The Rhetoric of 9/11 and Federal Personnel Management Reform:
An Analysis of Metaphor, Presidential Rhetoric, and
Public Administration Policymaking

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The events of September 11, 2001 changed the context, priorities and goals of public sector management reform. One event that illustrates the impact of 9/11 on public sector management reform is the enactment of the personnel management provisions of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (HSA). This legislation introduced significant changes to personnel policy in one government agency, and the current study explores how presidential, post 9/11 rhetoric played a key role in its passage into law.

Public management reform in the federal government is generally a subject only attended to by managers and employees within the system, government agencies tasked with personnel matters (such as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), for example), unions representing federal employees, and legislators whose constituent interests include those of federal workers. However, civil service reform in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), an agency created as a result of the HSA, was uncommon in that an issue that would normally have been isolated to those immediately affected by management reforms was instead thrust into the public realm. The key reason that this debate moved into the public realm was that President Bush, in campaigning for key Republican legislators in the 2002 mid-term elections, raised the issue of personnel management reforms as key to providing national security (Bush 2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

Business and technical communication researchers have previously investigated rhetorical resources deployed within public institutions to persuade constituent interests that a particular change or course of action was justified (e.g., Dayton, 2002; Graham & Lindeman, 2005; Harrison & Young, 2005). However, the DHS/HSA case represents a circumstance in which the American public became the audience for an issue that would normally have only been debated within the community of public sector management. 9/11 marked a change in the rhetorical situation in a way that Bitzer (1968) would say gave rise to a new "exigence" or "imperfection marked by urgency" that calls forth a rhetorical response (p. 63). As such, this case provides an important look at how localized issues are reframed for the public audience, a change that simultaneously invited the audience to consider specialized topics not normally in their frame of reference and attempted to persuade them that one course of action was preferable over another.

Reform debates in federal personnel management predated those that occurred as part of DHS/HSA in 2002. Previous administrations had proposed broad changes in the civil service laws, but none had been enacted by the Congress. While the HSA contained many more issues than those concerning management reform, the personnel management provision was perhaps the most contentious of the proposed law, delaying final passage of the legislation until after the 2002 mid-term elections and resulting in a tough battle between federal employee unions and the Bush Administration for support on Capitol Hill (Brook & King, 2007). Ultimately, the legislation passed, and the management reforms were written into law on November 25, 2002.

In an analytic study of the DHS/HSA case, Brook and King (2007) explored why the legislation passed and what role 9/11 played in the outcome. Their analysis suggested that "national security" was a key rhetorical lever in the debate and was instructive in understanding why the legislation was successful: "the most powerful explanation for the outcome rests with the argument that the personnel management policy was created and made relevant by the events of 9/11 and the rhetoric of national security" (p. 405). The Bush administration and its supporters on Capitol Hill repeatedly cast the argument over personnel management flexibility as a matter of national security. Brook and King's (2007) analysis of arguments made by previous administrations, dating back to the Reagan Administration, found that large-scale personnel management reforms had been repeatedly proposed to Congress only to be consistently defeated or ignored. By examining all published arguments made for and against personnel management reforms, both before and after 9/11, "national security" was found to be the only argument unique to the debate that resulted in the reforms actually passing into law.

The current paper moves beyond the Brook & King's study to investigate the national security argument in HSA/DHS case in more detail, drawing on Ivie's (1987) method of metaphorical analysis. By examining the rhetorical force of "national security" in arguments from both sides of the debate, this study further explores the communication that led to the most sweeping civil service reform since 1978. This analysis provides insight into the rhetorical resources brought to bear in a public argument for an audience that likely had little previous knowledge or interest in the topic of the debate.

The paper begins by providing background of the case, followed by an overview of the literature on presidential rhetoric and influence, and subsequently describes the materials and methods undertaken in the analysis. Results demonstrate how the framing of three issues—strategy, protection, and power—was key in the rhetorical force of the arguments for the public audience. Each side in the debate drew on different metaphors in their arguments, which are analyzed against the context of a post 9/11 America. This study suggests why some metaphors were more persuasive than others and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Background: The Homeland Security Act

The HSA created the DHS by combining 22 existing agencies and 170,000 federal employees into a new cabinet-level department—the largest and most complex

reorganization of the federal government since the creation of the Department of Defense nearly six decades earlier. The legislation included authority for DHS to initiate new approaches to personnel management outside many of the normal rules of the federal civil service. This new personnel management authority was potentially the broadest and most significant change in civil service law since the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978 (Brook and King, 2007).

