

The Peer to Boss Transition:

A Dialectic Perspective

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Abstract

Subjects relating to job transitions have been well-studied. The experience of becoming a boss over a former peer group has not. To explore this issue, 12 recently promoted health care workers were interviewed about their experiences of the transition. The findings were interpreted in light of dialectic theory which states that social phenomena are experienced in terms of contradictions and tensions. The results and analysis demonstrate that participants experienced tensions related to interpersonal, intrapersonal, and organizational issues. Lack of training prior to the promotion was widely identified as the main contributory factor. Differences in how dialectic tensions were experienced, and the strategies used to negotiate them, emerged between full and part-time new managers. In general, the strategies used help the participants reduce the experienced tensions over time.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	pg. 5-8
Chapter 1: Literature Review	pg. 9-38
Dialectics.....	pg. 10-20
Contradiction.....	pg. 12-15
Change.....	pg. 15-17
Praxis.....	pg. 17-18
Totality.....	pg. 18-20
Dialectic Applications.....	pg. 20-30
Contextual.....	pg. 21-23
Interactive.....	pg. 23-24
Relational.....	pg. 24-30
Literature Review Discussion.....	pg. 30-37
Summary.....	pg. 37-38
Research Questions.....	pg. 38
Chapter 2: Methods:	pg. 39-48
Participants.....	pg. 42-44
Procedure.....	pg. 44-46
Data Analysis.....	pg. 46-47
Summary.....	pg. 47-48
Chapter 3: Results:.....	pg. 49-83
Research question one.....	pg. 51-70
Organizational domain.....	pg. 51-56
Interpersonal domain.....	pg. 56-64
Intrapersonal domain.....	pg. 64-70
Research question two.....	pg. 70-78
Research question three.....	pg. 78-82
Summary.....	pg. 82-83
Chapter 4: Analysis.....	pg. 84-111
Research question one.....	pg. 89-99
Dialectics of leadership.....	pg. 92-94
In or out.....	pg. 94-97
Status differences.....	pg. 97-98
Intrapersonal tensions.....	pg. 98-98
Ambiguity.....	pg. 99-100
Research question two.....	pg. 100-105
Research question three.....	pg. 105-107
Summary.....	pg. 107-111
Chapter 5: Conclusion:.....	pg. 111-118
Applied value.....	pg. 113-117
Limitations and future possibilities.....	pg. 117-120
Summary.....	pg. 120
Appendix:.....	pg. 122-123
References:.....	pg. 124-128

Dialectical Considerations in the Peer to Boss Transition

Thesis Introduction

Any one who has spent some time in the work force has probably taken part in, or overheard, a similar conversation. Workers seem always to have an opinion on how their particular department is running, how the boss is managing the department, and how they themselves would do things “if I were boss”. While not everyone gets to test themselves on this assertion, some do get the opportunity. They may not seek it out, but given the chance for promotion, they take it. Individual skills, such as technical competence, may be enough to put them in the running for promotion. Having prior, formal managerial training may or may not be a requisite for promotion.

Perhaps it seems that those individuals who are promoted from within the organization have less need for formal training in the leadership arena. After all, they know the organizational culture; they know the business; they have a history with other workers; they are familiar with organizational policies; they have proven themselves capable through their individual efforts. All indicators point to a smooth transition.

Yet there are factors that may be overlooked. The person promoted from within has to negotiate the complexities of new responsibilities and roles while negotiating new types of interactions in the same organization. Co-workers are different. The policies and procedures that one deals with as a supervisor are different, or enforced differently, than they were as a staff member. Technical capabilities may be insufficient to coach an underperformer. Thus, while the context may be familiar, at the same time it is unknown.

The juxtaposition of that contrast is perhaps most apparent when the promotion involves managing former co-workers. These newly promoted individuals have

established relationships with former peers. In some cases they are not just co-workers but friends. Their connection may extend well beyond the work environment. Yet by virtue of their promotion, the situation with former cohorts has changed dramatically in some respects; in other respects it remains the same. Familiar interactions are colored with the overlay of the new hierarchy. One may have to give an unfavorable performance review to a friend. New social rules apply to familiar relationships. After work socialization with former co-workers may be curtailed. At the same time, new relationships are forged with members of the organization's administration. Yet it may take time and significant effort by the new boss to firmly establish him or herself within the ranks of the leadership team. All of this occurs while adapting to new responsibilities. Even as a promotion over a new work group may be fraught with difficulties, promotion over the existing work group may be complicated further.

This study confirms that assessment. The findings demonstrate that managers promoted from within to supervise the same work group do go through a tumultuous transition phase. While some of the difficulties might be inherent with the stressors associated with any promotion, this study identifies considerations unique to this work group. In part the difficulties identified are related to organizational issues, but they are tied to relational issues and intrapersonal challenges as well.

Further, this study confirms the value of using dialectic analysis to explore this particular transition. The change from being a peer one day to being the boss the next day is replete with examples of contradictory situations and competing interests. The theoretical background of dialectics, which resides in notions of contradiction and

change, provides a clear lens through which the complex nature of becoming a boss over former coworkers can be understood.

Yet the value of this examination does not reside solely with putting a theoretical framework around the work transition at hand. The underlying goal relates to the practical value of learning more about the intricacies of becoming a manager. Both organizations and employees can benefit from the information gleaned herein.

Organizations have a vested interest in working to ensure the success of their new managers. Effective leadership positively impacts the work team, the department, and the organization. An employee considering such a promotion needs to know success is not guaranteed by previous accomplishments. Nor is success guaranteed because they know their co-workers. Indeed, the path of becoming a boss over yesterday's peers has unique pitfalls and challenges. Being aware of the pitfalls may help to guide one's footsteps around them.

Thus, this study addresses the primary goal articulated earlier. A secondary goal relates to future exploration of this topic. Knowing the transition from peer to manager is complex, this study provides a starting point for further exploration of this particular work transition.

As this thesis moves toward that goal, the chapters are arranged as follows. Chapter 1 begins by laying out the central tenets of dialectic theory. The four core principles of dialectic theory are explained to give readers a common understanding of how a theory that is well known for its economic application can be applied to the social sciences. This is followed by a review of dialectical applications to specific relational and organizational contexts. It is here that dialectics moves beyond theory into the realm of

the practical and applied. Its utility in understanding the peer to boss transition will be established.

Chapter 2 establishes the justification for the choice of research methods. The chapter opens with general comments regarding the applicability of dialectics to the present study. This is followed with the rationale for selection of qualitative research methods and a specific description of the semi-structured interview process.

Demographic details of the participants are included here as is a description of data collection methods.

Chapter 3 tells the stories of the participants. General observations about the participants as a group are followed with specific examples from their narratives. Experiences are revealed through the liberal use of direct quotes to paint an overall picture for the reader.

In chapter 4, the results are analyzed for major themes and sub-themes. The chapter begins with an examination of how the themes model the four dialectic centralities. Following that, specific dialectic applications to the experiences of the participants are presented.

Chapter 5 ties the basic outcomes of the study with practical suggestions to increase organizational support for training and assimilating new managers, especially those promoted to managing former cohorts. The chapter also includes comments related to the limitations of this study. Suggestions for future research are offered as well.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

A computer search on the topic of work transitions yields many references. Researchers have examined the processes of socialization and adaptation of an employee new to a department or organization. The sheer number of references suggests this is a topic of both practical and academic interest. Authors recognize the problems related to work transitions. For example, Ashford and Taylor (1990) suggest that the adaptation process for individuals who have undergone work transitions is often beset by pitfalls in spite of their own best efforts.

A job promotion is one particular work transition that may have even more potential pitfalls. Hill (2007) argues that most new managers do not succeed in their new positions. In spite of prior technical achievements or significant individual contributions, new managers struggle to adjust to their new positions. If new managers in general have difficulty on their journey, one particular group of new managers faces unique circumstances.

Some research suggests that individuals promoted from within an organization undergo different adaptation processes than an individual hired externally (Kramer & Noland, 1999). Other authors note the transition to management within the same department or work group is frustrating and perplexing (Gove, 2004). Lowe and Bolton (2002) acknowledge the particular challenges fire-fighters face when they are promoted to manage former peers. Among the changes is the reality of no longer being part of the gang. According to the authors, a new supervisor simply cannot afford to be part of the gang. It is critical for new managers to be friendly without being a friend; to be professional without being overly personal.

It seems then that the promotion of an individual from working within a work group to managing that same work group would have received significant attention. From the point of view of a communication scholar, this work transition could provide a wealth of research opportunity. From both a relational and organizational perspective, researchers could add to the body of knowledge regarding several pertinent areas. Scholars have written about the importance of leadership styles, the supervisor-subordinate relationship, and the different types of communication styles that affect employee satisfaction and organizational commitment. Yet Wood and Duck (1995) acknowledge the peer to boss phenomenon is largely understudied.

The purpose of this study is to address that gap. In particular, this study seeks to provide an observer with a look through a dialectic lens into the world of managing former cohorts. As later paragraphs will show, dialectics is essentially about contradiction, tension, and change. Because of the inherent contradictions within the peer to boss transition, dialectics is well suited as a basis for this study.

To that end, the literature review begins with a discussion of dialectic principles, a necessary backdrop from which to move on to a presentation of relational dialectics in a variety of settings. Therefore this chapter includes studies from interpersonal and organizational communication scholarship. A variety of relationships and contexts are included as they provide an understanding for the dialectic framework in this study. The chapter continues with an examination of the similarities and differences among the findings of the cited works. It concludes with a presentation of three research questions.

Dialectics

Dialectics, at its core, is essentially about contradiction. Whether one is speaking of the dueling pressures of production and consumption in an economic application of dialectics, or of the competing pressures within a relationship, similarities exist when applying dialectic principles. Though the application of dialectics to relationships or social interaction is more recent than its application to economic systems, the validity of this application lies in the experiences of the people who make up those systems.

Johnson and Long (2002) note that contemporary communication scholars use dialectics to examine “practical relational exigencies that are present and pressing in all human communication” (p.26). The examination of those relational considerations lies in understanding four basic concepts of dialectics. As described by Dindia (1994) those are:

1. Oppositional forces form the basis of all social phenomena including social relationships.
2. Change is constant in such phenomena.
3. Social relationships are defined by relations among their characteristics.
4. Dialectical tensions are never eliminated, but they may be transformed, adapted to, and managed. (p.43)

Although there may be individual differences in the description or application of dialectic principles, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) note there are basic similarities between authors which reflect the underlying assumptions of dialectics. While using different verbiage than Dindia (1996), Baxter and Montgomery (1996) concur that the centralities of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality are apparent throughout dialectic

scholarship. These are part and parcel of relationships, and of the social systems within which they are embedded. With that background, the following paragraphs will examine each of those concepts in turn.

Contradiction

It is important to note at the outset of this discussion that the term “contradiction” does not imply confrontation. Nor should the term “oppositional forces” be interpreted as a sort of constant warring within the relationship. Used interchangeably with the term “dialectical tensions” or simply “tensions”, contradictions within interactions and society are necessary components for the very existence of the relationship. As such, contradiction is not seen as undesirable or negative. It simply is. This is one way in which dialectical theory can be differentiated from role theory. According to Ellis and Fisher (1994), role theory understands contradiction of roles to be negative.

That is not to say that the contradictions experienced within a relationship do not cause conflict. They may or may not, depending on the perceptions of the individuals. Werner and Baxter (1994) point out that dialectical tension does not necessarily result in interpersonal conflict although they imply that partners may indeed experience conflict. Individuals experience the inherent relational tension differently, thus creating the potential for conflict. Werner and Baxter (1994) also suggest that dialectical tension may result in intrapersonal conflict as an individual tries to manage competing demands. This is in contrast to Baxter and Montgomery (1996) who state that dialectical contradiction is placed firmly within the interpersonal relationship.

Whether contradictions are situated within the relationship only, or can be experienced by only one partner, is perhaps not as important as is their usefulness to

scholars. As it is, contradictions form the very basis for dialectical analysis (Werner & Baxter (1994). Rawlins (1989) agrees with that position. Contrasts are central to the perceptions and the structuring of our understanding of a relationship and the social systems with which it interfaces.

The discussion above does not mean to suggest that the experienced contradictions are necessarily separate and discrete elements. Rather than being two distinct poles, contradictions may be seen as multi-faceted. A multi-faceted approach to dialectical opposition suggests that predictability and novelty are opposites, but predictability and mystery, and predictability and uncertainty, are also opposites which evoke differing connotations than the predictability-novelty dialectic (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Werner and Baxter (1994) concur by pointing out that the very words used in describing an opposition may carry different nuances of meaning depending on its particular context. For example openness may mean complete and honest disclosure to individuals involved in an intimate relationship; it may mean sharing of inside information in a peer/boss relationship.

Another component of dialectic contradictions is the relationship of the opposite poles. Meaning of one opposite is only salient in context and comparison of the other (Poole & Van de Ven , 2004; Rawlins, 1989). Predictability only gains importance in the context of its opposition, be it novelty or uncertainty. It is the interaction of the two poles that causes tension for the partners. (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For purposes of the study at hand, connection with subordinates is necessary in the construction of one's management role. Yet separation from them is also a presupposition in terms of differing behavioral requirements, or the withholding of certain information. The interaction

between the opposite poles of separation and connection results in a dialectic tension which may be experienced differently by both parties. The communicative choices of each person in response to their experience of that tension are constitutive of the relationship they have (Johnson & Long, 2004).

Similarly, a person may experience and respond to contradictory forces differently when in a group versus an individual setting (Poole & Van de Ven, 2004). For example, a newly promoted boss may feel less connected with the group as a whole than with any one individual. A typical staff meeting may serve to illustrate this point. Rather than sitting with the gang, a newly promoted boss may be front and center as they lead the meeting, thus potentially reinforcing a sense of isolation from the group.

One might expect the situation above to lose its potency in terms of the experience of separation with the passage of time. This in fact points to what Rawlins (1989, 1992) describes as the temporal nature of dialectic contradictions. He avers the intensity, or the dominance, of any dialectic changes as the relationship proceeds in time. An individual relationship might experience different gradations of a particular contradiction depending on the particular life-stage of the participants or the length of the relationship itself. A new boss who had long-standing relationships with former peers may experience a greater tension between being connected to the former peers, and now being apart from them (as part of management), than a new boss who had worked with the peers for a shorter period of time.

On a similar note Rawlins (1989) describes how individuals or partners may emphasize one aspect of a dialectic contradiction over the other. In relation to the study at hand, a new boss may initially act primarily to stay connected to the former peer group.

He also describes how a relationship may be primarily influenced by a certain dialectic contradiction at a given point in relationship history. Efforts by the boss to stay connected to the former work group may supersede efforts related to other dialectic contradictions in the early stages of the transition. As that same boss gains more experience (and new peer relationships) he or she may behave in ways that serve to enforce separation from the former peers.

The above discussion does not seek to imply that partners in a relationship have a sort of dialectic consciousness. Nor does it mean to suggest that individuals would even articulate their experiences in terms of contradictions. Yet individuals are driven to act in response to their own experiences. As such, the contradictions they experience, either consciously or unconsciously, may become the impetus for action and change.

Change

A second major underlying assumption of dialectics is change. Change occurs as a result of the tension between the competing pulls of contradictory forces (Rawlins, 1989; Baxter & Simon, 1993). If contradictions and tensions are inherently present in a relationship, a reader may infer that relationships are never stable. Montgomery (1993) says as much when she notes that relationships are in a state of perpetual flux. As such, relational goals should not be viewed in terms of maintenance or only sufficient change to keep the relationship interesting. The goal is to effectively navigate through the contradictions and resultant tensions that any relationship undergoes.

How this change occurs, or the process of change, is identified differently by different authors. Early work by Bridge and Baxter (1992) implies change that is goal oriented and predictable. While examining the relationships of friends who were also

work associates, they noted that “domination is the central feature of dialectical struggle” (p.28). This may imply that one pole of a contradiction wins out over the other. The struggle and the eventual domination may result in a resolution of the tension and a change in the relationship. However, according to Poole and Van de Ven (2004), dialectic change is not necessarily goal driven or the result of a conscious decision. The path of tension mitigation and the outcome of the process are neither predictable nor specifically anticipated. As the relationship evolves, the partners deal with competing contradictory demands differently. Thus any “domination” is temporary at best.

