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The Construction of Organizational Identity: Discourses on a Brazilian Private Railroad

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ABSTRACT

Considering the current organizational macro-environments, we notice that competitors have become more aggressive. At the same time, some stakeholders are expecting more from organizations in relation to social and environmental issues. Therefore, in order to survive in this context, it is crucial for organizations to know better their identity, which is projected by different means of communication to its internal members and external public. In this scenario, the aim of this paper is to analyze the projected organizational identity of a recently privatized Brazilian railroad. We studied the construction and transformation process of this organizational identity through two different discourses: that of the high-level manager and that of the trade union. In addition, two Discourse Analysis elements were used: the persuasion strategies and the discursive images. These elements were very useful in order to apprehend the ideological background of the discourses and the organizational identity projected. In the end, we concluded that the identity projection process occurs in a very diverse, contradictory and interactive way.

Key words: organizational identity; discourse analysis; persuasion strategies; discursive images.

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INTRODUCTION

For the last few decades, the globalization process has been changing Brazilian society through privatizations, market deregulation and increasing competition between all kinds of organizations. According to Almeida (2005), academic studies on organizational identity and public expectations of corporations have advanced a great deal since 1990. Efforts to present intrinsic and extrinsic organizational qualities to society may turn out to be a competitive differential.

This paper aims to study the construction of a private railroad's organizational identity, Railroad X⁽¹⁾, in order to understand the different levels of this process, through different points of view. In spite of the railroad's importance to economic development, the Brazilian train system had suffered a notable decrease in investments since the late 1980's. This negligence regarding the sector resulted in an increase in *Rede Ferroviária Federal S. A.*'s (RFFSA⁽²⁾) debts and, as a result, the RFFSA ended up being privatized by 1996 and 1997.

This opening to private capital process divided the company into six separate railroads. One of them, Railroad X, located on the mid-eastern part of Brazil (Duarte, 1997), had to act according to the investors' interests and keep Brazilian society, especially its clients, satisfied. Therefore, the management of Railroad X's identity is necessary, in order to give credibility and legitimacy to this new organization.

Railroad X emerged amid major organizational changes, such as layoffs, changes in stock participation and changes in management style. The management of its new identity is crucial, in order to make it easier for employees to identify with the organization and its new managerial practices. Briefly, Railroad X should look for its legitimacy with its internal and external public. Hence, our main purpose is to present the study of the changes in Railroad X's identity from 1999 to 2005 regarding the discourses of two different organizational groups: upper management and the trade union.

This paper is divided into seven sections: introduction, theoretical reference concerning organizational identity, methods of gathering and analyzing data, result findings from the managerial point of view, results of the trade union's point of view, considerations and comparisons of both discourses and conclusions.

STUDIES CONCERNING IDENTITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

According to Nogueira and Machado-da-Silva (2003), organizational identity can be understood as the result of various perceptions of the differentiating, essential and lasting aspects of an organization, including its social **status** and relevant comparisons with other groups or organizations. In addition, there is a psychological relation between social and organizational identity: the connection with a positively identified organization may have a positive effect on the individual's social identity (Rodrigues & Child, 2005).

Most of the identity studies related to organizations present a relational point of view. The individual, within an organizational structure, builds his identity in relation to the organization and the other subjacent categories, such as working groups, units, departments, small groups with unique characteristics, etc. Therefore, each member of the organization, personally and symbolically, interacts with others, creating and recognizing identities (Pimentel, Carrieri, Leite-da-Silva, & Abate, 2005).

Wood and Caldas (1995) differentiated the paths that a study into **organizational identity** may follow. A first dimension of distinction is related to the focal object. We can distinguish organizational studies that focus on the individual identity from others that concentrate on wider issues (such as

groups' or organizations' identities). Having the organization as the focal object, Albert and Whetten (1985) were pioneers in asserting that organizations, like individuals, also can have an identity. This would be built based on shared beliefs about what is differentiating, essential and lasting in the organization. These three criteria would be enough to define organizational identity as a scientific concept.

Wood and Caldas's second dimension of distinction for the studies into organizational identity would be the differences in perspective. Identity may be conceived as an internally or externally defined attribute in relation to the analyzed object. The internal perspective focuses on identification issues in order to apprehend the organizational members' shared values and distinctive characteristics. The external perspective is related to the study of organizational image and reputation, attempting to understand the result of the different stakeholders' feelings and perceptions about the organization (Almeida, 2005).

Considering possible contradictions between the organizational identity conceived by different perspective and focal objects, Carrieri (2003) stated that we can talk about homogeneous and unique organizational identity characteristics, or grouped and fragmented ones. Studying both, it would be possible to improve comprehension of identity and culture within organizations.

In this sense, we could state that Railroad X is passing through a crucial moment concerning the comprehension of its identity because of its recent beginning. In order to comprehend the railroad's identity, our focal object in preparing this paper was the organization, and two different internal perspectives were considered: the managerial and the trade union's. Based on these concepts, we aimed to comprehend changes in the organizational identity of Railroad X from its beginning.