Most of the key issues in the debates over reform were well-traveled terrain for both sides. Those in favor of reforms had long argued for the need to more strategically manage human capital. Specifically, reformers were interested in managers having the flexibility to move personnel where needed to respond to agency needs, a pay system that was based on performance, better systems for recruiting and retaining employees, and adjustments in labor relations rules to enable the various flexibilities being proposed (James, 2002; Shiplett, 2001; United States GAO, 2001; United States GAO, 2002). Those against the reforms primarily argued that most, if not all the flexibilities were available under the current system. Further, opponents argued that additional flexibilities would deny federal employees their rights to collective bargaining, represented a regression back to an older system where favoritism substituted for a civil service system based on merit principles, and gave the Administration unprecedented control over employees without the checks and balances provided by union representation (Harnage 2000, 2001; Kelly, 2002; Schwemle, 2002).

However, the introduction of "national security" as a reason for reform was unique to the HSA/DHS legislation. Because this new argument was based on national concerns rather than those localized at the federal management level, the debate was thrust into the public realm. Once there, the debate centered around presidential rhetoric, affected a national election, and brought about unprecedented involvement of the general public in the federal management reform controversy.

Presidential Rhetoric and Influence

By many accounts, the contentious battle over the personnel management reforms was over as soon as the returns came in on election night, 2002. Colleen Kelly, President of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) and a key spokesperson against the reforms, noted the elections as pivotal to passing the legislation: "In the end it went through because of the mid-term elections . . . I knew that night what was going to happen . . . within two weeks they acted on the legislation" (Brook and King, 2007, p. 403). While there were a few key mid-term winners who tipped the balance in the Senate, there was also a general feeling that the election results signaled a powerful force in public support for legislation in support of national security. In particular, Max Cleland, the democratic incumbent in Georgia, was a key senator to lose his seat. One irony in his defeat was that Cleland—a triple amputee, decorated Vietnam veteran—was portrayed in Republican campaign ads as anti-national security because of his alignment with the Unions on the personnel issue (Lowery, 2004). John Gartland, director of legislative affairs at OPM, noted that after Max Cleland was defeated, "it sent a message back here. A bunch of other Democrats and Republicans, they quickly got along, and they passed

that bill" (Brook and King, 2007, p. 403). Another researcher, James Lewis of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, also argued that the national security argument held tremendous power: "Neither party is going to want to get caught with the other one saying, 'Look, they're obstructing homeland security.' That's where they're not going to be as willing to question or criticize as much as they would otherwise" (Williams and Nather, 2002, p. 1642).

It is well understood that members of congress are consistently concerned with reelection, and Kernell (1997) argues that they are more likely to support a popular president who uses the bully pulpit to advocate policy positions, as long as it is clear that citizens support the presidential positions. Therefore, some argue that going public with policy positions can be an effective way for a president to gain compliance from those legislators who oppose his positions. Speechmaking and campaigning are some ways that presidents take arguments to the public, and some research has demonstrated that presidential speech making has a positive relationship to legislative success at the macro level (Barrett, 2004; Canes-Wrone 2001; Kernell, 1997).

Other research, however, suggests otherwise. For example, Powell and Schloyer (2003) argued that "there is little if any presidential influence gained by implicit electoral threats delivered through public appeals," (p. 133). Other researchers have suggested that presidential appeals also have little effect on the public. For example, Edwards (2003) has argued that "presidents usually fail in their efforts to move the public to support them and their policies," and he calls for more studies that focus directly on the effect of presidential leadership on opinion. One way of examining these effects is through rhetorical criticism and analysis (p. 26).

Language philosopher and rhetorician Kenneth Burke (1950) described the function of rhetoric as "the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (p. 41). To study the effects of presidential rhetoric, then, is to examine the discourse a president uses in his attempt at influencing attitudes and inducing particular actions. Political science and public policy researchers have argued elsewhere that policy change depends on a politician's skill in framing issues in particular ways to advance their position on an issue (Abolafia, 2004; Kingdon, 1984; Myers, 2000). Other scholars go even further, suggesting that language can effectively create rather than simply reflect reality. For example, noted presidential rhetorician David Zarefsky (2004) argues that presidential rhetoric may suggest "possibilities and . . . issue invitations" (p. 610) to audiences for seeing the rhetor's position as aligned with their own interests. These invitations, through language, influence how people view a situation: "Because of his prominent political position and his access to the means of communication, the president, by defining a situation, might be able to shape the context in which events or proposals are viewed by the public" (p. 611).

This study examines the Bush administration's communication that linked personnel management reform with national security, and seeks to understand why those language choices may have been effective in persuading audiences of his position in a post-9/11 world.

While the president wields particular influence over his audiences, there are opposing forces that also emerge. In this case, the public employee unions were a strong, vocal counterpoint to the administration's arguments in favor of personnel management reforms. Unlike an individual or even a citizen-led group opposition, these unions have a history of political power and influence in government. In the case of personnel management reforms, the unions also had a history of success in defeating similar legislation in the past; this history meant that they could draw on arguments that had a track record for killing management reforms. Because the current study focused on how this legislation passed when it had failed every time before, it was important to examine both the administration's arguments in favor of the reforms as well as the union's arguments against the reforms.