Baxter and Montgomery (1997) suggest dialectical change may be conceptualized more like a spiral in which behaviors are never precisely recreated because new experiences continually intervene on the relationship. Dialectic tension is not resolved by domination of one pole so much as it is transformed and transcended. Goldsmith (1990) offers an example. She found that acceptable behaviors are defined differently as relationships change. In the peer to boss situation, some behaviors by the new boss may initially be unwelcome. Enforcing policies and procedures may be interpreted negatively by the former peers as a sign of the new boss simply exerting newfound power. Later, the same behavior may become accepted, and even desirable, as an indicator of impartiality.

Some authors apply dialectic principles to the understanding of organizational change or systems. Van de Ven and Hargave (2004) identify a link between dialectics and organizational change. In their description of institutional change, change occurs as actors seek to resolve conflict. As the negotiation of tension occurs, resultant change

occurs in both the responsibilities and the rights of the participants, thus creating new work processes or standards.

Another author who applies dialectics to organizational concepts is Collinson (2004). He examined leadership qualities from the perspective of dialectics. He specifically discusses the dialectics of control / resistance, dissent / consent, and the gendered dialectic of men / women. Each of these dialectical tensions may effect change in an organization from the position of either the leader or the “led”. While Collinson (2004) acknowledges the power differential implied by the very concept of leadership, the author concludes that both groups not only participate in, but also lead change from their own positions. Even those people in relatively less powerful positions propel change by their dissent or resistance to people in more powerful positions. Examining how both groups react to and manage the above contradictions would result in a deeper understanding of the leadership role. In the present study, new bosses may be confronted with resistance or dissent from their former peers. How they negotiate dissent or resistance while trying to gain consent and control will both construct and be constitutive of their relationships with their direct reports.

Praxis

Praxis is the third underlying assumption of a dialectical perspective. Praxis is the phenomenon that individuals are “both actors and objects of their own actions” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 14). Individuals make communicative choices within a given context, which then influences future contexts and interactions. In other words, individuals in a relationship have a history of individual communicative choices. These choices inform their present choice of communicative actions, which in turn informs and

constrains future interactions. Actions and reactions, the particular communicative choices an individual and a partner make within a specific social context, give shape to the relationship itself (Baxter & Montgomery, 1997). In the context of the peer becoming a manager of former coworkers, a communicative history as peers may be insufficient to guide the participants in their new relationship as supervisor-subordinate.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) take the idea of praxis one step further. They suggest that individuals are not solely impacted by their own actions or relationships. Rather, individuals are actors within a culture that incorporates past actions of its members. It does not matter whether or not those members are still part of the culture. These historical, cultural choices continue to frame present communicative choices. Within the context of a job promotion, both the new boss and the former peers may be constrained by the choices and actions of previous bosses. For instance, a previous boss who employed an authoritarian leadership style might be the role model for the new boss. Similarly, the effect of an authoritarian leadership style may deter former peers from voicing concerns or problems to their new boss who in actuality may have a different leadership style.

Totality

The fourth concept in dialectics is totality. It is the belief that “phenomena can be understood only in relation to other phenomena” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.14). Totality refers to the interrelatedness and interdependencies of social processes and constructs. A phenomenon is not whole or total unto itself, but derives existence from its constitutive parts which have significance only in relation to each other and the whole (Rawlins, 1989). While separating the whole from its parts and studying them separately

might have abstract value, totality suggests a need to go beyond this delineation. A greater depth of understanding occurs with analysis of the parts with each other and with the whole. Comprehension will be further enhanced by studying the whole in light of its relation with an even larger construct. As Johnson and Long (2004) describe, a thorough understanding of social processes is predicated on totality, where totality is the inclusion of the individual, the experienced contradictions, the actions, and the situation which encompasses all of the above.

Another application of the concept of totality lies in the idea that dialectic tensions have both an internal and an external component. Tensions exist within a relationship and at the interface of the relationship with larger systems (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 1997). Totality suggests that dialectic scholars must go beyond the consideration of contradictions inherent within a relationship. They must also examine the contradictions that lie within the greater system within which a relationship exists (Ball, 1979).

The transition at hand provides an example. A newly promoted boss may feel tension from the contrast between their former “insider” status and their perception of their current “outsider” status. Yet to examine only that contrast would be incomplete. External forces also have bearing on the relationship. The new boss is likely to feel organizational pressure from increased responsibilities. Those demands on time may contribute to the tension experienced interpersonally. Having less time to share stories around the water cooler may reinforce the boss’s perception of not being included. On the other hand, less water cooler time may look like the new boss is avoiding interaction with

the former peers. Thus, the tension between the individuals is in part constructed by tensions outside of the immediate relationship.

A further example of the above discussion is apparent in the work of Kramer (2004) with his study of group interactions. He did not limit his dialectical analysis to interpersonal relationships and internal tensions between members of the group. He sought to understand how dialectical processes impacted group tensions, thereby investigating both internal and external components, and the interplay between smaller and larger systems. Kramer (2004) pointed out that individual perspective of experienced contradiction contributed to contradictions at the group level and perceived group tension. In an application of this to the current study, former peers may have different perspectives on perceived favoritism by the new boss. Some may see it as a way of the boss maintaining ties. Others may see it as a way of disconnection from those who are not “favorites”. In this example, individual differences may affect overall dialectical tensions within the entire work group.

With a common understanding of the basics of dialectic theory, a discussion of specific applications of dialectics is presented. Although not necessarily identified as such in the following section, the four tenets of dialectics provide the basis for the studies cited. Opposition, change, totality, and praxis are interwoven within this corpus of dialectic scholarship.

Dialectic Applications

The previous paragraphs presented a discussion of the conceptual underpinnings of the dialectical perspective. This section moves to an examination of the application of the dialectical perspective to specific situations. Because of the focus on relationship

within the dialectic field, many of the studies fall within the realm of interpersonal communication. Some of the studies use married couples as the study participants. Others of the studies refer specifically to romantic relationships or friendships. While it may be argued that peers are not necessarily friends, and usually not romantically involved, the studies do demonstrate the applicability of dialectic principles. As such, they serve to inform the discussion at hand. Specific examples of dialectic analysis within the work environment are also cited. Again, they serve to inform this discussion even though the particular context and relational issues may be different than the focus of this study.

This section breaks down into three main areas. Relational dialectics is the umbrella under which both interactional and contextual dialectics fall. Admittedly the division is somewhat arbitrary since all categories deal with relationships and contradictions. Yet there are differences. These subtleties serve as a means to organize a wide-ranging scope of literature. Thus, the presentation of the three categories here is meant to assist the reader, rather than to suggest any firm lines of division or to place the current study into one category or the other.

Contextual dialectics

Rawlins (1989, 1992) differentiated between “contextual dialectics” and “interactional dialectics.” Although both fall under the umbrella of “relational dialectics” (Baxter, 1988), contextual dialectics describe the cultural contradictions within which a relationship is enacted. Specifically, Rawlins (1989) identified the tension created by the competing demands of the private sphere of a relationship and how the relationship appears to, or interfaces with, the public sphere. In an example, Rawlins (1989) noted the

public benefits of a particular friendship may be in asynchrony with the cultural notions of “friendship”. In the study at hand, the organizational benefits of a work relationship may be asynchronous with cultural notions of friendship. The utility of the relationship in terms of scheduling preferences or work assignments may contrast with more altruistic notions of friendship.

Cultural beliefs and standards may create tension in a relationship also. What a relationship experiences privately may contrast with perceived cultural expectations. A classic example may be the relationship with two individuals from different socio-economic or religious backgrounds. The contentment the couple experiences privately may contrast with the difficulties they experience from others who ascribe to more parochial cultural standards. Similarly, the acceptance of status unequal partners by each other may contrast with how their relation appears publicly. A boss may be open to charges of favoritism if a friendship with a former peer appears to be too close.

One particular example of Rawlin’s (1992) work in contextual dialectics is his study of platonic friendships within the work environment. At least some of these friendships were between status unequal partners. Individuals at different hierarchical levels had to negotiate the tensions surrounding their inequality of organizational status. Status inequality, as well as organizational norms and culture, impacted how they negotiated their difference in status relative to their friendship.

One example of contextual dialectics within the healthcare field is the placement of Fagerström’s (2006) study within the nursing context. She described how nurses often felt pulled between their own idea of what nursing meant and the actual work of nursing. “Being” a good nurse involved the actual caring for the patient in the technical and

compassionate manner they held as an ideal for nursing. This had to be balanced with demands that did not align with that ideal. Patient caseload, healthcare economics, and demographics impacted the nurses' perceptions of whether they were in fact fulfilling their desire to be good nurses. The ideal of "being" a good nurse contrasted with the real demands of just being a nurse.

Interactional dialectics

Interactional dialectics describe the contradictions that occur as a relationship is played out over time. For instance, Conville (1988) examined the structure of transitions within the relationships of two married couples who reported being near divorce. He found the negotiation of specific dialectic tensions was associated with significant transitions in the relationship. As the partners moved between contradictions related to affect, intimacy, and the passage of time, they also negotiated different ways of relating and were able to salvage their relationships.

This is similar to the work of Masheter and Harris (1986). They examined the dialectic tensions experienced by one couple during major relational transitions. Rather than viewing the relationship in terms of dissolution, dialectic analysis revealed a transformation of the relationship from marriage through divorce and into friendship.

As a divorce is seen as a turning point in one's marriage, a job promotion may signal a major turning point in one's work career. Subsequently one's relationships may also undergo changes. For example, new bosses may relate different relational tensions and use different strategies to cope with those tensions than bosses with several years of management experience.

Kramer (2004) provides an example of interactional dialectics applied to a group setting. His examination of dialectical processes in a community theater group took place over the entire casting, rehearsal schedule and production of the performance. Based on the responses of the participants, Kramer (2004) identified four broad categories of dialectics. Individuals were caught between their commitment to the group and their commitment to other life activities. They had to deal with competition between expected, prescribed activities, and spontaneous changes related to the production. People balanced their feelings of being included and excluded from the overall group. There were differences regarding what were acceptable or unacceptable behaviors. In so far as Kramer (2004) was alone in his application of dialectics to groups, it is mentioned here. As a producer leads a group of performers, a manager leads a work group.

Having presented samples of both contextual and interactional dialectics within scholarly research, the following section turns to the broader category of relational dialectics. As mentioned earlier, the distinctions between the categories are somewhat imprecise. After all, when one examines a relationship through different turning points (interactional) one is simultaneously examining the relationship itself. Again, the separation here is meant for organizational purposes only. In the following paragraphs, I begin with a review of research dealing more generally with relational dialectics. As the section proceeds, the focus will narrow to those studies that are more aligned with the focus of this study in terms of relationship and context.

Relational dialectics

Relational dialectics (Baxter, 1988) is proposed as a way to study relationships from the basis of their contradictions. This includes identifying both the oppositional

poles that partners experience, and the strategies with which they negotiate the resultant tensions. Baxter (1990) used relational dialectics to frame her study of college undergraduates who were engaged in romantic relationships. She found that partners struggled with relational contradictions. They needed to have a modicum of both sharing and being private; of being independent from each other and being connected; of having a predictable, safe relationship, and needing to add newness and excitement. Although the relationships to be studied in this examination are presumed to not be romantically involved, there may be parallels to the work of Baxter (1990). The very fact of the promotion of one individual in a work relationship adds novelty. It is also likely that former cohorts would have to deal with contradictions of how the promotion affected their relationship in terms of connection or independence from each other.

Baxter and Simon (1993) found that the partners in romantic relationships used specific strategies to move their relationship along the continuum of the dialectic opposites mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Each of those strategies was found to be context dependent. In the situation at hand, a new boss may use strategies to enforce or diminish their connection from the former peer group, depending on the particular context of the circumstances at hand. If the boss had to implement an unpopular directive, he or she could select strategies designed to show empathy and thereby reinforce connection with the group. A different set of circumstances might call for different behavioral strategies.

Montgomery (1993) suggests that the very idea of “strategies” as ways of maintaining a relationship may need to be reexamined in light of the continuing cyclic pattern of interpersonal relationships. She states “Different adaptations and

transformations are viewed as appropriate for different times and places” (p.210). Strategies are different and are used differently at different points in a relationship. Couples in the work of developing their relationship will negotiate the pull between togetherness and independence differently than those undergoing the work of dissolving a relationship. Yet it is possible that the strategies used may be transformative of either relationship, moving either along the continuum of relational satisfaction.

The above discussion alludes to Montgomery’s (1993) contention that relationship maintenance is a concept worthy of re-examination within a dialectical framework. Maintenance is but one pole of a dialectic of maintenance / flux which is integral to intimate relationships. This is in contrast to other authors in the communication field who see maintenance as a goal in and of itself (See Canary & Stafford, 1992, and Dainton & Stafford,1993, for example). To the extent that a boss-subordinate relationship must be maintained in some fashion (until one of them leaves the department), the preceding discussion becomes applicable. Examining how new bosses experience relational maintenance with former peers may reveal they too use different strategies, depending on whether a particular work relationship is in a state of relative dissolution or development.

Johnson, Wittenberg, Villagran, Mazur, and Villagran (2003) agree with Montgomery (1993). They examined the development of relationships from a dialectic lens. In their study of patterns of relationship development among friends, they found evidence for a cyclic pattern of development among casual, close, or best friends. The authors identified patterns of relationship development and deterioration among all categories of friends. This suggests that development and deterioration is a dialectic that

is active across the spectrum of friendship, a finding that challenges the idea of relationship progression or maintenance as the norm. While the former peer relationship in the study at hand may not have the longevity of a best friend relationship, it may still undergo the cycles of maintenance and flux which Montgomery (1993) and Johnson et al (2003) suggest. Relational development may be interrupted by periods of deterioration as the new boss has to confront or coach the former peer on performance issues.

Like Montgomery (1993), Spitzberg (1993) diverges from traditional communication literature in his application of dialectics to a previously established concept. He proposes applying dialectics to examinations of communication competence. Spitzberg (1993) suggests that competence as a construct is actually more of a dialectic complexity than has typically been acknowledged. For example, he describes the contradiction between communication appropriateness and communication effectiveness. In given situations, what is most appropriate may be in tension with what is most effective. As Spitzberg (1993) puts it, communication competence involves knowing “how to control the situation tactically, yet still work ‘within’ the parameters of relational context” (p.144). One needs both to have a sense of group processes and dynamics while accomplishing objectives. A new supervisor will have to exercise strategic choices for the group that may be at odds with personal or group relationships.

As part of Spitzberg’s (1993) work, he notes that overall communication competence is dependent on the skills a boss has relative to both job responsibilities and relationships. Both are important but do not necessarily co-exist. He presents the example of the manager who is competent in terms of job responsibilities, but who is relatively incompetent with subordinates in terms of interpersonal relationships.

In another example of the complexity of communication competence, Spitzberg (1993) notes the construct itself is influenced by the presence of either a context-impaired or a context-facilitated situation. In a context-impaired situation, the actions of an individual are related to perceived threat or stress. A new boss is likely to experience stresses associated with the new position, a context-impaired situation. The collegiality of the prior peer situation would be more aligned with a context-facilitated situation. The juxtaposition of those two situations may create some tension for the new boss in trying to decide a course of action. What may look like communication competence is in fact the negotiation of dialectic tensions (Spitzberg, 1993).

Bridge and Baxter (1991) examined the dialectics present in the relationships of friends who were also work associates. 162 survey respondents indicated their relationships were impacted by having to deal with inherent contradictions. These tensions related to managing work status, partiality, information sharing, time spent together, and relative judgment or acceptance. In their study, Bridge and Baxter (1991) examined the communication strategies utilized by the participants to manage the experienced tensions. Of particular interest to this study were the findings related to status-unequal friends and close friends. Status-unequal friends tended to privilege one role over the other (as a means of negotiating tension) more so than status-equal friends did. They also noted that close friends reported less overall tension, and less need to separate their roles, than work associates who had more casual friendships.