Organizational Identity Transformation

Numerous studies have defined what organizational identity is and why it matters. However, very little is known about the process by which organizational identity emerges and changes over time (Empson, 2004). Changes in organizational identity are always a result of a state of identity ambiguity – a shared sense that there are multiple possible interpretations of what the organization is. Corley and Gioia (2004) have identified three triggers of identity change that represent these potential discrepancies and cause members to change their organizational identity: a construed external image discrepancy, change in the salient social referent and temporal identity discrepancies.

Since organizational identities consist of language and meanings, there are two basic ways in which organizational identity change can occur: in the labels used to express identity or in the meanings underlying those labels (Corley & Gioia, 2004). Fiol (2002) has shown the importance of managing identity labels during radical change processes. The rhetorical way of expressing identity can play an important role in helping members disassociate from the old identity and identify instead with a new set of core beliefs.

Elstak and Riel (2005) have explored the link between organizational identity change and individual identification, in order to oppose Fiol's (2002) conclusions that a low degree of identification makes members receptive to identity change. Members who do not identify with the organization will not be motivated to change because they are indifferent toward the organization's continuity and social position. Therefore, during identity change processes, a member's strong identification toward the organization is a key element to building a new identity.

This paper aims to enrich studies about organizational identity change, taking into account the discrepancy between scholars in this field. We could state that Railroad X's identity has been through a change process because of a change in its social referent and also because of temporal identity discrepancies. In addition, the railroad has faced a meaningful label identity change. In order to better understand this change process and its impacts on organizational members, we have used the concept of projected organizational identity, as stated by Almeida (2005), which:

(...) includes the corporative identity, considered as the visual translation of what the organization is, but it also incorporates every managerial discourse, about what the organization is, which can be expressed by institutional bulletins, cd-rom, homepages, newsletters and internal magazines, lectures, intranet, press releases, advertisements, sales campaigns and several means and actions of communication adopted by the organization as a way of placing itself internally and externally (p. 46).

Based on this definition, we notice the great influence of the managerial ideological creation in the construction of the projected identity, through different communication mechanisms. However, for the purposes of this paper we considered that the projected organizational identity is also built based on what is said in everyday life and by the trade union's discourse. In this way, while the managerial discourse would generally try to project a considered adequate identity, other discourses would show an organizational identity built through daily practices.

METHODS

This research can be classified as exploratory. At the beginning, we did bibliographic research of the RFFSA and Railroad X. We then made case study of the identity changes in the railroad, presenting a unifying interpretation of the two different perspectives of the situation. The most important data for the study were collected in internal bulletins and newsletters, published by the enterprise and the trade union, the STEFBH (*Sindicato dos Trabalhadores em Empresas Ferroviárias de Belo Horizonte – Railroad Workers' Trade Union in Belo Horizonte*). This data were analyzed from 1999 to 2005 in order to understand the changes during this period. In addition, we also interviewed the person responsible for the internal communication of Railroad X, the trade union president and an RFFSA's engineer.

These three interviews were used in a complementary way to the discourses collected through bulletins and newsletters. The interviewees from Railroad X and the trade union were chosen because they were responsible for deciding what information should be released in their internal bulletins. In this sense, by recognizing what their ideological backgrounds are, we can better understand the intended purposes of each discourse published in the printed data. Finally, we interviewed the RFFSA's engineer in order to enrich our knowledge concerning this defunct company. The interviewee has been working for many years in the RFFSA and he is one of the few employees who still work for the company and is in charge of dealing with its final obligations. Therefore, his opinions are interesting as a third point of view of the privatization context.

Data Analysis Technique: Discourse Analysis

In order to perform a qualitative data analysis, we used the Discourse Analysis [DA]. Discourse becomes a key element to the comprehension of the projected organizational identity because it is an instrument of reality interpretation, which defines a certain organizational identity and tries to influence the individual's behavior. The DA is an important technique for extracting from discourse its ideological formation and the organizational identity related to it. In this paper, we basically used two DA elements: the use of persuasion strategies (Faria & Linhares, 1993) and the construction of discursive images (Pêcheux as cited in Gadet & Hak, 1990).

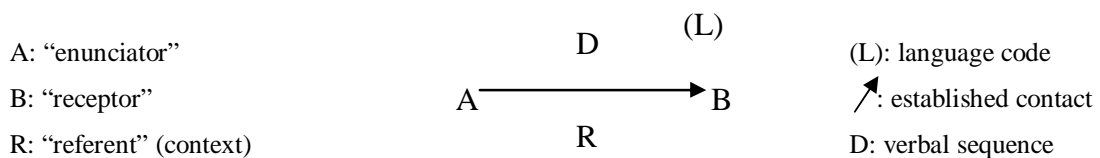
According to Faria and Linhares (1993), it is important to detect four persuasion strategies in a discourse. The creation of discursive characters can reveal the enunciator's ideological inclination because they are not created without purpose. Therefore, the enunciator may contradict or defend ideas through the use of a given character, transfer responsibilities to it or even omit its existence. Similarly, relations between explicit and implicit contents carry an ideological background. The implicit content enables the enunciator to pass to the reader certain ideas in a subtle and interactive way. These implicit

ideas can reveal the enunciator's ideological background (Faria & Linhares, 1993; Maingueneau, 2000).