One useful way to examine rhetorical force is through the examination of metaphors. Particularly in political discourse, the use of language and metaphor can influence the receivers of the message, possibly influencing how people vote or adopt a position on a particular issue. George Lakoff (2002) has written about the relationship between metaphor and politics, arguing that metaphors affect unconscious reasoning and inference making. This paper argues that underlying metaphors, within the arguments from reform advocates and opponents, played a role in shaping public opinion, thus clearing the way for reform legislation that had repeatedly failed prior to 9/11.

Materials

To examine the arguments for personnel management reform in the post 9/11 period, the author and two graduate students consulted materials in the public record that illustrated both sides of the debate. The search probed research databases such as Lexis Nexis, Proquest, JSTOR, and the Homeland Security Digital Library, resulting in a variety of materials including newspapers, scholarly reports, speech transcripts, congressional hearings, and other public accounts. In all, the authors consulted 85 different sources, containing nearly 200 quotes that contained direct references to the debate. The authors reviewed all the collected quotes, jointly categorizing them into 14 initial themes: Strategic Human Capital Management; Accountability; Efficiencies; Broad-banding / Paybanding; Performance Based Pay / Performance Measures; Modernization; Recruitment/Retention; Public Perception; Flexibility; Union Busting; Unions Good for government; Whistle-blower protections; Partisianship Issues; and National Security. Building on Brook and King (2007), the authors selected only those quotes related to National Security for further analysis. Of the 200 original quotes, 37 contained references directly to National Security. Those 37 quotes provided the basis for the current study.

The study also included data gathered in qualitative interviews with key participants in the debate, including members of the Bush Administration, legislators, and public union representatives. Although the interview data was consulted to gain general background into the debate, the actual data set for the study was limited to only those arguments that could be directly attributable to a specific source and were available in the public record. By limiting the data to directly attributed material, there was a reduced risk of imposing

third-party interpretation of specific arguments. Instead, the data only included the terms of the argument as made by the original author/speaker/organization. In many cases, the evidence for arguments was in the form of direct quotations taken from hearings, speeches, press briefings, or other public events. In other cases, the data were drawn from sources such as "talking points" representing the official position of a participant in the debate, such as the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) union. In all cases, only those arguments in the public record counted as data for the study. There is a particular utility in restricting the data to only those arguments made publicly; namely, such arguments would most likely be those which were circulated in the public sphere. It was important to view the debate as the public viewed it in order to examine the potential effects of the arguments on those audiences.

Method

Once the quotes on National Security were isolated for analysis, the quoted statements were categorized as either for or against personnel management reforms. Then, the statements were closely analyzed using Ivie's (1987) rhetorical method for metaphorical criticism.

Metaphoric analysis

One effective approach for analyzing arguments and their potential effect is to examine the metaphors embedded within them. Far from being mere ornament, metaphors structure how people think in that they invite audiences to view persons, places and situations in particular ways (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). Robert L. Ivie (1987), in his article "Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War 'Idealists," provides a useful approach for examining the persuasive and rhetorical effect of metaphors. According to Ivie, metaphor provides a key for understanding rhetorical invention, whereby an image conveyed in an argument "produces an … interpretation of reality, with which the intended audience is invited to identify" (p. 351). Through metaphor analysis, we can gain insights into how arguments may invoke particular audience responses and, consequently, we can better understand some of the persuasive characteristics that may have impacted the successful outcome of the legislation.

Using Ivie's (1987) method, the metaphors were identified and then grouped into themes or "metaphorical concepts" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981, pp. 289-292). To improve reliability, the author and two graduate students had to reach full agreement about the match between specific quotes the metaphorical concept to which they were assigned in order to count as data for the final analysis.

Next, each metaphor was examined within each theme to identify patterns of usage. To increase validity of the findings, this study drew from Philipsen's (1989) two principles of validity in his "objectivist approach" to investigations of ethnographic communicative practices: (1) "To the degree the investigator's claims about the practices studied are evidenced in the behavior of the interlocutors studied, those claims can be given

credence" and (2) "To the degree the investigator's claims about the practices studied are congruent across multiple means of observation and analysis, those claims can be given credence" (p. 252). While this study focuses only on direct quotations rather than other kinds of communicative behaviors, these principles illustrate the commitment to the discourse of the interlocutors as the means of evidence, with multiple examples providing credibility for the claims offered in the analysis.

Finally, the metaphors of the proponents and opponents were compared to examine differences and gain insight into which arguments may have resonated with audiences. In this part of the analysis, key factors were considered in assessing the rhetorical force of particular metaphors; namely, the rhetorical situation, the unique circumstances following 9/11, and the culture of fear (see Faredi, 2007) that was present in America at the time of this legislation. Finally, in some cases, the interview data with key government officials offered additional insights to supplement the rhetorical claims in this paper.