Closest to the thrust of this study is the work of Zorn (1995). He applied a dialectic perspective to a particular work context that he termed “bosses and buddies”. Zorn (1995) used interviews in his exploration of status unequal friendships. While

limited to only five participants in his exploratory study, Zorn's (1995) work nonetheless provides information of import to this study. Specifically, at least some of the participants described their relationship with a friend and coworker who subsequently became their supervisor. Others described their relationship with a friend who had been a peer but was now a subordinate.

In agreement with Bridge and Baxter (1992), Zorn (1995) found that participants in his study struggled with balancing feelings of separation and closeness (i.e. autonomy/connection). Participants also described specific actions that reinforced one pole of that dialectic. For example, at least one participant stated her friend (now the supervisor) stopped returning phone calls. This resulted in dissolution of the friendship. The identification of the supervisor's actions and the resultant change in the relationship was a portrayal of both the presence of the dialectic and the strategy with which the supervisor used to negotiate the tension. Zorn (1995) also found that participants had to deal with experiences where desire for openness on the part of one of the partners conflicted with the other's expectations or their desire for more information sharing (openness /closedness). One supervisor admitted she was reluctant to share some information with her friend who was also now her subordinate. What is not clear in this example is whether this new caution was due to organizational norms or whether it was a way of exerting power by the newly made supervisor.

Zorn (1995) also found evidence that relational partners tried to manage the generally equal nature of friendships while having to negotiate the reality of their unequal status. In particular the newly promoted supervisors used specific communication strategies to diminish the tension they felt in negotiating the superiority /equality

dialectic. For example, one supervisor deflected her instructions and directives to give the impression they were coming from her boss. Other supervisor participants enlisted the help of their former status-equal coworkers to elaborate and detail a general directive. In both of these examples, it is apparent the supervisor was engaging in behavior that served to minimize the status difference, and hence the separation, from her former co-workers.

Zorn (1995) noted that subordinates wanted and expected preferential treatment because of their friendship with the superior. Simultaneously the supervisor was engaged in strategies to deflect any charges of favoritism. Each partner was actively emphasizing one aspect of what Zorn (1995) names a dialectic of privilege/ uniformity. Yet Zorn (1995) found some evidence that at least some of the supervisors were experiencing some internal tension in relation to this dialectic. Some of the supervisors gave contradicting statements as they claimed to be fair to all their subordinates but then admitted to being more permissive with their friends. Interestingly this leniency was not uniformly reported by the subordinates. This may be an example of the multi-faceted nature of dialectic tensions, in that some of the subordinates did not talk of privilege. Instead of being granted special favors, they were actually singled out for harsher interactions and reprimands by their friend who now was their supervisor.

Literature Review Discussion

The preceding section provided a summary of dialectics, both conceptually and pragmatically. Studies of relationships within and external to organizations were presented. This section will examine the findings of the studies presented, and present research questions to guide this examination of how an individual moves from being a peer to being the boss of those peers.

One of the difficulties in the application of dialectics in the social sciences is its similarity with role theory. While an exhaustive discussion of role theory is beyond the scope of this study, one example may help to articulate the point. Werner and Baxter (1994) suggest that dialectic tension may be situated internally. According to them, the tension between two co-existing but opposite demands may cause intrapersonal conflict. How then does this differ from role conflict? Perhaps an analogy from the field of geology will help to address the question.

Tension from role conflict may be likened to the situation of colliding tectonic plates. Earthquakes occur, mountains are lifted. The opposing forces are resolved. As Ellis and Fisher (1994) maintain, managing role strain or conflict means resolving the existent tension. The resolution of the tension is in fact a goal.

Tension from dialectical opposites is like wave action on a beach. The waves are constantly in motion, their force acting against the relative stability of the beach. With each tide, the beach is at once transformed yet remains the same. New sand dunes will impact the action of the next tide. Therefore the tension between wave and sand is not resolved. It continues but is not the same the next time the tide comes in. The tension then is transformative but is not eliminated. This transformative characteristic is a hallmark of dialectic theory.

The breadth of dialectic theory also presents some difficulty when applying dialectics to a specific relationship or context. It may be likened to a wide-angle camera, through which any situation can be seen through the lens of contradiction and change. For instance, Johnson et al (2003) identify dissolution / development as a dialectic. It could be argued though that dissolution or development of a relationship is the result of

negotiation of dialectical tensions. How partners in a relation manage dialectical tensions, such as autonomy / connection, or novelty / predictability, will impact the longevity of the relationship and the satisfaction of the partners. In another example, Fagerström (2006) identifies two states of 'being' as a dialectic tension. Again the state of one's perception of 'being' or 'not being' a good nurse may be the result of the individual's choices in negotiating the ideal / real dialectic of actually doing the work of nursing.

Other difficulties with the literature examined lie within individual studies. Several of the works presented relied on a small number of participants. Masheter and Harris (1986) interviewed only one couple whose marriage had ended in divorce but had since become friends; Conville (1988) used only two couples in his case studies of relational transitions, and Zorn (1995) interviewed only five participants. In all of these cases, the number of participants was consistent with that generally accepted for exploratory studies or case studies. Yet, subsequent researchers have to exert caution in generalizing findings to other groups because of the small numbers involved in the studies.

Of more import to this effort is simply the paucity of literature surrounding the peer to boss transition. While two of the studies (Bridge & Baxter, 1992 and Zorn, 1995) situated their studies of friends within the work force, they specifically identified friends as the basis for their work. Even though both of the studies included individuals who were in a superior-subordinate relationship, all of the participants in that relationship identified themselves as friends. It remains to be seen if friends experience the same relational tensions as individuals in a peer relationship (such as that of co-workers).

The very nature of friend or intimate relationships is significantly different from the nature of work relationships. For example, friend relationships are freely chosen whereas work relationships are not. Co-workers may well become friends (or vice versa) but the friendship is still chosen. Co-worker relationships are mandated, at least to some degree. Certainly, the supervisor-subordinate relationship is mandated as well.

Whether work relationships are hierarchical or not, individuals may construct those relationships differently than friends who are also co-workers. How individuals in mandated relationships experience contradictions and tensions may be different than individuals in relationships that are freely chosen. Both Zorn (1995) and Bridge and Baxter (1992) found that friends who were status unequal work associates identified some tension associated with their new hierarchical status. Bridge and Baxter (1992) identify this tension as equality / inequality whereas Zorn (1995) labels it equality / superiority. Again, this tension may not be operative in situations where the boss was once a peer but not necessarily a friend. Individuals who have not achieved the level of intimacy and connection that might be characteristic of friendship may not experience this particular tension. They may simply just accept the inequality.

Worth noting is the presence of the same dialectic tensions across several cited studies. For instance autonomy / connection, openness / closedness and predictability/ novelty are discussed in the work of Zorn (1995), Bridge and Baxter (1992), and Rawlins (1989). In fact the first two studies seemed to have a presumption of the presence of those three dialectics. While this may be based in the work of earlier authors (such as Rawlins, 1989), it also raises questions of researcher bias.

For example, Baxter and Simon (1993) explore maintenance strategies utilized by individuals as they negotiated the three previously mentioned dialectics. This begs the question of whether the authors might have inadvertently neglected other possible dialectics (and maintenance strategies) in their study. Letting dialectic tensions reveal themselves in the course of interviews rather than assuming the presence of certain dialectics would be one strategy to avoid this situation.

Collinson (2005) provides some insight into this question with his discussion on leadership dialectics and power. It is reasonable to consider that issues of control / resistance, and dissent/ consent may play a significant role in any status unequal relationship. Some new bosses may be reluctant to wield their new authority while others may relish the opportunity. Both the boss and the former cohort may experience tension surrounding these dialectics rather than, or in addition to, the three mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Relating to this discussion is the difference between the work of Rawlins (1989, 1992) on young, adult friendships and the work of other authors (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Zorn, 1995) who studied friend relationships at work. Rawlins (1989, 1992) describes the tension that occurs in balancing the utility of a relationship with the affective component of the relationship. While Rawlins (1989) states that the utility of a friend relationship is less acknowledged and less studied than the affective component, he also points out that the utility of a friendship is not necessarily negative or uncommon. Presumably individuals “get” something from a relationship, whether that is affirmation or solace or enjoyment. Partners in a status unequal work relationship may also “get” something from their relationship.

In the case of non-intimate co-workers and especially those in a hierarchical relationship, instrumentality may be manifested by particular strategies employed by both superiors and subordinates. Persons in each group strive to get cooperation from others as they seek to achieve personal and organizational objectives. While affection may be more difficult to define in a non-intimate relationship, co-workers still experience and enjoy informal pleasantries such as a smile, a greeting, a good-bye, or by an honest and caring inquiry into one's health or family. Therefore it is reasonable to expect the boss who is now managing former peers may also experience a similar contradiction. Yet this is not mentioned in the organizationally based work of Bridge and Baxter (1992) or Zorn (1995), though friendship was a requirement of both studies. Whether the absence of this dialectic reflects differences in identifying and naming dialectic tensions, or lies in differences related to research methods is not clear.

Another area of difference exists between work on young adult friendships and work on blended friendships (work associates who are also friends). Rawlins (1989) identifies the dialectic of judgment and acceptance in his work on young adult friendships. Bridge and Baxter (1992) similarly found evidence of this dialectic in their work with friends who are simultaneously co-workers. Yet Zorn (1995) did not report this particular contradiction in his work with friends in a hierarchical work situation. It is possible the study participants did not report this because the very nature of the superior-subordinate relationship involves judgment. This occurs at least minimally in the form of performance reviews. While friends may need to negotiate the judgment / acceptance dialectic, subordinates may view judgment as a given, not something that is negotiated.

One further possible explanation for the difference between the work of Zorn (1995) and Bridge and Baxter (1992) is the selection of the research participants. Zorn (1995) specifically sought out individuals who were either supervising or being supervised by former peers and friends. This was not specifically a criterion for inclusion in the study of Bridge and Baxter (1992). Some of the participants did report having friends at work that held a higher organizational position, but it is not clear whether the individuals were actually being supervised by that friend.

The work of Kramer (2004) also brings a greater depth to the understanding of work relationships. His work might initially be seen as somewhat unrelated to the present study because of his focus on group rather than individual relationships. Yet further examination reveals some parallels and implications for the specific work relationship at hand. In fact, the application of dialectics to group dynamics may enlarge the scope of interpersonal dialectics within the work context.

Kramer's (2004) work in group dialectics offers a parallel with the study at hand. Participants had to negotiate a balance between their commitment to the group and their commitment to other life activities. These contrasting demands caused some tension for the participants. This particular dialectic did not appear in other studies related to blended, status unequal friendships. It may be argued that this was not found in other studies because it applied to only one partner in the relationship. It has to be acknowledged, however, that tension caused by efforts to manage the balance between work and personal life may also impact other relationships the boss is involved with.

Johnson and Long (2002) also extended dialectics to group communication theory. While Johnson and Long (2002) present a more conceptual basis for this

application, Kramer's (2004) work is situated in the actual exploration of a particular group. While several of the authors (Zorn, 1995; Bridge & Baxter, 1992 and Rawlins, 1992) did place their study within work groups, they did not seek to examine the relationships from a group perspective. Yet, it seems logical to expect that group dynamics as a whole would impact individual relationships. For example, the rise of group tension secondary to the uncertainty that may surround the arrival of any new boss may impact the tensions felt and expressed between the boss and each of the subordinates. Further exploration along the lines of Kramer's work would inform both relational dialectics and group dialectical concepts.

Summary

This literature review sought to present the reader with a conceptual basis of dialectics as utilized in the social sciences. Applied works that spanned the domains of interpersonal and organizational communication literature were offered to build a foundation for further examination. In particular, the cited works provide a basis from which to explore the peer to boss phenomenon.

As was seen in the preceding pages, dialectics is essentially about contradiction, change, totality, and praxis. As such it is a valuable tool with which to examine the peer to boss work transition. By its very nature, that transition encompasses change. Contradictions between what was and what is may exist. Management does not operate in a vacuum. Individual relationships are colored by organizational norms and culture. They have to be constructed and enacted within the demands of new responsibilities for budgetary constraint and productivity standards. Relationships that were forged as peers

may have to be recast in terms of hierarchy. How partners react to the changed status may not fit expectations that were based on past behaviors as equal partners.

Unfortunately, there is scarce information available that is specific to the peer to boss transition. While the literature review demonstrated the utility of dialectics in examining relationships from across interpersonal and organizational literature, there were few studies that addressed the particular experience of managing former peers. Yet one researcher builds on the work of others. To that end, the conceptual background in dialectics and the research works cited within this chapter, led the researcher to the following research questions:

RQ 1. How do individuals who have been promoted to manage their former peer group talk about their experience?

RQ 2. How do supervisors manage the experience and the changes that occur?

RQ 3. What changes, if any have occurred over the course of the supervisory experience?

Chapter 2: Method

As outlined previously, the purpose of this study is to explore the transition from being a peer in a work group to being the boss of that same work group. While communication literature, as well as business literature, is replete with discussions of the characteristics of effective managers, or with suggestions of how to be a more effective manager, this study focuses on the experience of becoming a manager over a former peer group. Thus, this study moves the discussion from the singular perspective of communication competency or compliance-gaining (for example) to the lived experience of the individual as he or she negotiates different aspects of becoming boss.

The particular frame for examining that lived experience is dialectics. Dialectics is particularly suited to this exploration as it provides a conceptual framework for understanding the work transition at hand. Dialectics is essentially about contradictions, tensions, and change. While these characteristics may be common to all job promotions, it is reasonable to suggest that contradiction and tension may be more keenly felt by individuals now managing former peers. Dialectics also emphasizes the totality of the experience. That is, dialectics looks at the impacts and interfaces of one system on the other. The experience as a whole is examined rather than only the relational or organizational perspective, even though both perspectives likely impact the entire experience. Thus, the use of dialectics for this study provides both increased depth and breadth to the understanding of the experiences of people who are in the process of becoming managers.

In contrast to the viewpoint articulated in the previous chapter that relational dialectics, by definition, must include the experiences of both (or all) parties to the

relationship, this study hears only the voice of the new supervisor. Yet there is precedence to suggest a more single-minded approach. For example, Altmann (1993) discusses those dialectical processes that are located within the individual. He specifies “Indeed, one can conceive of dialectical processes of ... autonomy / connection functioning in the minds of individuals in a relationship” (p.28). Dindia (1994) concurs with her observation that dialectical processes may occur at both the individual and dyadic levels.

Another consideration in limiting this examination to the perspective of the recently promoted boss can be found in the work of authors cited previously. While Bridge and Baxter (1992) examined the relationships of workers who had close friends at their place of employment, they did not specify the inclusion of both partners in their study. Zorn (1995), whose work most closely approximates the intent of the present study, also did not necessarily include both parties in his work entitled “Bosses and Buddies”. He did include individuals who experienced the situation of having friends who had become the boss, and those who themselves now managed friends. They were not necessarily, however, partners in the same relationship. Therefore this study expands the work of other authors who have examined relations in the work place through a dialectical perspective by its inclusion of bosses who were peers but not necessarily friends.

As was seen in the literature review, dialectic analysis may incorporate both qualitative and quantitative elements. For purposes of this study, however, qualitative research methods were chosen. There were several reasons for this selection.

In the study at hand, the intent was to examine a particular job transition. Job transitions mean changes of intersecting systems, from the intrapersonal to the organizational. The potential complexity of the interactions is best suited to an analysis with qualitative methods. Herein the accounts of the participants illuminate both the individual and social ramifications of the transition, and provide insight into how the participants made sense of themselves, their former peers, and even the organization. Their own voices, with all the nuance and tone, are heard as they talk with the researcher.

The second reason for the selection of qualitative methods was alluded to in the literature review. That is, this particular job transition has not been thoroughly studied. While using scales or forced answer surveys would provide answers, it would not provide stories. Qualitative methods that capture the stories of the participants will provide a broad base from which researchers may launch their own targeted investigations into one or more aspects of this phenomenon.