The silence strategy about certain themes and characters is also a common way of persuading. The enunciator can omit possible meanings, which are undesired and incoherent with the sustained point of view. Through the analysis of what is omitted and what is exposed, we can understand better the discourse's ideology. Finally, the fourth strategy refers to lexical choice and it is also a revealing element. The argumentative intention of the enunciator is reflected in the words that he uses to express himself. In different situations, we can use strong or subtle, clear or technical vocabulary (Faria & Linhares, 1993).

The persuasion strategies can contribute to the definition of the discursive partners' profile. Discursive partners are the ones involved in a given discursive situation. In this study, particularly, the partners are the enterprise and the trade union, on one side, and the projected receptors of their discourses, on the other side. From the definition of Railroad X's profile, we could determine the identity characteristics of the organization through different points of view.

Based on Jakobson's informational diagram, Pêcheux (as cited in Gadet & Hak, 1990, pp. 79-87) emphasized the need to identify the main partners and the reference of a discourse because they are constitutive factors of any linguistic process, as shown in the figure below:



By the process described in the diagram, we can identify different structural elements of the discourse's production. To Pêcheux, A and B represent certain places, which are defined by the social structure. Sociology describes these places with several objective aspects. As an example of these places, we can cite a director or chief's situation in an enterprise and an employee's place in a factory. However, when we represent A and B in a discursive process, they become different and often do not preserve their objective characteristics. These formations of images can be represented and explained as in the table:

Table 1: Imaginary Formations about the Discursive Partners

Imaginary formations' expressions	Expression's meaning	Implicit question, whose "answer" supposes a correspondent imaginary formation
A { I _A (A) I _A (B)	Image of A's place, according to the subject in A's position	"Who am I to talk to you like that?"
	Image of B's place, according to the subject in A's position	"Who is he, for me to talk to him like that?"
B { I _B (B) I _B (A)	Image of B's place, according to the subject in B's position	"Who am I, for him to talk to me like that?"
	Image of A's place, according to the subject in B's position	"Who is he to talk to me like that?"

Source: adapted from Pêcheux (1990, pp. 82-83).

In addition to the partners' position in the discourse, it is important to emphasize that the referent (the context or situation in which the discourse appears) also influences the discourse production conditions (Pêcheux, 1990). In this sense, there are further expressions:

Table 2: Imaginary Formations of the "Referent"

Expressions designating imaginary formations	Expressions' meaning	Implicit questions, whose "answer" supposes a correspondent
A I _A (R)	A's "Point of View" regarding R	"What do I tell you like this?"
B I _B (R)	B's "Point of View" regarding R	"What does he tell me like this?"

Based on Pêcheux's theory, this paper could apprehend a concept that goes further on managerial discourse and also consider trade union discourse too. The analysis of how each partner sees the reference is interesting in order to find out each discourse's conception of reality.

THE RAILROAD X

Railroad X started in 1996, through a concession process of an RFFSA's East-Center railroad. The enterprise officially started to operate in 1 September of the same year. At that time, it presented a very heterogeneous stockholder configuration. There were eight, including national and international investors.

In September of 2003, Company Y⁽³⁾, one of the biggest Brazilian corporations, was authorized by the government to take charge of the stocks control of Railroad X. Thus it became part of Company Y's logistic department. Railroad X's business focus changed from the strict control of the railroad to the status of logistic operator, responsible not only for the railroad, but also for its links with other railroads and other means of transportation. Railroad X operates in seven Brazilian states covering important production centers.

Through a previous data analysis, we were able to divide the organizational identity of Railroad X into three main phases. The first one was the railroad prior to privatization, when it was controlled by the federal government. The second was the moment after privatization. The third, from 2002 onwards, was the managerial dominance by Company Y. This company had become the main Railroad X stockholder in 1999. However, it was only in 2002 that one could see greater interest on the part of Company Y in investing in the railroad and influencing its management practices. This influence became stronger after 2003, when Railroad X started to integrate Company's Y logistic structure.

The Identity of Railroad X from the Managerial Point of View

Interviews and newsletters from Railroad X were used to examine the managerial discourse. According to this discourse, at the moment before privatization, RFFSA was identified as a shambles enterprise in a condition of financial bankruptcy and not adapted to the new economic reality. The following excerpt well illustrates the characters' profile in the discourse:

“Employees were used to the enterprise's reality, a reality that escaped them at that time, because of what had begun, I mean, in Collor's government, although I don't think you can blame President Collor himself. But it stemmed from a new reality that was being established, with the strengthening of neoliberalism. From that time on, the world has changed (...). And the railroad workers were unfortunately conservative; they had some resistance (...). So, when they woke up the enterprise was already in a major crisis” (RFFSA's engineer-characters highlighted).