Findings

Upon the review of the data, a pattern emerged as to how both sides in the controversy were constructed in the arguments. Although there were many quotes from different spokespersons on each side, the collective perspectives gave rise to what are termed as two representative *agents* for each side, one representing reform advocates and one representing reform opponents. The reform advocate agent, for example, included perspectives expressed by President George W. Bush and his administration, various representatives of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and others who argued for an overhaul of the existing personnel management system. On the other side, the reform opponent agent included perspectives expressed by union leaders, legislators who supported the union position and others who opposed the sweeping reform measures being proposed by the Bush Administration. The multiple perspectives, within each side of the debate, shared similarities such that a unified agent for that perspective emerged as the embodiment of a position either for or against personnel management reform. The analysis revealed two distinct agents that we label as follows: The Administration Agent (the advocates of reform) and the Union Agent (the opponents of reform).

The Administration Agent (hereafter referred to as "Administration") is the proponent for civil service reform. This agent is constructed as one who expressed concern with national security and the protection of the American people against an external foe. By establishing the objects of its protection—the American people—the Administration assumes and establishes the credibility and authority to act and speak on their behalf.

The Union Agent (hereafter referred to as "Union") is the opponent of sweeping civil service reform.[1] This agent is constructed as one who is concerned with the protection of

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[1] It is important to note that some of those who comprise the Union agent are in favor of some personnel management reforms in federal government; however, collectively, we characterize this agent as "reform opponents" because they oppose the sweeping reforms being proposed by the Bush administration, specifically those reforms that would restrict union power and union representation.

federal workers against an internal foe, one who would compromise workers' rights and freedoms in service to fighting a war. By establishing the objects of its protection—primarily unionized federal workers affected by the proposed changes—the Union assumes and establishes the credibility and authority to act on their behalf.

The utility of collapsing each side's views into a representative agent is that it provides a collective representation of the primary opposing arguments. While the nuances and differences between members on the same side are not necessarily unimportant, the audiences of this debate as a whole likely conceived of the arguments in broader terms. It is against that backdrop of the debate, broadly conceived, that this study directs its focus. Given the establishment of these two agents, the next section focuses on the analysis of metaphors and examines the rhetorical force of the national security argument.

Metaphor Analysis

Within our corpus of data, several metaphoric themes emerged among the arguments presented. Those metaphors were evident in three primary issues relevant to this debate: strategy, protection, and power. Within each of these key issues, there were metaphoric references that illustrated the perspectives of the two competing agents; a careful comparison provided insights into the potential impact on the audiences of the arguments. First, the issue of "strategy" emerged as a key concept; that is, how each side characterized its efforts toward an ultimate goal. Second, the issue of "protection" emerged in which each side identified both the method for and the object of its protection. Third, the issue of "power" emerged; that is, how each side expressed and conceptualized its power relative to each other and national security. These three issues—strategy, protection, and power—were arguably important to Americans in the post-9/11 world. Furthermore, each side in the debate addressed these issues, and a comparison of their differences was useful in assessing the effectiveness of the arguments.

Throughout the following analysis, italics are used to highlight particular words or phrases that were important in the interpretation of the data. Therefore, all use of italics should be considered added emphasis rather than the original quoted authors' unless otherwise noted.

Strategy.

A strategy, understood as a plan for successful action, implies intent on the part of the entity engaging in it; however, strategies are often implicitly rather than explicitly stated. Within the corpus of data, each agent exhibited its own strategy, underlain with metaphors that supported its own and refuted the other's strategic intentions. How these strategic intentions are expressed, and the principles they illustrate, can provide insight into responses by audiences—that is, which strategies the audience may judge as rational and in their best interest. So, it is important to look at both the strategies that were expressed by each agent in the controversy, as well as the metaphors they drew upon to convey their strategic perspectives and rationales.

The Administration presents their strategy as one that requires them to have more control over federal personnel in order to provide national security and protect America. For example, President Bush (2002a) argued that he needed the freedom "*to put the right people* at the *right place* at the *right time* to protect the American people." The metaphor of physical placement—to "put" federal workers in particular places at particular times—is rationalized as a strategy to protect America, much like one would move a Bishop or Knight in a chess game to protect the King. This physical placement metaphor was also picked up by the news media. In one summary of the issues, an article in the *Washington Post* noted, "The White House wants to retain the ability to *remove* some employees from unions for national security reasons," and "Bush wants the ability to *move* workers from one part of the department to another to meet rapidly changing needs (Miller and Eilperin, 2002b). Then DHS Secretary Tom Ridge argued that "the legislation proposed by the Administration provides that when the Department is established, employees represented by unions will continue to be represented because their bargaining units *will move* with them" (McCallion, 2003, p. 2). This metaphor of physical placement suggests that the Administration requires a particularly high degree of power and control over personnel, but that degree of power is presented as rational and justified in light of national security. To the extent that the audience is concerned about national security, then they are invited to see the Administration strategy—in this case, its need for power over personnel—as one that is consistent with that concern.