One final note on this author's choice of qualitative research is important to note. Burnett (1991) reports that the very act of providing a narrative can provide the participant with a sense of control and understanding. If that is true for the participant, it also applies to this researcher who underwent a similar job transition within this healthcare institution in the past several years. Rather than being an impediment, however, the author's own experience afforded a sort of "insider" status and credibility as someone with an empathetic ear.

With that in mind this chapter divides into several sections. The chapter opens with a presentation of the participant selection criteria and participant demographics. Following that is a discussion of the process used for data gathering and reporting. A

brief discussion of dialectics as the basis for framing the Analysis chapter precedes a discussion of the data gathering and reporting. Within the later section, specific details regarding the interview processes and data analysis will be included. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Participants

The 12 participants for this study were recruited based on several characteristics. The primary factor for inclusion in this study was recent promotion to a supervisory position. For purposes of this study, participants were in their position no more than 18 months. This was an attempt to mitigate the effects of time on memory. It was hoped that recollection would less likely be colored by the passages of time. It is also important to note that the term “supervisor”, as used in this study, is representative of any position in which one is now in a formal management role with his / her former peers. The official title of a participant may be manager, supervisor, or even director, depending on the organization. Particular to the organization studied is another title. Several of the people interviewed had the position of “team lead”. This job description carries with it supervisory expectations and the authority to direct the work of their former peers. Team leads were involved with, but did not actually perform, staff annual performance reviews. The “team lead” title meant a compensation differential, though all of the “team lead” positions involved continuation of previous staff duties.

Although unexpected at the outset of the study, there was a breakdown of interviewees into part-time and full-time. Seven of the participants were full-time supervisor; five were part-time with varying percentages of time devoted to

administrative duties. This difference proved to be serendipitous in that findings between the groups were illuminating and enriching to the study as a whole.

There was a predominance of females in the participant group. 10 females and two males agreed to be interviewed. While a more balanced sample would have been preferred, the gender make-up is not surprising. The demographics of workers in healthcare continue to be skewed toward females. Therefore the sample reflects general demographics.

A second factor for inclusion in the study was having been promoted from within an organization, and managing former peers. Further, the term “peers”, for purposes of this study, means individuals with a concomitant professional title with whom the participant worked on a regular basis, as well as support staff with whom the participant worked. While this may leave the findings open to the charge of being influenced by power issues between the new supervisor and former peers, the organizational structure of healthcare organizations often entails the supervision of individuals with varying degrees of education and titles.

The participants were recruited from within one healthcare organization. While it might be argued that limiting this study to only managers from the health care field limits its applicability, there are several reasons for this selection. Health care organizations typically promote from within as staff nurses, or staff therapists, are transitioned to management. Secondly, organizational tensions will be similar within one organization, thereby mitigating influence from outside sources. Thirdly, the sample was convenient to this researcher who is herself employed in this organization.

Within this institution, promotions are routinely announced and therefore potentially qualified participants were readily identifiable. Another source of participants was the recent class listing of a recurrent training session put on by the education department of the organization. This one-day session is entitled “Peer Today, Boss Tomorrow” and is available to any new leader in the organization. Again, because promotions are routinely announced within this organization, obtaining a list of class participants was not jeopardizing confidentiality or privacy.

While all of the participants were employees of one organization, the organization in question is actually a large, non-profit organization with several different institutions aligned under its umbrella. These smaller institutions are separated geographically in an upper Mid-west state. This helped to ensure a wider variety of experiences than if all participants were from one of the smaller institutions. Initial contact with each potential candidate was made via phone or email in which the goal of the study was outlined. In order to avoid the possibility of predisposing the candidates towards the study, they were told the aim of the study was to examine their experiences as they made the transition from peer to boss. They were assured that every effort would be made to maintain confidentiality should they choose to participate. Finally the candidates were queried regarding their interest in participation. Their assent led to the establishment of a date for face-to-face contact.

Procedure

The argument for using qualitative research methodology in this particular study was presented earlier. However, it is also important to note this study follows the work of other authors who framed their research within dialectic theory and also used qualitative

research methods. In particular, the work of Zorn (1995) provided precedence for this study. He utilized the semi-structured interview process in his studies. In keeping with that technique, this interviewer worked from a list of open-ended questions designed to encourage reflection and narrative regarding the particular transition in question (Berger, 2000). In all cases, questions were structured to elicit descriptions of the peer to boss experience as interpreted by the participants.

Because of the individuality of each participant's experience, the interviews were not performed in a prescribed manner but progressed according to the tenor and pace set by the participants. Questions of a demographic nature were posed initially to ascertain details of the participant's experience as a peer and as a supervisor (e.g. How many people do you supervise?), and also as an attempt to put the participant at ease for the remainder of the interview. Following those initial questions, open-ended questions were followed by probing questions in order to obtain a rich description of the individual's experience. Questions can be found in the appendix. Interviews took place at a location convenient to the interviewee. All but one of the interviews occurred in a private room or office within the workplace. One participant chose to be interviewed in her home. All of the interviews were between 30-60 minutes in length. The interviews took place over a six week time span. A signed consent form was obtained from all participants prior to the interview to ensure agreement for inclusion in the study.

The interview itself was digitally recorded with the interviewee's full knowledge. In order to ensure consistency of interview techniques and question, this author conducted all interviews. The interviewer took minimal field notes during and immediately after the interview. Doing so aided in the analysis of each participant's

experience. Recordings were loaded onto discs and later transcribed by a paid typist. Due to circumstances beyond the control of the researcher, the last completed transcript was delivered nearly six weeks after the date of the last interview. Both the discs and the transcriptions were kept in a locked file by the author. The recordings and transcripts were under the sole possession of the author except while undergoing transcription itself.

Data analysis

After completion of the interview and transcription phase, the interviews were interpreted and analyzed for similar themes regarding the dialectic tensions experienced in their peer to boss transition. Rather than presuming the existence of any previously mentioned dialectical constructs (i.e. autonomy-connection), emergent themes were explored as they appear. This kept the analysis interpretive of the narrative and not constructive of the experience.

Following the work of Moustakas (1994), each transcript was individually analyzed for important descriptions and essential statements. A second reading was used to identify major themes that appear in each interview. Similar experiences and descriptions were noted and grouped in categories and sub-categories. Subsequent readings confirmed initial findings and ensured accurate representation of the emergent themes. This multi-step process proceeded with each of the interviews.

While qualitative data may be subject to the charge of misrepresentation by the author, the multiple readings helped to mitigate that concern. The process of interview followed by reading and re-reading allowed for a thorough examination of the experience as described by the interviewee. In this way, the experience of the participant was the basis for all findings. The descriptions of the participants led the researcher to the

experience instead of the researcher presuming to know the experience. In addition, emergent themes were confirmed during the interview process by reflecting back to the interviewees the opinions heard during the interview. Re-confirmation took place also during the last two interviews when emergent themes of the previous interviews were again presented to the interviewees.

When all of the transcripts were read and analyzed, all themes were captured in a master list. Again, similar themes were collapsed into one group. Similar sub-categories were grouped together. At this point, research findings were discussed with the faculty advisor. Finally, conclusions regarding the reported experiences of the participants were drawn in an attempt to provide insight into the research questions posed earlier in this study.

Summary

The qualitative methods chosen for this study lend themselves to a rich exploration of the particular job transition in question. Members of a work group establish various relationships with their peers. They establish a certain working knowledge of the organization. They understand their job responsibilities. In short, they know themselves as a peer and as part of a larger organization. The changes that occur with promotion to a supervisory capacity over that same work group afford the opportunity to examine a largely unstudied phenomenon.

People in this situation find themselves in at once familiar but also uncharted territory. They remain part of the work group but are now separated from that work group by virtue of a promotion. Friends are now direct reports. The very nature of the promotion speaks of contradiction and potential tension for the new boss. To that end, the

participants in this study provide the context for a closer look at how this transition is experienced as a dialectic phenomenon, and how the findings apply to communication principles across the organizational and interpersonal domains.

Chapter 3: Results

“Making this kind of change is hard, I think.” For most of the participants in this study, that statement (offered in one interview) sums up their experience in moving from peer to boss. While individual experiences were unique, certain themes and sub-themes emerged during the interviews. Before going on to examine those themes, some general observations will assist in framing the responses of the participants.

To a person, the individuals who made this transition expressed enthusiasm for taking their new position. For some it was the novelty of the transition, for others it was the excitement of taking on a new challenge. One individual said taking the leadership position was a way of improving her understanding of the big picture.

I find it interesting, the management, learning more about what’s going on, the whole picture. Sometimes you’re just working like as a medical assistant or secretary or just whatever and you just know that, and I just kind of wanted to know the whole picture of everything that was going on.

Others were excited about the prospect of increased compensation for performing duties they had already been doing. An interviewee offered these comments.

At the time when it [the new promotion] was first given to me with all the more administrative-type issues of schedules and time cards...I was already doing it. So now it just-I hate to say it- for lack of a better word, I’m getting paid to do it.

The enthusiasm expressed was in sharp contrast to the depth of the emotions of frustration and ambiguity expressed in many of the interviews. Of the 12 participants, two stated their experience was relatively smooth with few relationship changes or struggles. The others coped with unexpected relationship changes, self-doubt, and lack of

support from the organization even as they were trying to solidify their own understanding of their new position within the organization. In spite of differences in overall experiences, all of the participants, either directly or indirectly, talked about particular challenges they faced.

Several of the participants seemed to welcome the opportunity to share their experiences with a neutral listener as they willingly and intently shared their stories. A number of the interviewees commented on their hope that the research findings would be useful to the organization in the future. They believed the information gathered in this study could be helpful to others either contemplating, or currently undergoing a similar transition.

While a person's experience cannot necessarily be delineated and defined into specific categories, doing so here provides a basis for the organization and discussion of the findings. In a broad sense, the experiences described by the interviewees could be placed within three general categories. The categories that emerged from the discussion were organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

The parsing out of the interviewee's experience into categories does not imply these categories stand alone without having an impact on the others. Nor does it suggest that these major themes are absolutely discrete. Similarly, results related to research questions two and three overlap with each other and with research question one. Nonetheless, the categorization is an attempt to better understand the experience as a whole and to understand the relationship between the different areas.

In this chapter I relate the experiences of the interviewees in each of three dimensions, organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Following that, the stories of

the participants in relation to the strategies they used are presented. The final section describes the words of the interviewees regarding how they experienced changes over time.

Research question one: How do individuals who have been promoted to manage their former peer group talk about their experience?

Organizational dimension

Comments about organizational issues were pervasive. Vague job descriptions, lack of mentoring, unstated or unclear expectations, and lack of access to managerial support were common complaints. In this regard, peers who become managers may not be substantially different than new bosses in general. Yet it is important to understand the impact these issues had in the experiences of the participants.

At a minimum, challenges in the organizational domain need to be included here as part of the totality of the experience. More specifically related to this discussion are the following examples which will be explored in more detail later. Lack of acceptance by new managerial peers may have contributed to an increasing sense of isolation as the new boss found themselves no longer part of any group. Lack of support from the organization may have influenced how the new bosses interacted with their former peers. It is reasonable to suggest that training in conflict management (for example) might have mitigated some of the difficulties in handling these situations with former peers.

Directly related to this discussion is the impact that lack of clear job descriptions and job expectations had on both the new bosses and their former peers. In some cases, this particular organizational failing was identified as being one of the biggest contributors to rocky relations with former peers. While any new boss may have to cope

with unclear job descriptions, the effects could be expected to vary from those experienced by this participant group.

The comments that follow in this section will illuminate for the reader how organizational domain issues played a part in the participants' adjustment to their new positions. Comments from both full-time and part-time bosses will be included as organizational issues surfaced as a theme in both groups, although with some division along those lines.

Three of the full-time bosses who were now department directors spoke of not knowing how to navigate their way through the differing expectations of their new role. For these bosses, the difficulties stemmed more from not knowing the unwritten expectations of their new role. Their words underscored their frustration with the perceived lack of organizational support for them in the transitions to their new role. They simply were not in the loop when it came to knowing the requirements or the processes of their new positions. One individual describes his experience, saying

There's this whole Leadership Excellence System, which I know nothing about, until suddenly I'm supposed to have this performance appraisal in [his own performance appraisal]. And, you know—I'm like, where did this come from? I mean when was somebody going to tell me about this? I mentioned that to C [his boss] and she's like, oh yeah, we should get you set up with that. And I'm like do you think because apparently I am supposed to be doing stuff on this.

He goes on to say that he also had no prior knowledge of the timeline for operational budgets because his name was not on the distribution list for the electronic communications regarding the budget. With the budget deadline suddenly upon him, his

response was, “All right, I’m just going to pull some number out of here and just, you know, try to back it up or whatever.” Later, he stated, “Suddenly this budget was in place and I don’t even know if it was the one I submitted.” Six months into the position he was continuing to learn of meetings he should have been attending but had been unaware of. He said, “How am I supposed to know if I don’t get a meeting invite or anything else. I mean, I’m sorry. I just don’t sit there and think, is it disaster planning today?”

His frustrations were echoed by another participant. This individual described how the lack of a mentor to guide her through different organizational processes created some confusion on her part. She articulated her experience in these words.

I don’t know all the managerial mores kind of thing. I’m just the kid from the block and I just kind of moved up. Just the way that things are presented. Oh, well, we need to have a meeting to talk about a problem. And so I would be, okay, great, let’s sit down. We’re going to talk about it [the problem]. No, that’s now how you go about it. First you organize a meeting by sending everything through Outlook, and then you discuss, you know, in a certain manner how things will be.

In another example she says,

There was a lot of stuff that was unbeknownst to me how you would maneuver through things....I didn’t realize you were supposed to do this with this person, and if I had an issue maybe I should consult so-and-so person and my HR partner.

A third individual also talks of having to make her own way. She speaks of “falling into a crack” between being a staff member and then transitioning to a full-time management role.

Nobody told me that I should go see HR...nobody told me what meetings [to go to] or anything. . . . So here I'm going, what else do I need to do, how do I deal with these issues, you know, and different things, all the changes, all the expectations of managers, I had no guidance.

For these full-time individuals, their experience as new bosses was marked in part by what could be described as just not knowing where to go, who to go to, or what needed to be done now that they were bosses. It is possible this was due in part to assumptions by both the new bosses and the organization of a sort of cultural knowledge. Because they were members of the organization, they would, or should, automatically know those things.

Part-time bosses also expressed dissatisfaction with organizational support in making the transition from peer to boss, but for them the issue was more frustration in attempts to balance administrative duties with staff duties. Because their positions were new to the organization, job descriptions for their new duties were described as incomplete and not reflective of the comprehensiveness of the tasks expected of them.

All of the part-time bosses described feelings of frustration in balancing their new administrative duties with their continuing job duties. One individual who had four hours per week designated as administrative time described an actual administrative time commitment of almost 20 hours per week. Another individual spoke of the difficulty in fulfilling her administrative duties in a climate of ever-increasing productivity pushes. She had in fact lost her designated administrative time but not her administrative duties. She said,

My biggest thing is I don't have the time. I mean you have all of these extra duties, but you're expected to work on the floor as one of your peers to, you know, do the same things they are doing, but yet you have these extra duties, but no time, no extra time, or no set time away to do them in.

Besides the challenges presented by simply not having enough time to do administrative duties while also working as a staff person, participants acknowledged the difficulties this arrangement presented to their co-workers. One of the respondents described the negative perceptions of the staff as she started being pulled away from daily work duties and towards more administrative functions. She noted the misperceptions of her former peers, saying, "I think that [being away from patients] kind of frustrates them. They think I'm not pulling my weight because they don't understand some of the other stuff that I'm doing." Another also experienced that sentiment from their co-workers. She offered, "I hear little rumblings here and there, but then, you know, you hear through the grape vine that you're not pulling your weight because you delegated something that you shouldn't have. So, you know, it's frustrating."