From the excerpt cited above, we notice the shift of responsibility from the character government to the character railroad workers. Implicitly, it is said that the government cannot be blamed, nor can President Fernando Collor, who was only following a neoliberalizing world trend. The railroad workers, on the other hand, were presented as one of the culprits because they could not adapt to the market's new characteristics. This is implicit mainly in the 4th sentence of the excerpt. In this process of responsibility transference, an ideological development from a dominant class is highlighted. According to this development, the employees are considered guilty.

“The owner of the RFFSA, the biggest railroad enterprise in Latin America, bigger than Petrobrás [the petroleum company], was the Brazilian people. It was paid for by the Brazilian people. (...) So I think the way it was done, in such a short period, left no time to thoughtfully prepare the denationalization in a less damaging way to the nation” (RFFSA engineer-characters highlighted).

Another discursive character to be highlighted is Brazilian society. In this excerpt, the enunciator manifests his sorrow for the loss caused in consequence of the railroad concessions sale. The Brazilian people appear explicitly as the great victim of the process, for they are said to have paid for the RFFSA patrimony. In addition, the interviewee shows explicit discontentment about the way the RFFSA privatization took place. It is interesting to highlight in the excerpt above that denationalization would have caused loss to the nation anyway, inferred by the **expression less damaging** in the last sentence.

In the enterprise's second phase, one of the main themes is the increase in railroad accidents:

“By dismissing an employee in charge of maintenance and hiring people with no experience, or rehiring the same employees with a different salary and in worse conditions, they have interfered with the maintenance of the permanent via and railroads. By doing so, they brought about a situation of serious accidents” (RFFSA's engineer, characters highlighted).

Some of the first actions of the railroad's private managers were dismissals and cost reductions. Thus, a consequence of these actions can be seen in managerial discourse: accidents increase. The interviewed manager also admits that the level of accidents in the enterprise had escalated. By analyzing the relationship between the characters highlighted above, we notice the transference of responsibility to Railroad X's new managers. Implicitly, the private managers' lack of social

sensitivity is denounced. The employee, on the other hand, is presented as a victim of managerial practices.

The manager of Railroad X mentions that the enterprise's initial phase was quite a difficult period. A phase when management was adjusting to the railroad sector conditions during the privatization period. She differentiates, thus, between an abandonment scenario, during the RFFSA period, and a changing one, initiated by Railroad X. However, before the changes took place, there had been hardships:

“The beginning was difficult because there was a history of abandonment. We took over the railroad in a declining period. The prices reported by the government did not actually exist. So, the beginning was a period of adjustment. (...) Railroad X had had capital loss so far” (Railroad X manager, characters highlighted).

The enterprise's initial phase is identified with the development of a new identity, trying to understand this new environment in which the organization would operate. Railroad X's management, here identified by the expression **we**, went through a number of difficulties and would be responsible for reversing this situation, restoring the railroad system from its decline; in addition, the enterprise **wasn't profitable**. The character, government, is implicitly getting all the blame for the poor railroad conditions, due to neglect and lack of balance with reality.

The difficulties faced are made explicit by the interviewee. Those difficulties would be due to the investor group's heterogeneity and lack of experience in railroad management:

“They were groups that did not have a lot of experience and knowledge of the railroad business. Even though Company Y was also present in some cases, as in Railroad X's case, the opinions were very divergent. The groups were very divergent” (RFFSA's engineer, characters highlighted).

It is interesting to observe in this excerpt that the character Company Y stands out from the other investors. It is identified as one that would be capable of managing the railroad in the most efficient way. However, the existing divergence between the groups would hinder Railroad X's progress. Concerning the lexical choice used in the discourse, we see the use of the term **railroad business**. We can affirm, from the implicit ideas in this expression, that the enunciator sees Railroad X's activity as exclusively directed to the market and the social function theme is set aside.

During Railroad X's third identity phase, we frequently observe the themes of investment, restructuring, accident prevention and productivity.

“(...) Railroad X's employees were invited to take part, body and soul, in a turnaround process. (...) Now, we need to focus on the results: the achievements of individual goals will turn into the enterprise's victories” (Railroad X's Newsletter, April 2005, characters highlighted).

We can observe the implicit theme of the employee's identification with the new Railroad X's management. The idea of cooperation between work and capital is also implicit. The unity theme can still be inferred from the use of the character **we**, which integrates all Railroad X's members.

Following the investors' idea and the railroad's restructuring, the themes of safety, accident decrease and productivity increase appear. These facts would be the result of a new management. The improvements observed in Railroad X would be part of a new identity for the enterprise, which would be the new Railroad X.