The Union critiqued the Administration's strategy in several ways. First, the Union asserted that the Administration's strategy was disingenuous. The Administration argued for the need to bypass union protections in order to place, move, or remove federal personnel where they were needed for national security purposes. The Union asserted that the Administration was instead anti-union, a claim they argued using metaphors of destruction and elimination. For example, John Gage, current AFGE president, questioned the connection drawn between union rights—including the right to control where personnel are placed—and national security; In a *Washington Post* editorial, Gage was quoted as asserting that such claims were "disingenuous." The editorial went on to echo some of Gage's concerns, noting, "It would be nice to believe the administration's fervent denials of a plot to *destroy* the mostly Democratic unions. But before we do, we'd like to see some clearer arguments from the administration about what the *elimination* of union bargaining has to do with either the nation's safety or civil service performance" (Civil service reform, p. A20). In another example from AFGE (2001a) *Talking Points*, the Union asserted that the Administration's strategy represented "longstanding efforts to *bust* federal employee unions." Former AFGE president Bobby Harnage also critiqued the Administration's strategy using similar metaphors: "*Destroying* the rights of federal employees will, in turn, *destroy* any attempt to provide skilled, well-trained, professional employees to guard our nation and its citizens" (McCallion, 2003). The Union asserted that the Administration was destroying the rights of the workers and, thus, positioned the Administration's strategy as negative and destructive. These examples illustrate the Union's perspective that the Administration strategy will destroy and eliminate the rights of workers, a move that will harm national security.

In addition to arguing that the Union position helps rather than hinders national security, the Union also argued that the Administration's claims about national security interests were a tactic to gain compliance for controversial personnel reforms. The Union charged the Administration with premeditation and drew on a metaphor of perseverance in arguing this claim. For example, Rhode Island Senator Chaffee, a Republican who sided with the Union in the controversy, stated, "The President and his allies knew exactly what they were doing in *holding out* on this issue" (Firestone and Bumiller, 2002, p. A1). The writers who quoted Chaffee went on to report on the perspectives of reform opponents, noting that "Many members of Congress from both parties now say that the Administration was *politically clever* in inserting the personnel requirements, foreseeing an opposition from the Democrats and an opportunity to defeat them in the face of national security" (Firestone and Bumiller, 2002, p. A1). To "hold out" on an issue and to be "politically clever" implies conscious intent; as a critique of the Administration's strategy, it illustrates the Union argument that the Administration was consciously strategic in their use of the national security argument and "knew exactly what they were doing."

Implied within their critique of the Administration's strategy, however, is the Union's own strategy to preserve workers' rights to organize, to bargain, and to be heard. Underlying this strategic perspective is a battle metaphor which suggests that federal workers are already engaged in the war on terror. For example, Harnage said that the "*fight* against terrorism, in which federal employees have always been on the *front lines of the homeland*, is about preserving our freedoms—including our right to organize—not destroying them" (Barr, 2003). Colleen Kelly, president of the NTEU, also asserted that it is important to have "*frontline* employees with a real voice in how the work gets done" (Barr, 2002b). In these examples, the Union drew upon a metaphor that suggests that employees are already in a position to support national security, and this metaphoric depiction challenges the physical placement needs espoused by the Administration.

So, here we have two strategies, from each side in the debate, both of which are supported by potentially powerful metaphors. Each side presents their strategy as right, just, and in service to what is critical and important. However, there are some key differences between the two positions that could potentially affect audience response. One key difference is the object of protection. In the case of the Administration, the focus of protection is the "American people." In the case of the Union, the primary focus of protection is a subset of the American people, the federal workers. So, while the Administration expressed a need to physically place the federal worker, the power they seek is expressed as a means to protect the larger group of Americans; that is, *all* Americans. The Union uses powerful metaphors to describe the problems with that power—destruction of the Union and the rights it affords workers, challenges of disingenuousness, and powerful depictions of federal workers as already on the frontline of the national security battle—but ultimately their strategy is directed at a subset of Americans. Thus, the various audiences being addressed may see their interests being more directly served by the Administration's strategy than by the Union strategy. To put it another way, in a post-9/11 world, audiences might simply be more moved to accept various strategies in service to their own safety versus the protection of workers' rights.

Similarly, an audience might not be moved by critiques of the Administration's strategy, even if the critiques were credible, if they did not view the Union's purported objective as more important than the Administration's purported objective.

The issue of protection—that is, defining the objects of protection and who needs what kind of power to ensure it—is a critical issue in this debate. The next section explores this issue in more detail.

Protection.