Besides inaccurate job descriptions, part-time bosses described situations in which the expectations of their former peers differed from the expectations they had for themselves. This discrepancy in expectations contributed to a difficult adjustment period for both the new bosses and the former peers. One boss who had been in her position for nearly a year stated, "I don't think we [self and other team lead] were at all prepared. . . it's just been flying by the seat of our pants which has been, you know, kind of stressful for us, and the staff feels frustrated with it too." She goes on to describe how unclear job expectations caused unrealistic expectations on the part of her co-workers. "It's supposed

to be team lead, what are they doing? ...everything that's going wrong is put on [the team lead] ... the team lead has got to try to fix it and obviously that's not possible."

Another participant described the differences between the actual job description, and the way her role was perceived by others.

The lead position is kind of ambiguous....I'm not a supervisor but yet I'm the person to go to. And so there have been times that they want to treat me as a supervisor and come to me with issues that may not be my responsibility to handle.

Her words allude to a disparity between her own understanding of the job and how she felt it was understood by her former peers.

The previous paragraphs described how organizational influences impact individuals promoted from peer to boss. Yet, a number of the quotes above indicate that organizational issues also impacted former peers. The uncertainty and frustration caused by either lack of organizational support, or lack of job clarity, clearly impacted interpersonal relationships. The next section describes how new bosses experienced changes in relationships due to organizational and other issues.

Interpersonal dimension

Although the majority of participants described changes to relationships, some did not. These were individuals who did not have close relationships with former peers, and those on the other end of the spectrum who characterized former peer relationships as "close friends." One individual stated she and her former peers frequently got together after work and they continued to do so even after her promotion. One of the others who did not have previous close relations nonetheless verbalized concerns over the possibility

of relationship changes. A former peer had included the new boss in relating a positive personal experience. The interviewee said, "...It kind of makes me feel good that she still wants to include me in that. Because you're afraid sometimes that you're going to lose that."

For those participants who did experience some relational changes, full-time bosses and part-time bosses differentiated their experience of those changes. Full-time bosses noted the changes, but seemed to struggle less with them. Relational change was accepted and sometimes even encouraged by the full-time bosses. Because part-time bosses still had to function in their former peer group, relationship changes were more difficult to deal with.

Three of the full-time bosses who had at least some close relationships with their former peers stated they were still able to maintain those relationships, even to the extent of being able to socialize occasionally after work. These individuals did note some changes in communication topics though. One individual joked, "Well I don't hear them saying bad things about their boss anymore." Another individual acknowledged there were times when she absented herself from the group because of the conversation.

At first it was hard because, you know, you would go out with these people, you did things with them, and then you would come to work and how do you cut those ties, how do you not say nothing outside of work about things that are happening at work and you know, you just walk away, its time. I just came to the point when things like that came up outside of work, it was time for me to leave.

Two of the full-time bosses discussed the importance of maintaining some

separation from their former co-workers, and the difficulty of doing so. One individual who stated she had “good friends” now under her as direct reports stated,

That does make it difficult at being leader in charge to have to say, I’m sorry, I know you don’t like this but this is what we have to do. . . . You can still be a good friend. It’s hard, you know we’re good friends yet, but it’s a different spectrum because work is work and social is social, and I try to make that very, very clear.

One individual talked of her volitional separation from her former peers. She offered she would not consider socializing after work with her former peers because of potential ramifications. This individual expressed concern that after-hours socializing could interfere with the possibility of having to discipline one of her former peers.

Along with relationship changes that occurred because of the desire or need to establish some separation from former peers, another contributory factor emerged. Both part-time and full-time bosses articulated specific behavioral changes they noted since becoming boss. One person stated, “There are times when I can hear—you say something to somebody and behind you, you can hear the eyes rolling-type. You know that it’s happening behind you. You just know it.” One individual used her own body language during the interview to demonstrate how her former peers would turn their heads away from her as she spoke. She also described the body language of her former peers when interacting with them, saying, “I have one that actually gives you the silent treatment and will turn her chair right away from you.” On another occasion, in discussing a schedule change with a former peer, the interviewee said, “And she sat there, she had no eye contact. Oh God. I just hate it.” In another example of a behavior change, the same individual described how she was ostracized from her former peer group.

There would be talking going on, reception joking going around. I was out to the bathroom, out to break. When I come back, and it would stop, and really apparently, I mean obviously. It was not—I got ejected from the group.

Another participant had a similar experience of being ostracized. She described the change in what had been at least a collegial working atmosphere with her peers, saying, “It’s changed quite a bit. I said to W. [her boss] this can be a really lonely place to put in an eight-hour day. It can be a really lonely place in this building full of people.” Both of these individuals articulated one specific behavioral change on the part of their former peers which contributed to isolation and relationship dissolution. They both related their perceptions of constantly being watched by their former peers. One individual, in reflecting on her own experience and on what an individual contemplating such a move should know before accepting the promotion, said,

They’re going to watch everything you do. They’re going to hear everything you say. You will be critiqued and you’ll be judged on it. . . . You know they called me mini-manager before I was even a lead [because of her decisiveness]. They called me mini-manager teasingly anyway so we figured it [team lead position] was a good fit. But, you know, then it was OK because then if they don’t like what I said—you see, they’re not comfortable arguing back with me. . . . whereas before they might have said “Well, who died and made you boss?”

Another individual had a similar experience, saying,

I never knew I was such an interesting person. Everybody is so focused on everything you do. That’s the thing, that I feel like I’m under the microscope all the time, you know. The way I’m doing things or why I’m doing them that way or

have to justify why I'm doing it that way. . . .So that's been harder. And it's also been—you know, there's an expectation also. It's just people have a different—they put you as, Now you're part of "them", you know what I mean?

It's kind of gotten to the-and I don't know. I don't even feel good saying it because I don't think this is how it should be, but you kind of put on your suit of armor and you go back in the next day.

Although this increased scrutiny was mentioned directly by only two individuals, it was alluded to in the words of a third person and bears inclusion as a sub-theme. Within the last quote, another sub-theme emerges as well, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of the different themes and sub-themes.

The charge of being "one of them" was heard by other participants as well. It was experienced as a challenge by some and as an accusation by others. Former peers had expectations that the new bosses would take care of all issues and problems because they were now part of management. Five individuals experienced the "one of them" charge as being a challenge either to their credibility or to their authority. Support for company positions was suspect because of the association with management, no matter how little or how much of their time was dedicated to administrative duties.

One participant, who only had four hours of time dedicated to her supervisory duties, talked of being discredited by her former peers.

You know, there's always the meeting after the meeting. If I overhear it and I come across it, I say, guys that is not what V. [her boss] said, that is not what she meant. Don't take that one little sentence and, you know, you got to try and look

at it from her point of view. . . .So then, you know their response is usually, Yeah, of course, you're going to stick up for her because now you're one of them.

The description of "being one of them" was not experienced only by the part-time bosses. One full-time department director stated, "...then we had the ones that said, Oh, yeah, go, but I don't really believe anything of what you're saying to me, you're just one of them now."

Although being "one of them" reflected a change in the nature of relationships, it also meant a former peer might try to take advantage of having a friend in a position of power. Specifically, their former peer and friend now had the authority to grant favors. Not surprisingly, several of the interviewees discussed how favoritism had become a consideration in their relationships with former peers.

A perception of favoritism was something that four of the new bosses were conscious of and actively sought to minimize. They noted that at least some former peers expected favoritism while others were watching to make sure there was no favoritism. One individual stated that her former peers took liberties with coming into her office and spending an excessive amount of time chatting.

Some people think that now they're my best friends and they come in here and they're chatty, chatty where I need to get my work done and need to get them back on track. . . .Other people in the department have brought it to my attention. Another new boss stated that her former peers seemed to put unrealistic expectations on her because of their past relationship.

Did you think I was your best friend and you would get everything you wanted?

And maybe it is familiarity, maybe it is because we are kind of friendsy-friendsy,

but I have to be friends with everybody. . . .Even if I was best friends with one of these women, I couldn't give her preferential treatment.

Her words acknowledge the fact that relationships with friends now carried an element of utility not found in their previous relational history.

Relationship history emerged as a sub-theme in a different way also. Several of the supervisors commented that knowing their peers gave them a head start in knowing how to manage their former peers. They could adjust the message or the way the message was delivered to suit the personalities of their former co-workers. One participant summed it up in these words.

I think just working with the girls already before I took the lead position. I think I knew how everybody was and how they would react to certain things. I think you have to be a little more gentle with some people, I think, so you don't hurt their feelings.

Two supervisors commented that having been one of the group also eased the adjustment of the group to having a former peer as their new boss. One commented, "I think they realized that I haven't really changed as a person. I'm still that same person, but my job responsibilities are a little bit different but I'm still a very even keel, that very objective individual."

Four of the individuals felt their prior history with the work group as a peer did not prove to be advantageous. One interviewee said, "It would make things easier if when you came into a position people didn't already have an established relationship with you because it's hard to change." She noted that the same personal qualities which had made her an unofficial leader were no longer seen as desirable by her former peers.

Her decisiveness and, by her own admission, abruptness, had been accepted in the role of a co-worker, but caused some difficulties in her role as boss.

For others, their prior relationship as a peer subtracted from their credibility and authority as boss. One individual commented that because so many people knew her as a staff nurse, physicians and other leaders (including her own boss) were slow to accept her as the charge nurse. Another described a similar experience. When discussing resistance of staff to implementing new mandatory standards, he said, "Maybe I'm seen more as a friend when I'm suggesting to do these things rather than as a boss that you have to do these things."

Another sub-theme within the interpersonal dimension was the description of relationships in terms of family. This was a common analogy used by both full-time and part-time bosses. It was used by individuals who identified relationship changes with former peers and those who denied changes.

For the two part-time bosses who stated there were no changes to the relationships they had with former peers, the working group was described as being like siblings, and in particular sisters. Of note is that these two individuals also spoke of having close relationships with their former peers. One individual stated,

We play together, we work together, but it's also like having a sister. You love your sister, but sometimes you want to just wring her up by the neck. . . .So I guess we have no problems calling each other butt heads.

When asked if her former peers were still comfortable calling her a butt head, even after her promotion, she responded, "I totally recommend that they do."

Three other individuals also used the analogy of family when talking about their work groups. One individual spoke in terms of wanting to protect her former peers from a too intensive and stressful work situation as a mother might do. The others used the image of parent and child in terms of challenges to authority or performance issues. One individual said, “It probably sounds bad, but they’re kind of like kids. They test and they see what they can get away with and pressure and see if I really mean what I say when I say something.” For another participant, the parent analogy was applied to an interaction with a former peer. In describing the “silent treatment” she was receiving from one of her former peers, she said, “That is like my fourteen year old daughter. . . .That’s how it feels and that’s hard to deal with.”

Not surprisingly, the interpersonal dimension was a major theme of all of the interviews. That is, being a boss is at its essence relating to and managing people. Therefore the many stories surrounding relationships, and the perceived ways in which they changed, reflected the significance of this theme. Closely related to the interpersonal dimension is the intrapersonal dimension. After all, it is what an individual brings in terms of their own history and experiences that shapes and re-shapes current relationships. The next section will explore the facets of the intrapersonal theme expressed by the participants as part of their experience.

Intrapersonal dimension

For most of the individuals, dealing with intrapersonal conflict was part and parcel of their experience. This was true of both full and part-time bosses. For full-time bosses, the intrapersonal dimension focused primarily on two dimensions. The first centered on how to gain compliance from former peers. Sometimes this meant acting in

ways that were unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Part-time bosses struggled more with their own acceptance of the authority their new role afforded them. One commonality between both full and part-time bosses was their questioning of whether they were in fact capable of adequately performing their new job duties.

All but one of the participants, in one way or another, expressed doubt that they really were capable of handling their new position, or at least of handling some of the job duties involved. For part-time people, the self-doubt was related more to their perceived lack of skills in dealing with interpersonal or performance issues of their former peers.

Well, part of my problem is I don't have a lot of experience in conflict resolution. I don't have-I don't have the skills, or I feel I don't have the skills to fix the problem. I don't always know how to appropriately respond, and because I went from just being one of the gang to somebody that all of a sudden everybody comes to, some of it is performance issues, a lot of it is not.

The same individual later says, "Sometimes when I talk to people, it just –you know, my lack of training, my lack of experience, sometimes it just comes out wrong."

That sentiment is echoed in these words by another participant.

I don't feel comfortable enough to sit there and say, 'I'm sorry you're late, we're going to give you a tardy slip.' I know I've not had any form of formal training to do that step part of it even though my boss, my manager is working a satellite and here, and she's not always there so that things fall upon me and my co-lead if doo-doo hits the fan.

One other individual succinctly stated, "I'm not really this team leader type person."

Several full-time bosses also expressed self-doubt, but for them the issues pertained more to organizational issues. On the surface the issues raised by these bosses may seem applicable to any new boss. Yet their words may reflect a consciousness of not being accepted by other managers who may remember them as a front-line staff person instead of a manager. One full-time boss described it by saying,

The managers have been here for years and years ... and you're the new kid on the block, you're still learning. And sometimes I feel like if you say things, is it going to come out stupid? You know, like the inexperience goes, plop, and comes out and they look at you, like, where did this one come from kind of thing. . . . Am I supposed to go this person and ask for all this information, or are they going to look at me like a complete and total idiot? I should know that, why in the world are you asking me that now? So now I'm going, Should I have asked that question before because now I'm just going to look like an idiot?

Another full-time manager, in speaking of the unanticipated long hours of the new position, said, "Sometimes I feel I'm not managing the position, it's more managing me. I'm going, Why am I doing this? G. [former boss] was able to leave every day at four-thirty. I'm going, I must be doing something wrong." Again, while every new boss may struggle with the demands of a managerial position, this person had the knowledge of how his own previous boss had managed the same position. In addition, his former peers had knowledge of the efficiency of the former boss. It is possible that this individual was aware of the potential for comparison between him and the former director.

While both full-time and part-time bosses had doubts about having the skills to perform successfully in their new role, some of the part-time bosses seemed to question

whether they really did have more authority as boss. Their words reveal their difficulty in stepping into a position which gave them at least some power over their former peers.

Four of five part-time respondents gave conflicting statements about their perception of the authority they now had as bosses versus how they saw themselves in that role. One individual articulates her contrasting views of her new position in the words below. She initially accepts that she has the ability to decide a course of action and wants her former peer to accept and respect that. Later she clearly states that she doesn't have any additional authority. Her vacillation is noted in the following response.

She would kind of ride me, kind of push me, not really kind of respect that [making decision]. Not that I had authority, but just respect for me, in general, with what I could do. I basically stood up and said, No you have to respect me and you have to realize that I can make this choice and I'm the one that's going to have to suffer for the consequences. I know this is kind of hard for you, but I'm making these choices and doing these things and you cannot-she doesn't have a real part of it. She was mad at me because she felt it was I who was in authority. I said I don't have any more authority than you do or anything else like that.

Another part-time boss expressed similar sentiments in relation to conflict management between her former peers. She at once stated that she was surprised to find conflict management part of her new job responsibilities while stating also that she knew she would have to be involved. She differentiates authentic leadership from the position she now holds, but states that additional leadership training would have been beneficial to help deal with issues among her former peers. Her ambivalence about her position is reflected in the following words.

Neither my co-team lead and myself feel very comfortable doing that [conflict management] because we don't have that training. We knew that when she [their boss] was gone...we knew that in those small amounts we would have some conflict resolutions that we would have to fix, but not to the extent that we sometimes-what you're thinking a true manager would do. . . . I don't, you know, feel that we should actually have true management training, but sure would be kind of nice to have a little more background.

Another of the part-time bosses simply stated, "I really didn't anticipate people looking to me for true leadership." This last statement reflects an ambivalence regarding the assumption of an elevated work status. If some participants expressed some ambiguity regarding their own status as a leader, others talked about questions of personal integrity, or of having to be other than they believed themselves to be. This emerged as another sub-theme within the intrapersonal dimension.

As with other findings, this sub-theme may be found in interviews with new managers in general. Yet again, there are subtleties which suggest a difference between the two groups. For example, the words below indicate how one of the full-time bosses described her struggle in balancing the company position with her own value system. This may be particularly salient within this study because her former peers had at least some knowledge of how this individual reacted to organizational directives prior to her promotion. If they now perceived their former peer to be supporting positions as boss that she would not supported previously, her credibility might be at stake.