“The number of railroad occurrences dropped 15% in comparison with 2003. Good production results came together with the safety benefits” (Railroad X's Newsletter, April 2005).

“Building and consolidating the enterprise's image, being able to count on a well informed, integrated and motivated team, besides narrowing the relationship with the community and the media; these are prerequisites for the construction of the 'new Railroad X” (Railroad X's Newsletter, no. 12, August 2005, characters highlighted).

The two excerpts point to a change in the enterprise's identity. Formerly a loss-making enterprise, Railroad X is now highly productive and has few accidents; the enterprise's new attitude theme is explicit, the implicit one being the need for a communication policy between the railroad and other characters—the internal team and the community. According to the discourse, these characters are indispensable to the enterprise. This new attitude is considered as responsible for the renewal of Railroad X. Since 2004, one notices greater importance being attached to the communication function with the creation of a specialized department and many new information vehicles. The enterprise's internal communication is one of the items held responsible for the employee's identification with Railroad X as well as a vehicle for the dissemination of its new identity.

“Before, there was this put-out-the-fire attitude. We talked to the journalists who came around, but we invested little in getting good publicity for the enterprise” (Railroad X's Newsletter, no. 12, August 2005, characters highlighted).

“The intention is really to make up the employees' mind about the enterprise's projects. Therefore, to get the family involved too, (...) we send it (the newsletter) home to them. (...) If you look at the illustrations, there's always a black employee, because we have a lot of blacks working at the enterprise” (Railroad X's communication manager, characters highlighted).

In the excerpts above, the function of Railroad X's communication department is clear. The first excerpt makes an explicit comparison with the former reactive attitude of the enterprise's communication. The character we, who represents the people in charge of Railroad X's communication, would have modified its way of acting. It is implicit that the character journalists, representing the media, only sought the enterprise with the intention of reporting negative events. The communication department, therefore, would be in charge of publishing good news in order to maintain a positive image of the railroad. This action displays well the strategies employed by Railroad X's communication to captivate the employees and their families

As to the lexical choice for the discourses, there are two aspects worth highlighting: the selection of the expressions employees over railroad workers and railroad occurrences over accidents. The first preference could be an attempt to disassociate the railroad workers as a working class, and to integrate them to the enterprise as hired workers. The second aspect of lexical choice could be an euphemism, i.e., the term ‘accidents’ is avoided because of its highly negative connotation.

The theme of optimism about the future permeates the discourses, revealing an expectation of growth. The anniversary issue of Railroad X's Newsletter features a baby on its cover, which, according to the interviewee, could be a metaphor for the enterprise.

“On the cover of the August issue we featured a little baby who turned 1 in the same month the newsletter turned 1, with the intention of celebrating and drawing a parallel between the baby and the enterprise; since we're also developing, we'd stumble and fall too” (Railroad X's communication manager, character highlighted).

Finally, the main themes omitted by Railroad X's managerial discourse would be: all the enterprise's labor disputes, including those that existed prior to it being controlled by Company Y; the lack of salary equity between Company Y's railroad workers; and the great deactivation of the railroad network after privatization. The reason for the omission of these themes is obvious as they do not contribute towards the development of a positive identity for the new Railroad X.

Railroad X's Identity from the Trade Union's Point of View

In order to capture the trade union's discourse, two sources were used: the trade union's newsletter – Railroad Workers' Informative Newsletter – and an interview with the trade union's president. It is interesting to observe that, since the beginning, the trade union discourse explicitly opposed the privatization of the RFFSA, as can be seen in the excerpt below:

“The STEFBH supports the struggle against the privatization of the RFFSA and have been moving in this direction since late 1991 (...), emphasizing that the RFFSA’s dismantlement surely means retrogression and surrender to private capital, treason to Brazilian society. The bulletins also approach the strategies of worldwide neoliberalism, the big sponsor of the waves of privatization and outsourcing” (Railroad Workers’ Informative Newsletter, no. 18, March 1994, characters highlighted).

The trade union appears in the discourse as a protector, as responsible for the railroad workers’ increase of consciousness and mobilization. Furthermore, it claims that the RFFSA would have been abandoned and that its denationalization would be a loss for Brazilians, the victims in this discourse. The private capital’s interests become responsible for the privatization and for the growing precariousness of work conditions. Despite the problems experienced by the railroad, problems caused by the government as well as by public managers, one sees some identification on the part of the trade union with the **Network** (Rede) and with the railroad sector. Moreover, comparing private and public managements, the trade union’s president reaches the following conclusion:

“The railroad formerly had a meaning in the ‘Rede’ and now this meaning has changed (...). In the ‘Rede’s’ times, it had a very big social meaning because the railroads contributed to Brazil’s development. There are cities that sprang up around the railroad” (STEFBH’s president, characters highlighted).