9/11 generated a great deal of fear in the American public, an emotional preoccupation that was clearly an issue for HSA and the personnel management reforms contained within it. A critical question in this debate was who or what needed to be protected. The Administration expressed its intention, need, and ability to protect the average American citizen. The Union expressed its intention, need, and ability to protect the federal worker.

It is interesting to explore the ways that the Administration refers to the object of its protection. For example, the Administration consistently made references to "the American people," (Bush, 2000b, 2000c; Firestone, 2002; Friel, 2002; Miller and Eilperin, 2002a), a collective and inclusive reference that applies to everyone. Additionally, there were numerous references to "homeland" (e.g., Falkenrath, 2005; Friel, 2002; Mitchell, 2002), including but not limited to references to the Department of Homeland Security. For example, Bush noted in a speech, "We're doing everything we can to protect the *homeland* against an enemy that hates us," (Friel, 2002). Although there are many definitions of the term "home," as a metaphor it may invoke its more common connotation of the physical and personal home in which one lives. As an object of the Administration's protection, "homeland" simultaneously draws upon both the personal and national senses of that term; nonetheless, the personal connection invites the audience to view the object as valuable, for what is more valuable than one's home and its inhabitants? Another reference to the object of protection is "you" (Bush, 2002b, 2002c; Nakashima and Miller, 2002), as expressed, for example, in a Bush speech in which he asserts the "Department [of Homeland Security]. . . is being created to secure *you*" (Bush 2002c). In this case, he is not referring literally to an individual, but rather is drawing on "you" as a metaphor in addressing a collective. In doing so, however, he establishes a connection that invites the audience to identify with the object of protection as he describes it; it is not an abstract entity, but rather *you* who are the object of concern.

The Union, in contrast to the Administration, depicts the object of protection as primarily the federal worker and only secondarily the American public (e.g., Ballard, 2002; Barr 2002b; Friel, 2002; Harnage, 2001, 2002; McCallion, 2003; AFGE 2001a, 2001b). Consider these comments from Harnage, for example: "When *public employees*' rights and protections are compromised, so too is the safety and security of *the public they serve*. . . . Homeland security requires a *secure work force*. . . . Destroying the rights of *federal employees* will, in turn, destroy any attempt to provide *skilled, well-trained, professional employees* to guard *our nation and its citizens*" (McCallion, 2003). In this example, the federal employees are foregrounded as needing protection so that they, in

turn, can protect the public. The protection they need draws upon the concept of security, but primarily in the sense of the federal employee's own personal security rather than the security of the homeland per se. The reference to personal security involves protecting (rather than destroying) their rights as workers. Once the Union ensures protection for workers' rights, only then will those employees be able to "guard our nation" and all who comprise it.

In addition to foregrounding federal workers as the primary object of protection, the Union also depicts the public—the secondary object of protection—differently than does the Administration. For example, in the Harnage quote above, he referred to "the public" and "our nation and its citizens." As compared with the "American people," the reference to "the public" is abstract and does not draw upon the same connection with the audience. Additionally, this reference to "the public" is couched within a reference to the primary object, the federal employee, in that it is not simply the public, but rather "the public *they serve*." Again, then, the federal employee is still prevalent and connected to concerns involving the larger populace. The second term of reference, "our nation and its citizens," is also somewhat abstract compared with references by the Administration. While "*our* nation" creates some personal connection, the reference to "its citizens" reintroduces an abstract tone. In contrast to the directness of the term "you" as used by the Administration, "our nation and its citizens" asks the audience to place themselves within the third person reference rather than as a direct respondent of the message.

In speculating the persuasive effect of how each side in the debate dealt with the key issue of protection, it is important to closely examine how each side depicted the *objects* of that protection. The Administration cast a wide net that encompassed all the American people, while the Union expressed their primary concern as protecting federal employees, a move that they presented as a necessary first step to protecting the public. Additionally, the Administration drew upon metaphors and concepts that emphasized connection, whereas the Union drew upon concepts that were more abstract. The audience, therefore, may have been drawn to the Administration argument because they were invited to see themselves and their interests as being served more directly.

Power

Each agent in the controversy expressed an intention, need and ability to offer protection for its respective objects of primary concern. The ability to protect, however, necessitates that the agent possess the power to carry out the actions they see as necessary to provide that protection. Both agents in this debate expressed conceptions of its respective power, but each did so in different ways.