She relates the situation, saying,

...I don't believe in dishonesty and so when it comes to difficult decisions or getting people to buy into something I may not believe in, I try to find something within that, that I can get them to buy into, that I can buy in myself because otherwise how can you get somebody to buy into something that you don't believe in yourself.

Her words reflect the challenge she felt in trying to remain consistent with her own value system.

One individual alluded to feelings of duplicity when she was asked by her own boss to observe patterns of behavior in her former peers.

If I were told and especially if it is about one of the workers, my perception is that I'm not supposed to key on it [performance issue] but watch for it. . . .And it might be a little sneaky, yes, but I was told to pay attention to it. . . .like I said, it's kind of sneaky, but it's not sneaky.

Five individuals talked about having to act in ways that caused personal discomfort in order to accomplish a particular objective. One individual described how she had learned to be more authoritative with one individual, saying,

I'm not an authoritative-type personality. . . .I've already had somebody do that over me [be authoritative] and I cringe and I know, probably because on my personal analysis I don't respond well to that, and so that's why I don't like to do that [be authoritative].

For two of the five, their understanding of leadership behavior created some internal stress. One participant said, "Suddenly I'm supposed to wake up and no longer be who I am." She later says, "I think they're just expecting me to somehow become

suddenly more professional. I don't know, less like me." Her words are indicative of the distress she experienced when trying to align who she knew herself to be with what she perceived to be the behavioral demands of the position.

Whether faced with self-doubt, or striving to integrate their sense of being with their sense of what the job demanded, the intrapersonal domain was a major theme for most of the participants. Coupled with the interpersonal and the organizational themes described earlier, these three domains provide a rich description of the experience of going from peer to boss. The stories of the participants do not end with their struggles though. In the following sections, their stories continue, with descriptions of how they negotiated the particulars of the themes described above.

Research question two: How do supervisors manage the experience and the changes that occur?

New bosses used certain strategies to make sense of the new and uncertain world of management. In some cases, new bosses needed to make sense of how to squeeze more duties into too little time. Some needed to make sense of how to stay connected with the team while being separated from them by virtue of their positions. Some needed to make sense of newly exhibited behaviors of their former peers.

For part-time bosses, one of the biggest challenges was a slowly increasing list of new responsibilities with no extra time allotted to actually accomplish them. They handled this by a more constant shifting between staff duties and administrative duties. When they had some down time during their staff duties, they squeezed in a few minutes here and there to accomplish their supervisory duties. Another strategy was to formally or informally take themselves out of more leadership responsibilities. One person said, "I

can remember telling my manager that I can't get this done because I don't have this resource or this access or this amount of time to do [this project].”

For full-time bosses, increasing familiarity with the roles of other departments, e.g. human resources or finance, reduced the ambiguity associated with managerial job expectations. Other participants also found that organizational resources helped to negotiate the challenges of their new position. Most of the individuals mentioned they participated in coaching sessions with their own supervisors that were offered by the education department of the organization. All of the interviewees had taken at least one seminar for new leaders provided by the organization.

Beyond this, all but two of the new bosses looked to their own boss for guidance and support. One individual stated that her boss, in response to the participant's frustrations with not having enough training for the position, offered her the opportunity to attend training sessions outside of the organization. She said, “...I have signed up, V. [her boss] has been giving us some of these Fred Pryor seminars, flyers,...on time management topics and delegation topics and dealing with difficult people.” Other new bosses described more hands-on mentoring by their own boss. One spoke highly of her boss, saying,

She's been very supportive when I had a problem, when I've had a question, when I didn't feel qualified to do something being asked of me, she's given me training on the computer. New things, new tasks I have to do; yeah, she's great, she's given a lot of support.

While the organization and one's own boss could assist with negotiating some of the new demands of the position, other issues had to be negotiated individually.

The theme of separation as a strategy emerged in several of the interviews. For some of the bosses, separation was a strategy of self-preservation. Three of the participants specifically spoke in terms of how they had to separate themselves from the behavior of their former peers. Their words belied the intensity of their experience. Two of the individuals spoke of putting up a shield where the other referred to putting on a suit of armor. One stated, "People were just verbally attacking-it was not attacking and not abusive but it was just-I was carrying it all and I had to put that shield up." The other stated, "I don't even feel good about saying it because I don't think this is how it should be, but you kind of put on your suit of armor and you go back in the next day." A fourth individual offered her strategy for dealing with what she perceived to be petty complaints from her former peers, saying, "So, when it's emotional issues versus something that truly is work-related, and when it's not truly work-related, I'm trying to repeat in my head: Jimmy crack corn and, guess what, I don't care." For her, separating herself from the petty complaints of her former co-workers was critical in managing her new position.

Other participants used separation differently. Several of the new supervisors discussed how they had to set themselves apart from former peers in order to accomplish a certain goal. They accomplished this by developing a different, more direct style of interaction with their former peers. When speaking of trying to get former peers to change behaviors or processes, one individual said,

I tried to approach it in a friendly manner and tried to say, Hey, you know, I got this situation here. You know this is what you did. You probably should have done it this way. And you know, doing it that way I haven't had a whole lot of

success in changing behavior. So I'm kind of starting to lean more towards trying, hey, this is how it is, this is how it has to be, cut and dry.

One participant noted she needed assistance to learn how to be more direct with her former peers.

At first I was uncomfortable doing it [being direct], and I didn't know what-how they would feel towards me. So I went to M. [her boss] for a coaching session on how to do this and how to approach them and what to say without offending them or offending myself. So then, that helped a lot, too.

Putting some emotional separation between herself and her former peers allowed her to confront them on behavior or performance issues.

While several of the interviewees spoke of putting some distance between themselves and their former peers, others made particular efforts to do the opposite. In fact, one of the individuals who emphasized her separation from the petty complaints of her former co-workers also went out of her way to remain part of the group. After feeling that she was being excluded from conversations this new boss stated, "Now, it's improved. I worked on it though. I tried harder to joke around. . . .I try to show them that I'm still one of the group-part of that team." Another individual also described her efforts at connecting with former peers. She tried to make daily contact with her former peers, even though as supervisor she now had responsibilities to several departments.

In contrast to part-time bosses who encountered challenges related to the performance of both supervisory and staff duties, full-time bosses welcomed the opportunity to perform regular staff duties. For them it was a way of remaining connected with the group. All of the full-time bosses felt this was integral in gaining the trust and

respect of their former peers as the new boss. One interviewee said this was especially important to differentiate her leadership style from that of her predecessor. She described her efforts, saying,

So I spent a lot of time not just with the students that I was overseeing, but also the technologists, working with them as well. . . . I'm still here and I still have hands and I'm still a technologist. It was that total hands-on kind of integration that, I'm here and I'm working and I'm not just a figure-head if you will.

Another full-time boss told how his former peers appreciated seeing him out of his office and helping them. This contrasted with the actions of the individual previously in the management position. He described this scenario by saying,

Sometimes I just need a break whatever it is that I'm working on, or I just need to get up and walk around [helping in the department]. And so I think they at least see that and go, whoa, you know B [interviewee] will help out. They will ask me, 'Can you cover for me?', and I'm like, absolutely, sure, no problem.

Similarly another individual spoke of how her offer to help can lessen the sting of having been given an unpleasant or late surgical case. Her empathy is reflected in the following words.

This is what needs to be done. And I understand; I'll give you as much help as I can to help you get through this case. . . .And so, they're running the whole time and an extra pair of hands can help them a lot. And it can soothe the weary souls of the day staff. A part of it is, too, just showing that I'm willing to be there to help them too. . . .So, kind of being not only a leader, but also a helper.

Two of the full-time supervisors spoke of helping their staff by working the night shift to cover for significant personnel losses. It was important for them to show their former peers that even as bosses, they were still part of the team.

Another common strategy emerged with both part-time and full-time bosses. Actions to minimize status differences were described by several participants. In some cases this status equalization seemed to function as a way of gaining compliance. Other times it was a way of remaining part of the group. An example of the later is found in the words of a full-time boss who said,

I want us to be a team. I don't want us to be in a pyramid thing where I'm the manager. I realize that, yes, I'm the manager, I have to make the difficult decisions and that's why I got the job as manager. But in the same respect, I think we should be treated as equals. I don't feel like I'm the manager, you're the nurse, you do what I say because I said so. It's more on a—more of an equal basis.

One recently promoted part-time boss said, "...the girls I work with know I'm not [the boss] and they know that I'm a person they can go to to find answers." Another admitted having to reassure a former peer of their equal status in order to defuse a challenging situation. After denying any sense of hierarchy to her former peer, she told the interviewer,

It's just that I'm the one that they're going to come to as the lead, and we kind of hashed it out, and now it's great. We work really well together. And she understands now more of the responsibilities, needed to know what I did so she understands and respects that more.

For her, it was important that the former co-worker knew the difference in job responsibilities as a team lead, but also understood that the difference was not one of status or power. Equalizing positions was a way of resolving the conflict.

New bosses also had to make sense of the behavior of their former peers as they managed the tensions that arose. Sometimes the behavior causing the conflict was new and surprising to the new bosses. They dealt with it by ascribing emotional or psychological characteristics to it.

Participants spoke of managing their new position by attributing negative attitudes, or challenges to authority, to causes external to their position as leader. Four of the participants used the term “strong personality” to describe former co-workers with whom they were having problems since becoming boss. Two others simply said difficulties stemmed from “personalities”. One individual described her former co-workers negative attitudes and challenges to her authority as being due either to frustration for having to stay late (but within the demands of the job), or simply to a strong personality. She says, “Most of it is frustration seeping out.” Later, regarding a former co-worker, she said, “I don’t think she sees me as a charge person, but she’s also one of my strong personalities, and it depends on the day. And we all have our good days and our bad days.”

Another interviewee, in talking of the difficulties she had observed one of her supervisory peers going through in the transition from peer to boss, stated, “A lot of it has to do with the personalities of the two groups we work with, where mine are more laid back and hers are more uppity.” Yet another said, “But I kind of knew in the back of my mind that I was going to have problems with this individual because of the [former

peer's] strong personality.” It is not clear from their words whether this attribution actually resulted in improved behavior on the part of the peers. Their words do suggest, however, that this was a useful way for them to make sense of that behavior.

If attribution was one way of making sense of the behavior of former peers, new bosses also struggled with their own behavior and how it was perceived by their former peers. This is one example in which an intrapersonal experience also becomes a strategy. Four of the bosses talked about how they had to self-monitor their own behavior now that they were bosses. One individual described her efforts, saying,

I can't make facial expression. I can't make gestures. . . .I didn't know that a supervisor or team lead had to have more of a stone face, if you will; have to be careful about your expressions; have to be careful about, you know, your eyes. I very much feel like I have to watch myself. I have to. . . .I've never worried so much about—that little voice in my head is always keeping me in check: S. [interviewee], don't say anything about that; S., let it go, don't roll your eyes. You know I'll sigh . . .and you know they hear me sighing and I'll say, I'm just sighing, it's okay.

For others, self monitoring was a way of fulfilling their own ideas of being a good boss. One individual talked about correcting performance issues. He said, “I guess I always try to give people the benefit of the doubt. I don't want to be viewed as being a real jackass of a boss.” Another individual spoke of self-monitoring to take the emotion out of a situation. She described her efforts by saying,

Sometimes I think people open their mouth and don't realize what they've said. And it happens way too often, and sometimes I have to—I have to work at it

really carefully to make sure that what I'm saying is, you know—to be a good communicator. What I say is what I mean and not taken in poor context or anything like that.

The strategies discussed above all helped to solidify the new boss in their role as boss instead of peer. Sometimes, as with separation, this was used both protectively and proactively. Other times strategies were used to minimize status differences with staff or to manage conflict. Sometimes, new bosses used seemingly contrasting strategies such as separation and connection. It may be argued that any new boss may employ the strategies described above. Yet the bosses in this study may experience more tension associated with a particular strategy. Their responses in previous paragraphs indicate that in general and at some level, they were concerned about staying connected to their former peers. This consideration may not be operative in bosses who have no prior relationship with their direct reports. This question will be further explored in the next chapter. It is sufficient here to note that bosses use a variety of strategies to negotiate their new world. Whether or not those strategies were helpful will be explored in the following section which addresses Research Question number three.

Research question three: What changes, if any, have occurred over the course of the supervisory experience?

Nearly all of the new bosses expressed the view that things had improved over time. This was due to clarification of expectations, or issues related to personnel, or even getting more organizational assistance. Sometimes it was due to efforts the new managers made to change the way they approached a particular issue or individual. In a few cases, change was described as fleeting and inconsistent. The stories of these individuals will be

included as well in order to provide the reader with a full description of the range of experiences.

One minor theme that emerged was in the case of individuals who described change through no direct action or intention on their part. Three participants noted resolution of relationship issues simply because the person or persons with whom there was tension left the department. One interviewee and a former co-worker had both applied for the same supervisory position. The interviewee noted, “And when the other person didn’t get the position, they were very upset. She did put her notice in.” Interestingly, the perception of this new boss was that the co-worker was “just wanting a change”. She did not ascribe the co-workers resignation to rejection as a candidate for the supervisor position. Even for those bosses who had experienced the benefit of a resignation to ease the tension, they, along with other bosses noted further changes that occurred with the rest of the staff.

One of the improvements with staff was increased recognition by former peers. Six of the participants talked of how with time, their position as leader was solidified in the minds of the staff. Former peers began to value the input and guidance of their new boss. One of the full-time bosses articulated this saying,

I think I’m finally being seen as a management-type position now again. I mean ...my old work peers because they come to me and they ask me, what should we do now? So they come to me and ask me for directions.

A part-time boss described it this way, saying, “...they all come to me with questions now and ask...the girls feel like ‘maybe I do have someone to talk to if I have a problem’.”

Another of the part-time bosses talked of how her former peers relied on her to raise issues with management up the line. She stated, "I think they know that we're going to say it [a problem] so they didn't feel they have to say anything because they know its going to be brought up." Another individual talked of how she had gained recognition in the eyes of the staff with her ability to effect department change. She described this increased standing with the staff by saying, "...now she comes to me more with things that, you know, whether it's a concern or whether it's something we could do differently; more positive feedback I get from her."

If acceptance by former peers was one evident change, acceptance by management was also a change noted by two of the individuals. One put it like this, "I believe I have the supervisors and management helping me and finally focusing at the fact that, yes, I am part of management and I'm not a staff nurse any more." Although this increased recognition by other supervisors did not involve change with former peers, it nonetheless was one aspect of change that was helpful to a successful transition.

If acceptance by former peers and new peers was one aspect of change, another significant theme emerged that reflected more of an internal acceptance. Five of the new bosses, described moving towards a more holistic way of thinking. They talked about needing to consider what was best for the organization or the importance of getting a broader picture of a particular issue. One individual, when asked about changes stated,

I learned about the system, about our clinic, about everything. . . .and I think that's a good thing because it makes me work better. It makes me understand what everybody else is doing. I think maybe that's what makes me get along with everybody a little bit better. . . .I think you need to see the whole picture.

Another individual stated: “I have to think of the good of the department, and for the good of the department, this is my decision and I will stand by it.”

Some of the changes that participants talked about centered on changes in their own acceptance of their new positions. One individual talked of this change in terms of belief in her own abilities. She asserts,

I find myself more willing to put myself into it and try to fix the problem or try to help people with it and instead of not ignoring the situation. Confidence, I guess.

I have more confidence in handling situations.

Another noted how her own perspective in dealing with the attitudes of her former peers had changed by saying,

And so I took myself out of the equation more and looked at it more as the equation rather than me being the problem. . . . I don't take it personally. . . and I make sure that I direct the situation so that it's not putting me as the attacker from all sides.