During the construction of Railroad X’s organizational identity, one can see negative and neutral themes associated with the enterprise. It is interesting to observe that in spite of the trade union’s accusation of aspects it considered unfair in Railroad X’s management, it sporadically uses the ‘collaboration’ theme between the workers and the enterprise. Thus, the denial of the conflict between capital versus work is implicit: the trade union’s radicalism is seen as inappropriate. The protection offered to the workers exclusively by the trade union is also implicit.

“A partnership relation with the enterprises is made necessary. This is what the STEFBH is seeking. (...) At present, however, pure and simple intransigence is not acceptable, but the clarity of decisions in favor of the workers and the enterprise’s development (i.e., productivity) is. This will certainly revert to the worker as real gains. Moreover, balance is fundamental, since the enterprise aims at profit and the trade union represents the worker (...)” (Railroad Workers’ Informative Newsletter, no. 53, October 1998, characters highlighted).

In this excerpt, a minor hostility concerning the enterprise’s character can be detected, the enterprise that is also treated as a potential partner. The aim is, then, to balance enterprise and trade union interests. Implicitly, such interests can be conciliated. Moreover, when dealing with talks and the representation of the worker with the enterprise, the character trade union is given the most importance being an advocate for labor’s interests.

The trade union’s president recognizes that it is easier to deal with Railroad X than with the RFFSA; this is interesting, since the union’s struggle was against the RFFSA’s privatization. The preference for negotiating with the private enterprise would be due to greater facility in balancing interests.

One may conclude from the discourse that the workers are sometimes successful in agreements established with the enterprise. Thus, it remains implicit that interfacing with a private enterprise makes the balance between the trade union’s and Railroad X’s interests more accessible:

“I think it is easier than it was with RFFSA because it was a very large enterprise and depended on the authorization of agencies that controlled it. Therefore, the negotiations with the RFFSA were slower (...). With private companies, the answers are immediate” (STEFBH’s president, characters highlighted).

On the other hand, the negative themes related to Railroad X also appear in the trade union’s discourse. The claim for better working conditions, especially for the train operators, is observed. Railroad X would have threatened to cut benefits from employees and would not be able to accomplish the goals established by the denationalization edict.

“(…) the current trade union’s presidency is open and is now negotiating the Collective Agreement with Railroad X Corporation. The enterprise threatened to cut benefits among which four are fundamental and

indispensable: meal vouchers, profit sharing, overtime and company-controlled ‘flexitime’ (Banco de Horas)” (Railroad Workers’ Informative Newsletter, no. 53, October 1998, characters highlighted).

“Railroad X (...) transported only 82% of the loads that it should have carried in the first year of concession. In 1998, it achieved 91,3% of the established goals” (Railroad Workers’ Informative Newsletter, no. 54, April 1999, characters highlighted).

In the first highlighted excerpt, Railroad X is linked to negative themes: the cut in basic benefits. The trade union’s president emerges as being responsible for the protection of the railroad workers’ (implicit character) rights. Implicitly, Railroad X would not have a social commitment to its employees, as it would break labor laws. Hence, the trade union was to carry out a control function. In the last excerpt, the enterprise appears as ineffective, for it would not have been able to accomplish the goals established by the government (implicit character).

Finally, the trade union’s leader raises yet another relevant theme for the identity formation of Railroad X: the deactivation of railroads. The concessionaire companies would be responsible for this, and the consequence is the deprecation of the railroad patrimony.

“Many things were deactivated. 90% of the stations, in ‘96, in the case of Railroad X and in the case of Railroad Z (fictitious name) (...) 90% of the railroad stations were closed and today they are abandoned in the whole national territory” (STEFBH’s president, characters highlighted).

However, it is interesting to note the omission of some themes from the trade union’s discourse. It does not deal with railroad accidents or internal matters of the enterprise, concerning the new management’s adaptation and the conflicts among stockholder groups. Perhaps these themes were not considered relevant.

In the third identity phase of Railroad X, it is noticeable that the trade union’s discourse did not change. Nevertheless, a new theme arises: the claim for salary equity among employees of Railroad X and other Company Y railroads. This theme first arose during the Collective Agreement period in 2000, the first year after the Company Y took over, remaining in the trade union’s newsletters pages until 2005:

“Our main struggle is to seek salary EQUITY and benefits for Railroad X’s workers together with Company Y’s fellows (...). We must get mobilized to eliminate this unfair discrimination against Railroad X’s workers, a railroad that belongs to the Company Y Holding” (Railroad Workers’ Informative Newsletter, August 2005, characters highlighted).

Thus, it is interesting to note that the character Company Y had still not answered the STEFBH’s request, even after five years of claims. The discursive character Railroad X’s workers would be the victim of the discourse, since it would have been discriminated against and would have the right to receive the same salaries and benefits as the railroad workers from Company Y. Furthermore, it is inferred that the trade union could only demand salary equity after Company Y had major participation in Railroad X’s shares.

Another interesting theme that is relevant in this Railroad X identity phase is the condemnation of the concessionaires’ shares control by only one management group.