One key difference was in how they each portrayed the holder of power. In the case of the Administration, such holders were primarily emphasized as individuals or second person references to groups of people. For example, the Administration argued that "a time of war is the wrong time to weaken *the president's* ability to protect the American people" (Miller and Eilperin, 2002a, p. A01), and "I don't think you'll ever be able to say that you've done all you can do to enhance security of this country if you don't give *a*

new secretary . . . flexibility" (Nakashima and Miller, 2002, p. 15). In numerous other instances, Bush relied on the use of personal pronouns: "*I* need to have the ability to put the right people at the right place at the right time" (Friel, 2002), "*I* would have the capacity . . . to suspend those rules" (Bush, 2002c), and "*I* need the flexibility to be able to look at the American people and say *we're* doing everything *we* can to protect the homeland against an enemy that hates us," (Friel, 2002). In all these cases, the holder of power is an identifiable entity, one who can be held accountable—at least through identification—for the power and subsequent actions the agent takes. The Union, however, portrays the holder of power primarily as a system or abstract collectivities. For example, "the *merit system*" is held up as an entity which can ensure "protection for whistleblowers who alert Congress and the public to fraud, abuse, mismanagement, and *threats to national security*" (AFGE, 2001a). In other examples, systemic collectivities are emphasized as the holders of power: "*Federal employee unions* have formally represented the vast majority of the federal workforce for forty years. *Union membership* has never been inconsistent with national security" (AFGE, 2001b), and "[one of] the most important things needed to improve homeland security [is] *frontline employees* with a real voice in how the work gets done" (Barr. 2002b, p. B02). In these examples, the holders of power are union leadership and union membership, systemic collectives that are not as easily identifiable and, thus, do not carry the same perception or degree of direct accountability. From the perspective of the audience, it is plausible that the Administration's call for more power, in service to protecting the American people against threats to national security, was persuasive because of the direct relationship being drawn between the threat and who, specifically, was taking action to combat that threat. In the case of the Union, their portrayal of the entity that holds the power added another level of abstraction. As we saw previously, the first level of abstraction was that the object of protection was primarily the federal worker, a subset of the American people. Now, the second layer of abstraction is introduced: the holder of power portrayed by the Union is a system or collective that is taking responsibility for providing national security—a characterization that introduces a diffused entity and, therefore, only indirect accountability.

In addition to differences between depictions of the holders of power, each side also dealt differently with how it characterized its actions on behalf of national security. The Administration drew on action metaphors to describe and rationalize their need for power. For example, the Administration argued for personnel management changes so that it could "*create* a modern, flexible, and responsive program" (Bush administration analysis, 2002), "*put* the right people at the right place" (Bush, 2002b), and "*run* this department" (Friel, 2002). The Administration also repeatedly linked its actions directly to the needs of national security or the American people. Consider these examples: "I would *have the capacity*, for the *sake of national security*, to *suspend* collective bargaining rules" (Bush, 2002c), and to "*retain the ability to remove* some employees from unions for *national security reasons*" (Miller and Eilperin, 2002b, p. A08), and finally "I will *not accept* a lousy bill that makes it impossible for the president . . . *to do what the American people expect*, and that's to *protect the homeland*" (Firestone, 2002, p. A21). In all of these examples, the Administration portrays its efforts in active terms,

often linking those actions directly to the protection of the American people and the needs of national security.

The Union also describes its actions drawing on active verbs, but often in service to the federal employee or the union rather than the American people. Additionally, when national security is addressed, it is often done so secondarily. For example, AFGE talking points argued, "Federal employee unions have *formally represented* the vast majority of the federal workforce for forty years. Union membership has never *been inconsistent with national security*." (AFGE, 2001b). In this case, the act of formal representation is an active move, but it is taken on behalf of the federal workforce. Additionally, the link provided between the actions of the federal workforce and ensuring national security is more passive than active. That is, rather than characterizing the federal employees as directly impacting national security, in this instance their actions are such that they are not "inconsistent" with efforts to ensure national security. This lack of direct connection between actions and national security concerns is evident in this example as well: "Federal employee unions have *helped* to keep the *homeland secure*" (AFGE, 2001b). While "help" is an action, it is a much weaker action when compared with the Administration's efforts to "create" and "run" a department or "do what the American people expect" in service to national security. Importantly, there are instances in which the Union describes stronger actions. For example, consider the connotations of the metaphor "stand up" in this instance: "No one who *stands up* for the rights of collective bargaining should have their patriotism questioned" (Barr, 2002a). However, here again, the strong action is associated not directly with national security, but rather with a worker's right to collective bargaining. The issue of collective bargaining is presented here as separate from one's commitment to the nation. Though such a distinction may be credible, the power of the Union agent and its associated actions is still more directed toward protecting the federal employee than national security or the American people.

Finally, in addition to the difference between the Administration's relatively strong actions and the Union's relatively weak or potentially self-serving actions, each critiqued the other in ways that served to bolster these initial characterizations. Bush, for example, argued that those who opposed management reforms wanted legislation that "*strips* me of authority" (Friel, 2002), and wanted him "to *forfeit* power" (Bush, 2002c). Bush also argued that "A time of war is the wrong time to *weaken* the president's ability to protect the American people," and that he wouldn't accept legislation that "that *limits or weakens* the president's well-established authorities" (Miller and Eilperin, 2002a, p. A01). These critiques by the Administration do two things: first, they cast the opposition as making unreasonable demands that would compromise national security, and second, they reestablish the Administration's strong power position. By drawing on metaphors of removal, forfeiture, and weakness as so clearly damaging to the power necessary to protect the nation, the Administration effectively bolsters its own argument that it needs the power it seeks and should rightly retain the power it already possesses.