If the above bosses noted areas of improvement, three of the bosses who had noticed initial deterioration in the relations they had with former peers felt less certain about progress in restoring those relationships. Contrary to what might be expected, this did not seem directly related to the length of time they had been in their positions. One of the individuals in this group had been in their position for over a year; one for 10 months, and one for six months. One person noted that although most of the staff had “gone back to a friendly relationship”, he also stated that one person in particular continued to isolate him as “one of them.” Another described what might be described as cyclic and tenuous improvement, saying, “I can go for, you know, a month and be feeling good, thinking

things are going well, and then I find out that they've [former peers] indeed been complaining about how I've been doing my job."

Similarly, another individual stated early in the interview that relations with her co-workers seemed to have improved over the second half of her year as boss. Later in the interview she admitted this came at some cost to her with the stress of always having to monitor her own behavior, saying, "I very much feel like I have to watch myself. I have to." The improvements she noted over time seemed associated with and dependent on her own behavior as opposed to continuing and stable improvement described by some of the new bosses.

The previous paragraphs described how the new bosses in this study experienced change over time. As with the findings related in the opening sections of this chapter, change occurred at the organizational, interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. Many of the bosses who had experienced some relational or intrapersonal change did note a positive trend as they were in their positions longer. Other times change occurred without specific efforts of the new bosses as staff left the department, thereby resolving the tension of the relationship without repairing the relationship. For a select minority, change was tenuous and inconsistent, even after some months in the position. For them, the transition to boss had not been a smooth one. They continued to struggle with being caught between what and who they knew as a peer, and what and who they knew as a boss.

Summary

The results presented here indicate that individuals who have transitioned from being a peer to being a boss of that same work group have wide-ranging experiences. This section highlighted the themes within the broad categories of interpersonal,

organizational and intrapersonal experience. Although there were differences in the experiences of the full-time and part-time bosses, similarities also emerged. Variations were noted among individuals who had close relationships with their former peers and those who had only collegial relationships. Intrapersonal tensions emerged as a major theme across all categories of participants.

All of the participants were able to articulate strategies they used to help negotiate their transition to their new positions. For a few, the strategies were mainly a continuation of past behaviors. Others found themselves in unfamiliar situations, albeit with familiar people, which demanded a change in their own behavior. In general, but not exclusively, new supervisors expressed their perception that improvement across all domains had occurred the longer they had been in their positions.

Thus, the results chapter has accomplished its goal. That is, the stories of the participants were presented to give voice to people who had recently been promoted to manage their former peers. Listening to their voices will increase the reader's understanding of individual experiences. It also sheds light on the intersections, similarities, and differences among and across the stories.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Individuals who have been recently promoted might be expected to have a certain degree of anxiety and anticipation about their new position. Some new bosses, however, have to deal with a particular set of circumstances surrounding their promotion. For individuals who move from being a peer to being the boss of that same peer group, the transition requires an adjustment to the organizational and personal demands of the new role. Yet the transition also encompasses unique demands. A former peer now has to figure out how to be a boss over former colleagues or friends. They often find themselves in no-man's land. They may not be acknowledged as a peer by other managers who continue to see them as staff. Initial excitement is often replaced with a sometimes harsh reality. Because they have been promoted from within an organization, job orientation or leadership training may be scarce. They may also find relationships with former peers change, or those former peers have certain expectations of them that are new and sometimes overwhelming.

Exploring the experiences noted above, as described by individuals who have made the transition from peer to boss, surfaces major areas of similarities in their experiences. It also identifies differences between the stories of the full-time bosses, and the part-time bosses whose duties included the continued performance of regular staff duties. These similarities and differences will be explored in this chapter. Further, this exploration will be grounded in dialectic theory. Throughout the chapter, the usefulness of dialectics to frame the complexities found within the stories of the participants will be demonstrated.

This section opens with a general discussion of how the experiences of the participants fit within the four basic dialectic premises. Following that are separate sections devoted to each of the three research questions. Again, the totality of a person's experience is not so neatly divided into research questions. The stories of the participants wove between what they experienced, how they dealt with it, and how their experiences changed over time. The organization presented here is one way of articulating the depth and variety of responses in a way that is digestible for the reader.

Dialectic Theory

As outlined in the literature review, dialectics is about experiencing and negotiating tensions caused by competing and opposing demands. Its application here demonstrates its usefulness in helping to understand the very real experiences articulated by the interviewees. Specific examples will demonstrate the utility of the dialectic approach in understanding the experience of the participants. As mentioned in earlier chapters, dialectic theory is predicated on the ideas of contradiction (or opposition), totality, praxis and change. The following paragraphs will describe how each of these concepts is evident in the experiences of the participants.

Participants' stories were replete with descriptions of contradictions and how those contradictions impacted interactions with former peers and with their own new managers. This is illustrative of Dindia's (1994) position that contradictions or oppositions are constitutive of all social phenomena. For the interviewees in this study, one example of contradiction occurred at the interpersonal level. New bosses experienced a pull between being part of the group, and being outside of the group now that they were boss. They sometimes worked to remain part of the group, and at other times had to

behave or communicate in ways that set them apart from their former peers. Another example of contradictory or opposing forces is seen in the contrast between what these individuals understood their new jobs to entail, and what the actuality of that position was. Competence in one's former job duties was contrasted with feelings of insecurity regarding the knowledge or skills to fulfill new responsibilities.

While it may be argued that any new boss may describe a similar experience, this particular finding may be enhanced by the particulars of moving from peer to boss. For example, peers promoted to management have at least some knowledge of the responsibilities of the boss in their department. They have seen and interacted with the boss. They know how the department runs (at least they think they do). Simply put, a peer who moves up to management may have unrealistic expectations of the ease with which they can make the transition. This unrealistic expectation may have exacerbated the insecurity and angst of the participants in this study. The felt and expressed intrapersonal tension caused by the co-existing opposites of certainty and uncertainty demonstrates Werner and Baxter's (1994) contention that tension between co-existing opposites does occur at the intrapersonal level.

The above example may be used to illustrate another dialectic concept, that of totality. Totality implies that experiences are embedded within larger systems and are best understood within an examination of all the systems. Whereas uncertainty and certainty operated at the intrapersonal level, the tension was accentuated and to a certain degree transformed by the expectations of former peers. Not meeting those expectations resulted in tensions at the interpersonal level. Therefore, an examination of how new

managers experienced varying degrees of uncertainty and certainty must occur at both levels.

Praxis is a third dialectical concept. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) describe how past and present communicative choices influence future context and interactions. This idea of praxis is illustrated by the concept of a relational history. Allusions to relational history permeated the stories of participants.

Some found having a relational history was detrimental in their current position. In one example, comments and behaviors that had been accepted as a peer were no longer accepted as a manager. Jokes or non-verbal communication were now seen as offensive, whereas they would have been accepted prior to the promotion. Other individuals had a different experience. Prior history with their former peers provided a basis for interaction and understanding. Knowing how their former peers acted and interacted was helpful in tailoring communication to each individual. In either case, communicative choices in the past informed the present situation.

The concept of praxis was carried further by two participants. They specifically described how they were being measured against the actions of the previous boss. Their comments are illustrative of Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) position that current communicative choices are constrained by past interactions, even if those interactions occur with a different individual. Both of these individuals had to demonstrate and communicate that they were in fact different, and in these cases, more responsive than the previous bosses. For these two individuals, their own past history with the group seemed to be negated when they became a boss. Rather than being the known staff person, they

became “the boss” and acquired, at least to some extent, the characteristics of the old manager.

The fourth concept inherent to a discussion of dialectics is change. Change results from the tension between the contradictory forces (Baxter & Simon, 1993). Baxter and Montgomery (1997) describe change as a spiral, driven by experienced tensions. Relations are transformed as individuals in a relationship experience differing pulls and pushes. This idea was only partially supported by the participants. Some of the participants in this study did experience a transformation of relationships. This occurred as former peers started approaching their new bosses with questions. As the new boss came to be seen as knowledgeable and credible by their former peers, their new status was also accepted by former peers.

Other participants did not experience a transformation of the relationship. In some cases, the tension between a boss and a former peer was resolved when one party resigned. In other words, the relationship was not transformed but was dissolved. In other cases, the new bosses did not articulate if or how a particular relationship was transformed. Rather than being a refutation of any dialectical tenet, it may simply reflect the relatively short length of time that some of the participants were in their new position.

In some instances of denied relational change, a closer examination illustrates some evidence of change. One individual described how she was now responsible for monitoring the behavior of her former peers, and found having to do so was somewhat underhanded. In her capacity as boss, she had to exercise some judgment over her friend’s behavior, rather than accept it as she might previously have done. Although not articulated as such, change did occur because of the responsibility she now had to

monitor the behavior of her former cohorts. To what extent the peer would have thought the relationship changed if he or she found out her former co-worker was now the behavior monitor is unknown.

In an example of change not specifically addressed by any of the scholars cited earlier, many of the participants described change at the intrapersonal level. Yet this aligns well with Werner and Baxter's (1994) contention that contradictions exist on an intrapersonal level. If contradictions exist at the intrapersonal level, it is logical to suggest that change occurs at that level. An example of this is the new boss who found relational difficulties and uncertainties tied to job expectations diminished as she grew more confident and more holistic in her thinking. While it is impossible to say in what order the change occurred, it is clear from her words that transformative change occurred both at the inter and intrapersonal levels.

The above examples serve to illustrate the dialectic nature of the experiences of the study participants. The following section will examine, from a dialectical perspective, just what those tensions were and how they were negotiated. Variations within the responses of the participants will be discussed. Similarities and differences that occur between the study findings and the literature will also be noted.

Research question one: How do individuals who have been promoted to manage their former peer group talk about their experience?

Many of the bosses described situations that supported Spitzberg's (1993) idea of communication competence as having dialectic complexity. Although they did not define their language and behavior choices in terms of competence, their words indicated experiences in which they had to negotiate between opposing communicatively

competent choices. As an example, bosses talked about having to make choices for the good of the department or organization which put them at odds with former friends. What might be considered organizationally effective was not so in terms of relationships with friends.

Several of the bosses related situations in which they had to change their use of language to accomplish a certain goal. Without denying that any new boss has to negotiate between effectiveness and appropriateness, the new bosses in this study had the added concern of whether their language would alienate them from their former group. Language that was more relationally centered (appropriate for friends or cohorts) was ineffective in getting people to change their performance. Being nice was just not enough. Language had to take on a somewhat harsher tone, even if that put former relationships in jeopardy.

Another example to support Spitzberg's (1993) work is found in relation to what he labeled context-impaired / context facilitated communication. Some of the bosses described situations in which their communication with former peers was enhanced because of their prior history with the group. They knew their approaches to different people had to be different. Thus, they demonstrated more effective and appropriate communication because they were in what Spitzberg (1993) would name a context-facilitated situation.

Some bosses had the opposite experiences in which they felt their previous connection with the work group made their transition more difficult. Past communication styles or behaviors that were acceptable to former peers were no longer accepted by those same peers. It was these bosses who described having to constantly monitor their own

behaviors, creating a high stress (context-impaired) environment. Although some scholars of dialectics suggest that an individual may move between the opposing ends of a dialectic tension, the examples above do not indicate that. For these individuals, relational history was either helpful in creating a context-facilitated environment, or else contributed to the development of a context-impaired environment.

Another example of the context-impaired / context facilitated dialectic is found within the stories of those managers who had challenges in being accepted by, or feeling a part of, management. Sometimes this surfaced as frustration with not knowing processes or timelines for requirements. While it might be argued that any new manager would experience some context-impaired situations, there is some difference with the new managers in this study. The managers in this study may have received less orientation and training because they were promoted from within. In some cases, the participants had been appointed temporarily to manager. When the transition became permanent, they slid into the position. This seemed to impede the occurrence of what might have been typical and comprehensive new leader orientation for managers hired from outside the organization. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that these new bosses simply did not know enough about needed management skills, or about their new job expectations, to realize the omission.

At times this tension was expressed as feelings of inadequacy when working with other managers. Often this seemed related to the lack of acknowledgement they felt from other, more established managers. Nearly half of the full-time managers spoke directly of, or alluded to situations which exemplified this. Their own history as a staff member

proved to be an impediment to gaining full acceptance by the rest of the management team, and sometimes by their own directors.

Dialectics of leadership

Although succeeding paragraphs will discuss the similarities in the experiences of the participants with the work of Collinson (2004), this section will begin with an example of a variation with his work. Where Collinson (2004) discusses the dialectics of leadership from the vantage point of the led, another perspective is identified by the words of the full-time bosses. A common theme among them was their dedication to assisting their former peers with regular staff duties. For them, leadership also meant service to their former peers, a concept which in itself is somewhat of a contradiction.

This idea of leadership through service is not unique to this population. It is mentioned here because of its' utility for this group of new bosses. Like other bosses, assisting front-line staff may demonstrate empathy and dedication. Unlike other bosses, assisting front-line staff for these participants seemed to serve as a reminder of the former collegiality and team dynamics. Whether or not this finding can be categorized as a dialectical tension is perhaps less important than establishing that the new bosses in this study moved along a continuum of behavior. At one end was the performance of staff duties; at the other was the performance of their leadership duties.

In agreement with the work of Collinson (2004), participants largely described experiences which are consistent with his contention that leadership itself is a construct which is influenced by dialectical tensions. They articulate examples in which those who are led actually participate in leadership by virtue of resistance or dissent. Further, this

dissent contributed to specific behavioral changes by the new boss, or to specific relational changes.

One example of the above is seen in the words of the bosses who talked about the constant scrutiny they received from their former peers. Their words seem to indicate their perception of this monitoring as passive resistance to them or to their position. They went on to describe interpersonal changes to relationships, or specific relational changes they had made, because of behaviors of former peers which could be considered dissenting or resisting. Former collegiality was replaced with relational walls as they experienced the isolating behavior of their former peers. This sort of relational transformation was neither anticipated nor welcomed by the new boss. Yet it does demonstrate the dialectic axiom of transformative change in response to tension.

Also in agreement with Collinson's (2004) work is the finding that all of the participants experienced situations in which their authority and decisions were challenged or questioned by former peers. Specifically, the charge of being "one of them" is an example of how former peers expressed resistance to the credibility and the authority of the new boss. Certainly, dissent and resistance are not relegated to situations involving peers who become boss. It is the particular accusation of having turned into "one of them" that is salient to this study. As in the prior example, the dissent or resistance of the former peers became a force for change as new bosses found ways to deal with this phenomenon.

This sometimes was an alteration in the communication styles of the new bosses, but sometimes was an intrapersonal change in which they were forced to change their perspective of a situation, an interaction, or an individual. This is not to imply that former

peers were cognizant of their behavior as dissenting or resistance. Nor does it imply that the new bosses were even able to articulate the behavior as such. In fact, descriptions of personalities or job frustrations were often used when discussing challenges to authority. The question must be raised whether these attributions served another purpose. It is possible that this tactic moved the relationship or situation away from a personal level. It may have been easier to accept a difficult personality, or a bad day, than to admit that challenges to authority may indicate a change to a long-standing relationship. On another level, the attribution reflected in many of the stories of the participants may help to mitigate intrapersonal tensions as well. If the problem is due to someone else's bad day, it can't be due to one's own inexperience.

In or out?

The attribution discussed above may be reflective of another major theme, that of autonomy or connection with the former peer group. All of the participants, either directly or indirectly, gave evidence of their awareness of continuing participation (or not) in the group, or with specific individuals. This is consistent with the work of Zorn (1995). He found that participants in his study also dealt with the competing poles of being independent yet remaining connected with their former peer. It is also consistent with Bridge and Baxter (1992) who found that friends who were also work associates struggled to balance the autonomy required in a work situation with the connection they desired as friends.

Within this study, however, there was some variation among participants. Some interviewees felt a need to be part of the group. They also needed enough autonomy to

make decisions, accomplish administrative duties, or perform disciplinary actions. In some instances the new bosses seemed to vacillate between wanting connection with the group and wanting independence from the group. In other cases, even bosses who actively sought some separation from the group described efforts to remain connected.

Some of the variation mentioned above is based on the closeness of relationships. Bosses who identified the closest relations with their former peers prior to the promotion also reported fewer changes in terms of isolation or exclusion from the group after their promotion. The de facto autonomy, by virtue of the promotion itself, was not a factor in these cases, or at least not in terms of interpersonal relations. Yet the words of some of these individuals indicated a consciousness of being outside the work group.