“Some management groups have taken over the Brazilian railroad system. This system, which could integrate the whole country by means of passenger transportation and the possibility of small and medium production conveyance, has become the private property of some groups strongly armed with a powerful influence over governments (...).” (Railroad Workers’ Informative Newsletter, July 2005, characters highlighted).

In the excerpt above, the trade union’s discourse attacks the railroad concession stocks being controlled by only one enterprise or enterprise group. A trust would be formed that would have negative consequences for clients, an implicit character in the discourse theme of price definition. There would also be negative consequences for small and medium producers, inferred characters in the theme of small and medium production transportation, and for passengers, an explicit character. It is

interesting to highlight that in this theme the discourse enunciator avoids making explicit the management group controllers and the controlled railroads, counting on the reader's knowledge to fill in these blanks.

The themes of the trade union's struggle against the enterprise and of criticism towards concessionaires persist in the trade union's discourse, conveying the idea that Company Y's control did not modify labor relations at Railroad X.

"Yet, the enterprise has been interfering in the understanding between parties and, as they have not paid the PRV (Variable Remuneration Plan) scheduled for July 2003 and have not met other demands, the railroad workers decided to go on strike" (Railroad Workers' Informative Newsletter, no. 57, June 2000, characters highlighted).

"(...) furthermore, the concessionaires also neglected to prepare to transport an increased grain harvest, postponing essential construction work and investments on the road. Accidents were not reduced as much as intended and users frequently complain about the trains not being punctual" (Railroad Workers' Informative Newsletter, July 2005, characters highlighted).

From these two excerpts, Railroad X's disregard for its employees is explicit, and the organizational misconduct is implicit. The organization takes part in the discourse through the explicit character concessionaires. Railroad workers and railroad users would be the main **victims**, since their needs would not have been met by the enterprise. In addition, it is implicit that the concessionaires, who took over the railroad network, were not being efficient enough, i.e., the railroad sector had not improved with the process.

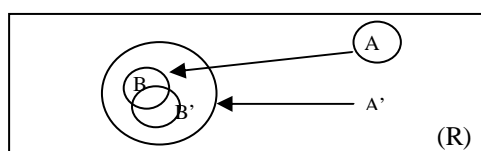
Unlike what is observed in managerial discourse, regarding lexical choice, one notices the constant use of the term railroad worker in the trade union's discourse. Such a strategy might contribute towards strengthening the idea of a united workforce: the worker should not identify with the enterprise, but with the workforce and the railroad.

Concerning the themes omitted from the trade union's discourses, we noticed that nothing was said about Company Y's investments in the railroads, the new enterprise managing projects or the new relationship policy with customers, employees and the community through the new communication department. Such themes would be omitted due to the positive connotation they could convey to the concessionaires.

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE "IMAGE GAME": RAILROAD X–TRADE UNION

As previously exposed, it is interesting to understand the imaginary formation in discourses to increase the knowledge of how the enterprise views itself and how its external and internal public sees it. The discursive partners that are going to take part in this analysis will be: Railroad X, the trade union, the railroad workers and their families. The discourse of the trade union (A) basically projects the employees (B) as readers. The discourse of Railroad X (A'), on the other hand, has the employees and their families (B') as its main addressees. It is still important to point out that the discourse referent (R–context) is the same, bearing in mind when and where they were mentioned. Figure 1 illustrates these discursive processes:

Figure 1: Discursive Processes of the Trade Union (A) and of the High Administration (A')



The self-image presented by Railroad X (IA'(A')) throughout would be the image of an enterprise that underwent difficult times at the beginning, although it has recently managed to grow and to improve its efficiency. This becomes clear through the comparison between the initial themes (the scrapping of the RFFSA, the mass dismissals, the railroad accidents) and the final themes (the railroad investments, increased productivity and the prospects for growth). Thus, what would prevail now is the creation of a promising and optimistic Railroad X image.

The point of view of Railroad X's management concerning the discursive context (I A'(R)) is quite important for understanding its ideological background. When it comes to the main referent characteristic, privatization, the discourse is favorable. As for other smaller themes, such as the increase in working hours, the disappearance of job positions and the lack of salary equity, the managerial discourse makes no mention of them, as it would prefer not to select them to compose its discourse, for they are negative to its image.

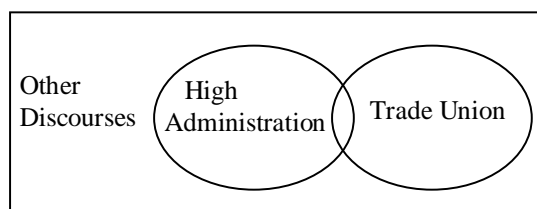
The trade union's image of the referent (IA(R)) also reveals a Railroad X identity. As highlighted above, there is an **anti-privatization** ideology: the union condemned the process before it occurred and still returns to the theme in order to criticize the concessionaires' performance. As for some smaller themes, the trade union's discourse becomes less radical, for example, when it defends the maintenance of a good relationship with the enterprise. However, considering Railroad X's activities as the main referent for the trade union's discourse, one can affirm that the union is against most of the actions of the enterprise, showing dissatisfaction in relation to the railroad management. Therefore, in the trade union discourse, in general, Railroad X has a negative image.

