will include such heresthetic-based heuristics along with their persuasion-based invention checklists.

The future is difficult to predict, but technical communication will become more cost-conscious, more international, and more focused on international standards. These changes mean more working in groups across international boundaries and more potential for situations in which rhetoric alone won't help us achieve our goals. In the global information economy, technical communicators—and the academics, institutions, and professional groups that support them—must manage situations, events, technologies, institutions, and the interactions and experiences of individuals, groups, technologies, and cultures. As a result, we must know how to neutralize or offset the attempts of others to manage those same variables when those people interfere with our goals.

If the current trend continues, technical communications practitioners will continue to work within organizations that demand the kind of cunning and political savvy that we've outlined here, and as educators, we are shirking our responsibility if we don't prepare students for the non-utopian organizational contexts within which they will work. After all, Mr. Smith went to Washington a utopian, but he had to learn how to structure his workplace so he could win, and he had to do so without compromising his ethical principles. Mr. Smith had to become a practical non-utopian who was able to use both rhetoric *and* heresthetic to his own advantage and that of his constituents. And like Mr. Smith, consider how much easier our students' jobs will be if they learn something about heresthetic maneuvering *before* being thrust into the workplace.

CONCLUSION

This essay has discussed but one facet of a very large subject. We have made no attempt to develop a general theory of strategy for technical communicators in contemporary organizations. But we believe that Riker's ideas and the ideas of the other writers we have mentioned will provide interested readers with some starting points for their own thinking, reading, writing, and political maneuvering.

Much remains undone. In our reading for this essay, for example, we were repeatedly struck by how the utopian assumptions of some academic writers limited their abilities to devise alternative solutions to problems. Because many academics assume that most people can be persuaded, that most interested parties will be people of good will and integrity, and that many resources are unlimited, their "solutions" to nagging problems like the differences between industry practitioners and academics rarely seem to descend from the world of fantasy into reality.

We think that if utopian academics could re-evaluate their assumptions and subject them to a thorough critique, there would be greater hope for more productive relations between practitioners and academics, there would be more respect for technical communication research inside and outside of the academy, and there would be a better chance that technical communicators will make the transition from wordsmith to communication strategist in the global information economy. TC

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PATRICK MOORE is an associate professor of English at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, where he studies how laissez-faire cultural capitalists, tenured radicals, and totalizing rhetoricians dominate workers in business, government, science, and technology. He earned his BA, MA, and PhD in linguistics, comparative literature, and English (respectively) from the University of Minnesota. His articles have appeared in *English literary history, Philological quarterly, Technical communication,* the *Journal of business and technical communication, Technical communication quarterly,* and the *Journal of technical writing and communication,* among others. Contact: epmoore@att.net.

MELINDA KRETH is an associate professor of English at Central Michigan University, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in technical communication, rhetoric & composition, empirical research methods in English education, women's literature, and science fiction and fantasy. She has published in *IEEE transactions on professional communication, Business communication quarterly, Journal of business and technical communication,* the *Association of Teachers of Technical Writing bulletin,* and *Pedagogy.* She received her MA in technical and expository writing from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and her PhD in Rhetoric and Composition from the University of Louisville. Contact: kreth1ml@cmich.edu.