The Union also offered its own critiques of the Administration's actions. Their harshest criticisms, as defenses against the power sought by the Administration, actually served to reestablish Administration authority, even as the Union was fighting against it. For

example, the Union argued that "We see the administration's use of 'flexibility' as a code word for *denial of due process* to federal employees" (Lunney, 2002), and that "merely because an employee performs work related to homeland security should not automatically mean that his union membership should be *outlawed*" (AFGE 2001a). In each of these cases, the Union implicitly acknowledges the power of the Administration to, in one case, "deny" due process, and in another case, to "outlaw" union membership. The empirical reality of these executive powers aside, the discourse directs the attention back to the primary power holder—the power holder who has repeatedly linked its actions with concerns about national security and the protection of the American people—as, in fact, already possessing some of the very power it seeks. In the old self-help mode of "acting as if" one *is* something as a route to actually becoming it, the Union critique in this instance actually serves to bolster the Administration argument and its need for (continued) power.

Conclusion

Why did large-scale civil service reform get enacted in 2002 when past attempts had failed?   This analysis provides insight to the outcome given the context of a post-9/11 environment. A significant and controversial public management reform was adopted because it became associated with broader concerns of the American public. The analysis of how each side presented its perspective on strategy, protection, and power suggests both the rhetorical force and persuasive appeal of the arguments linking public management reform to an issue of national concern. The Administration emphasized deliberate, accountable actions that they needed to take to protect the American people against a threat to national security. The Union mounted a defense against the Administration's arguments, emphasizing the need to protect the federal worker as a necessary prerequisite to any ability to provide true security for the nation. While each side presented strong metaphors to underscore their positions, ultimately the debate centered on the needs of the "American people" vs. the needs of the "federal worker."

In the post-9/11 environment, audiences likely identified more directly with the Administration's arguments than the Union's arguments. Arguments that had existed in personnel management debates prior to 9/11 took on new rhetorical force against the backdrop of national security. New arguments related to national security were unique to the debate and appear as the most influential, evidenced by the reforms passing into law. Additionally, the characterizations of the agents in the controversy were also rhetorically significant for audiences of this debate. Given the new rhetorical landscape, audiences were likely more persuaded by agents who exhibited strong, decisive, almost paternal action in the face of known and unknown threats to the "homeland." Conversely, the Union's arguments for worker protections, systemic remedies for problems, and solutions that depended on collective over individual action were not as effective as they had been in the past. Quite simply, the events of 9/11 changed the criteria by which the various positions in the personnel management debate were judged. Additionally, the new rhetorical situation provided the opportunity for new rhetorical resources to be deployed in a conflict over federal personnel management reforms, a fight comprised of arguments that had remained largely unchanged over numerous presidential administrations. As

Bitzer (1968) argues, it is the rhetorical situation "which calls the discourse into existence" and further allows the "creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (pp. 60-61). Given this new rhetorical situation, the force of the Administration's arguments was likely a factor in influencing those elected in a national election, which paved the way to achieving new personnel management authority as part of the HSA.

This case illustrates the utility and importance of rhetorical criticism in exploring how a previously localized argument changes and gains new traction when brought to a broader, less specialized audience. For business and technical communicators, this case has implications for understanding the role of communication in organizations when the audience broadens beyond those immediately affected by a proposed organizational or policy change. This case, in particular, demonstrates the need for rhetorical criticism in understanding the various ways communication can affect public policy and influence public opinion. Carolyn Rude (2004), for example, points out the importance of civic knowledge for technical communication students and practitioners who can "contribute their knowledge of rhetorical situations, audiences, genres, media and language to the tasks that engage citizens in debate on policy" (p. 271), and this case adds to scholarship that seeks to understand the connections between communication and the public sphere. Additionally, however, this case also alerts business and technical communicators how the rhetorical force of a previously successful argument can change in light of a new rhetorical situation.

Whereas this study provides a careful examination of rhetorical resources deployed in the DHS/HSA fight over personnel reforms, future research should more closely investigate the details of the post 9/11 rhetorical situation that gave rise to a new reception of arguments. Additionally, while the DHS/HSA case is illustrative, future research should investigate other personnel reform attempts, post 9/11, to investigate the differences or similarities to rhetorical resources employed. For example, the National Security Personnel System, with many of the same provisions and changes that appeared as part of the personnel system in DHS, became law only a year following the DHS passage. Additional investigation into the arguments for that legislation would help inform the conclusions derived in the current study.

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Biography

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