We can agree with Elstak and Riel (2005) that the lack of the trade union's identification with the **new** Railroad X makes the identity change process more complex and difficult. The railroad workers, who are the receptors of both discourses (high administration and trade union), receive two different discursive images (and identities) of Railroad X. This ambiguous state may be an obstacle to the construction of a consistent organizational identity.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In brief, we can state that Railroad X's identity, besides having undergone changes, has a multi-faceted character. It is possible to identify various themes that permeate the discourses in a differentiated manner, and other themes exclusive to only one of them. Thus, the projected Railroad X's identity can be illustrated in the following way:

Figure 2: The Projected Organizational Identity of Railroad X



The above diagram illustrates the projected organizational identity of Railroad X. It would be made up of a nucleus of themes common to both analyzed discourses; themes that would include the organization's main characteristics, such as: the operation area, the history of its privatization and its marked-by-accidents negative beginning. There are also themes that are exclusive to each discourse, such as salary equity, in the trade union's discourse, and the new Railroad X, in the managerial

discourse. Furthermore, the railroad's projected identity would still be constructed by other themes, conveyed by other discourses not analyzed here.

This multi-faceted identity may have a differentiated influence on the various recipients of these discourses, based on their social groups and their ideological backgrounds. This happens in view of the interactive character of the discursive process, in other words, the interlocutor plays an important role in the interpretation of what is explicitly and implicitly announced.

Eventually, we question the possibility of conceiving only one organizational identity. The strong link between ideological background and various internal and external organization groups' discourses was highlighted. These groups are held responsible for the projection, recognition and construction of the railroad identity. Consequently, it is very difficult to talk about only one enterprise identity, since the ideologies are different and peculiar to each social group.

In an attempt to visualize a single railroad's organizational identity, we can point to the themes at the intersection of all discourses represented in Figure 2. Thus, the railroad identity would only be made up of the most obvious and indisputable traits. Another way to look at the projected railroad's organizational identity would be to admit that it has, at least, a double identity, in view of the divergences made evident by the management and the trade union's discourse analyses. Each of these discourses would project a certain enterprise's identity to the interlocutors, who could accept or reject them according to an ideological background.

Finally, a third way of visualization proposed herein would be a dialectical view of the railroad identity. Both analyzed discourses are contradictory and present a certain different view of the reality. From this denial process, a railroad identity could arise as a synthesis of discourses, taking them as two sides of the same coin. The railroad identity would actually incorporate both discourses and would be something beyond them at the same time.

No matter how the railroad's organizational identity can be visualized, an identity projected by an infinite range of discourses, it is necessary to understand the complexity of this identity formation process. Thus, identity recognition can contribute to a better orientation of the organizational strategy, to a better understanding of employees and trade union behavior, and, finally, to an apprehension of the organization's role in its social context.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have studied Railroad X's history from 1999 to 2005 in order to comprehend its organizational identity. The railroad has gone through an important change process because of the RFFSA's privatization. We aimed to study the projection of the organizational identity while this change took place. Consequently, we considered two main intraorganizational discourses in our analysis, the managerial and that of the trade union. We assumed that both voices played a crucial role to the construction of Railroad X's identity because they came from two important groups within the organization. These groups were seen as having different ideological backgrounds. While the managerial discourse seemed to build an increasingly positive image, the trade union kept its opposed view about most of the common discursive themes. These results raised a discussion about the existence or not of a unified organizational identity.

This multifaceted organizational identity could be understood as an identity ambiguity state. However, we cannot assume that this is a temporal state, which would be solved when the change process is over. This paper's results show that organizational identity is a constantly dynamic and ambiguous process. Organizations are always changing, and so are their identities.

We can state that this paper's methodological contribution is the use of Discourse Analysis as a method of studying the projection of organizational identity. The four persuasion strategies were useful in detecting the enunciator's ideology behind the text. The identification of each strategy drove the analysis of the discourse intention in a systematic way. Therefore, the analysis process became clearer and more complete. In addition, the use of the discursive images concept helped to complete the analysis.

As for the paper's limitations, we could cite that we only studied the projected organizational identity, basically through bulletins and newsletters. The study of Railroad X's identity would be more complete if other resources were added, such as interviews with employees from different hierarchical positions; discourses from the community; media voices and even the opinions of stockholders. With all this information, this study could achieve a more conclusive result.

NOTES

¹ Railroad X is a fictitious name in order to conceal the company's identity.

² RFFSA was the name of the now defunct Brazilian federal railroad.

³ Company Y is also a fictitious name in order to conceal the company's identity.

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