Along with the promotion came some responsibility for monitoring the work performance of their former peers. This created some internal tension for them, but there is no evidence that it impacted relationships. It is possible these new bosses trusted their friends to accept their new position and the authority it implied, without any change in terms of their connection to the group. This is consistent with Bridge and Baxter (1992) who found that status unequal close friends did not have to use specific communication strategies of separation or selection to negotiate relative autonomy or connection.

In what initially may seem to be a contradictory finding to the above, full-time bosses with only casual relations with former peers also did not report changes in terms of exclusion or inclusion. They did not articulate concerns with whether or not they were still part of the work group. Perhaps they simply did not have a need to be as strongly connected because they had already been functioning with a large degree of autonomy from their peers.

Part-time bosses who reported having more casual relations with former peers seemed to experience the greatest degree of tension over where they stood in relation to their peers. It was these individuals who talked about being isolated and having to actively work to gain back even the same level of casual friendliness. Their experience may be understood in terms of Werner and Baxter's (1994) idea of interpersonal conflict. Those authors advance the idea that conflict may be caused because the people in a relationship sometimes privilege different poles of a dialectic tension at the same point in time. The former peers still had their work group; they were still connected. The new boss, by virtue of the promotion, was in fact already in an autonomous position and therefore might be seeking the reassurance of connection.

In another example of the autonomy-connection dialectic, even those individuals who had been good friends and who experienced few disruptions to relationships, voiced concern about leaving the department short-staffed when they were performing their staff duties. In these cases, demands external to the relationship (i.e. new job duties), created a sense of autonomy to which the new bosses were sensitive. This sensitivity extended to the point where they did not pursue leadership training that they themselves identified as desirable. In this case, connection to the group took precedence over the autonomy required to take the courses.

A further aspect of this particular dialectic tension occurred in relations with management. This was not described by any of the cited research studies. Several of the bosses described their perception of not being connected to other leaders. Not having mentoring, not being accepted as a leader by one's own boss, not being included in meetings all reinforced a sense of isolation from the existing management group. If

autonomy and connection had to be negotiated with former peers, it also had to be negotiated with new peers. It is possible that the sense of isolation from the new peer group only exaggerated the perception of autonomy or isolation from the old peer group.

Whether applied to former peers or to new peers, the autonomy-connection dialectic was played out also as a choice of strategies. This was consistent with the findings of Zorn (1995). Individuals identified behaviors by either the former peers or the new bosses that served to separate the former friends. In his study the separation occurred within individual relationships. For participants in this study though, boundaries were set with the group as a whole. This could mean curtailing socialization, or changing discussion topics. In other cases, boundaries were minimized as bosses helped out the staff by answering call lights on the nursing floors, or even working night shifts. Beyond just reinforcing social connection, stepping in to assist was a way of building trust, of showing empathy, of being visible, and of being approachable. It did not seem important whether those qualities may have been observable in the former peer role. It was important to demonstrate those qualities in the current role.

Status Differences

Given the very nature of this study in examining the transition from being a peer to a boss, it may be surprising that status equality or inequality would be a major theme. That is, status inequality is a given because of job titles. Yet this theme did emerge. Further it is consistent with the work of both Zorn (1995) and Bridge and Baxter (1992). Yet some differences with their work also emerged. Where the participants in those studies were speaking of how status inequality impacted their friendship, the individuals in this study talked about minimizing the inequality in order to gain credibility and

acceptance in their new position. For full-time bosses, continuing to perform staff duties was an indication of minimizing the inequality. Both part and full-time bosses used statements that minimized the status difference in what sometimes sounded like efforts to placate former peers. Somewhat paradoxically, they had to diminish their authority (or at least state their equality with former peers) in order to actually exercise their authority.

Although some authors (Bridge & Baxter, 1992) identify favoritism/impartiality as a separate dialectic, it is logical to discuss it within this section. If there were no status hierarchy, there would be no opportunity for charges of favoritism. Not surprisingly, those bosses who did talk about favoritism denied its existence. It was more that they were aware of the potential for favoritism because of expectations of their former peers, or the appearance of favoritism as seen by their former peers. This also is evidence of an awareness of the difference between the public and the private face of interactions with peers. How a particular relationship, or even interaction, could be interpreted by others was something to pay attention to. This concern with the public face of a private relationship is a dialectic tension identified by Rawlins (1983, 1989). Although his work was done with young adult friends, a similarity exists with the current study participants.

Intrapersonal tensions

One theme that was striking in its recurrence was the tension that was felt on an intrapersonal level. Although Baxter and Montgomery (1996) disagree with Werner and Baxter (1994) who suggest that dialectical tensions may be found in both the intrapersonal as well as interpersonal realm, the vast majority of participants in this study did voice their experience of having to negotiate different internal pulls. For these individuals, the intrapersonal conflicts they felt were as real and as valid as the

interpersonal dimension. They had to wear a different public face now that they were boss. Many participants discussed, in varying ways, how they felt they had to “be” someone other than they perceived themselves to be. Being sneaky, reconciling personal positions with the organization, and learning to be thick-skinned and assertive caused internal conflict. It was difficult for them to watch for performance failings among their former peers; their once cohorts knew what organizational positions had been supported when the new bosses were front-line employees; assertiveness might cause problems with a friend. In short, the participants in this study had to find in some measure, a new way of constructing themselves in relation to their work group and organizational initiatives.

This is in agreement with Fagerström’s (2006) work among healthcare workers. Nurses reported having to be a different kind of nurse than what they imagined. How the new supervisor saw themselves, or how they wanted to be (as supervisor), was sometimes in contrast to how they needed to be to achieve a certain goal or effect needed behavior change. Like the participants in Fagerström’s (2006) study, whose experience was driven by demands external to the patient / nurse relationship, the experiences reported by the participants in this study were sometimes driven by organizational demands, (i.e. productivity expectations). Unlike Fagerström’s participants, sometimes the experience was driven by the actions of former peers. Again, it is the relationship with the former peers that makes this finding pertinent to this study. Participants already had a sense of who they were within the former peer group. They seemed to find that at least in some situations, they could not be that same person with the same behaviors and same relations they once had.

Ambiguity

Participants often floated between experiences of certainty and uncertainty. For full-time bosses who had clear job descriptions, there was a large degree of unknowing related to unwritten organizational expectations and processes. Ambiguity in this case was related more to intrapersonal stress versus interpersonal relations. For part time bosses, some of the ambiguity was due in part to the position itself being new and not having clear job descriptions. Ambiguity was also created because job descriptions (incomplete as they were) did not get clearly communicated to the rest of the staff. The effects of this on the new bosses as well as on the staff contributed to expressed relational ambiguities and in some cases relational deterioration.

One author mentioned the ideas of ambiguity and certainty. Rawlins (1989, 1993) discussed how young adult friendships move along and between the two opposites. While there is a stark difference between the make-up of the study participants in this study and those in Rawlin's (1989, 1993) study, there is some agreement in the expression of ambiguity. Rawlins (1989, 1993) discussed how young adults experience ambiguity because they are just establishing their relationships. As their relationship continues, areas of unknowing become more resolved while at the same time, new facets of the individuals and the relationships appear, creating more ambiguity. In the current study, the bosses already knew their former peers, sometimes for several years. Yet the movement of one member of the relationship to a new position, something that is external to the relationship itself, created ambiguity for both the boss and the former peer. How each member of the relationship will react or change because of the status change is, at least initially, an unknown.

Research question two: How do supervisors manage the experience and the changes that occur?

New supervisors used a variety of strategies to deal with the tensions they experienced. In general, the strategies served to reduce uncertainty, to diminish intrapersonal tension, to solidify positions, to foster connection, or to increase separation. Sometimes the same strategy was used in different contexts. That is, one strategy proved useful across more than one domain. The following paragraphs will explore how the participants negotiated their transition.

As was seen in the previous section, new bosses experienced a high degree of uncertainty. Figuring out the limits and responsibilities of the position itself created both intra and interpersonal tension. Many of the participants took direct action to reduce organizational ambiguity associated with their new position. They sought out information from other departments, or participated in training sessions offered by the organization. Although this study did not provide for a longitudinal examination of this, it may be presumed that uncertainty regarding the specifics of the role would be diminished or completely resolved.

Admittedly this is not a strategy unique to the participants in this study. It may even appear to be more in alignment with role theory which holds the position that tensions are actually eliminated. Understanding the parameters of their new role did mitigate or eliminate at least some of the organizational uncertainty. Yet a closer examination will demonstrate the relationship this finding has to the dialectic framework of this study. Dialectic theory states that people act in ways that may alter their experience of a particular tension without eliminating it.

For instance, reducing or eliminating role uncertainty was identified by participants as helpful in transforming relationships. This is an example of dialectic totality as described by Johnson and Lang (2004) where the individuals, the tension, the actions, and the situation are all inseparable. In the example at hand, relationships were also transformed as the tension between role certainty and uncertainty was reduced. This occurred with former peers, but in a reversal of the hierarchical difference, also occurred with one's own boss as acceptance by both groups increased over time.

If actions to reduce role ambiguity were instrumental in transforming interpersonal relationships, they also helped to transform the tension expressed in the intrapersonal realm. This is consistent with the work of Werner and Baxter (1994) who, in contrast to Baxter and Montgomery (1996), noted that individuals experienced dialectic tensions across both systems. Specifically, the new bosses in this study expressed how they gained confidence in themselves, and changed their perspective of a situation, as role clarification increased.

Sometimes gaining perspective meant acting in ways that increased the distance between former peers and the new bosses. Both full-time and part time bosses used separation to negotiate tensions with their former peers. This is consistent with the work of Bridge and Baxter (1992). They found that identified that friends who were also co-workers isolated one role from the other. Zorn (1995) describes a similar strategy in his study but labels it autonomy. One difference between the works of the two authors is how the strategy was used by the participants.

In the former study, this strategy was used to maintain the friend relationship. In the latter study, participants reported the dissolution of their friend relationship due to the

behaviors of the other. In this study, participants related how they separated themselves from their former peers. In some cases, they stopped socializing; in others they chose not to participate in certain types of communication. Separating themselves from their former peers seemed to be accepted and expected, especially with the full-time bosses, in order to make unpopular decisions, or to ensure future objectivity and fairness. Similarly, they found their competence in effective communication sometimes necessitated separating themselves from their former peers. Directives had to be given as a boss and not merely suggested as a friend might do.

The theme of separation as a strategy also manifested itself in a way unique from that of the authors cited above. Several of the participants used separation as a way of deflecting what they considered hurtful or divisive behaviors by their former peers. In this situation, separation was used more as a strategy to negotiate intrapersonal tension caused by the unexpected negativity of their former peers. For some of the new bosses, separation became almost a strategy of self-preservation.

Another related strategy is what some new managers described as self-monitoring. Readers may observe that anyone in a management position has to exercise self-restraint. Indeed, self-restraint or self-monitoring is common in any relationship. Yet for several of the participants in this study, the need to monitor one's behavior and speech loomed large in their experience. Monitoring their own behavior seemed to function as a sort of protection. Those individuals who described this most eloquently talked as if self-monitoring was a necessity. It served to deflect spoken or implied criticism of their own capabilities (or deficiencies) as a boss. Monitoring one's own behavior may have been an attempt to prove that one did have the management skills necessary for success.

Interestingly, this intensive self-monitoring may have functioned to actually prioritize the viewpoint of the former peers. If the former peers were now finding fault with one's behavior, one's behavior must be at fault and should be scrutinized. It did not seem to matter if the former peers were justified in their observations or complaints.

In an example of how different dialectics and different strategies are apparent over time, some of the same individuals described their efforts to re-establish connection with former peers. This fits with the work of Montgomery (1993) who specifically advocates that adaptations, or strategies, are context dependent. This also is an example of the cyclic nature of relationship transformation as described by Baxter and Montgomery (1997). As the new bosses encountered isolating behaviors from former peers, they sometimes seemed to enforce that isolation by their own responses. Other times they actively worked to connect with former peers. One explanation for this may be that as the new bosses gained experience in their new position, as some of the uncertainty surrounding their own job expectations was resolved, they were able to turn their attention more to the relational aspect of their new position. For a few of the new part-time bosses, efforts to stay connected with former peers seemed to take priority over their new management role. Declining leadership training opportunities, or removing oneself from some of the new supervisory opportunities may reflect a privileging of connection over the autonomy that came with their new status-unequal position.

Maintaining connection also occurred by equalizing one's own status with that of lower status former peers. This sometimes was conveyed through direct assistance to the former peers, especially in the case of full-time bosses. It also was conveyed by specific verbiage, most often by the part-time bosses. When they communicated to former peers

that they were just the “go-to” person, or didn’t really have additional authority, they were maintaining their status in the group. This is consistent with the work of Zorn (1995) who found that bosses in his study sought to minimize the work status differential. He specifically attributes this as a way of negotiating what he calls the equality-superiority dialectic. Yet in this study, it surfaced as a way of maintaining connection.

The use of attribution as a strategy was identified in the majority of interviews. Although somewhat similar to a strategy identified by Zorn (1995), differences remain. In Zorn’s (1995) study, new bosses attributed their own directives as coming from an even higher management level to minimize the status differential. In this study, new bosses used attribution to make sense of the behaviors of their former peers. Complaints or negative behaviors were discounted by attributing their source to personality or circumstances. This seems to be related more to the concept of power that Collinson (2004) describes. In the study at hand, dismissing a complaint without acting on it was a way of defusing it. The dissent or resistance implied by the complainer became less powerful when it was attributed to a bad day. Whether or not attribution ultimately proved effective as a strategy to change the behavior of former peers could not be identified within the time frame of this study. Nor is it clear from the study that this was even a goal of the new bosses. Attribution might have simply been a way of not having to deal with the challenges posed by the complaining and negative behaviors they now encountered.

Research question three: What changes, if any, have occurred over the course of the supervisory experience?

As new bosses negotiated the new terrain of their supervisory experience they were met with both opportunities and challenges. In terms of relationship changes, no clear theme emerged. Some of the bosses were adamant in stating that no changes to relationships occurred because of their status change. While at least some of those same individuals spoke of challenges they had encountered from their former peers, they did not feel these challenges caused any relationship changes. This finding seemed tied to the type of previous relationships they had with their work group. Those who were close friends, and conversely, those who were only casual or work friends, reported fewer changes to relationships with former peers.

Other bosses were forthright in acknowledging that they had experienced some changes to prior peer relationships. For some participants the changes were both mystifying and disheartening, yet all but one new boss was able to articulate improvement over time. Even this individual was able to articulate fleeting improvement. Within the group who had noticed change, some differences emerged. Some of these individuals expressed the perspective that the relationship had returned to its prior state. Rather than being transformed as might be expected from a dialectic viewpoint, the relationship had deteriorated and then was renewed to its former level.

Other bosses were clear in describing more positive changes to their relationships. They noted a difference in how their former peers now approached them for instruction or advice. While this was not articulated as a change in the level of closeness, it does reflect a transformation of relationship. The relationship now carried with it a level of

utility as the new bosses were a potential source of information and clarification. They gave direction, created schedules and granted vacations. This perceived usefulness was welcomed by the new boss, and may have reflected for them an affirmation of their new role.

A smaller variation was reported in the experiences related to intrapersonal and organizational factors. Not surprisingly, improvements were attributed to resolution of organizational uncertainty. Yet this should not be overlooked in terms of importance. For nearly all of the participants, this was an important part of dealing with both intrapersonal and interpersonal tensions. This is one example where participants had a clear preference for functioning at one end of the dialectic of uncertainty and certainty. Certainty about job expectations, policies, procedures, and responsibilities was related to effectively handling other experienced tensions.

Analysis Summary

There is an old adage used to express the concept of being in simultaneously different places. Being caught between a rock and a hard place might well sum up the experience of the participants in this study. For some the rocks and the hard places were softer edged, like sandstone cliffs. For others, the rocks and hard places were sharp edges of granite. How these new bosses traveled between the rock of their former peer group and the hard place of their new position was at once individual and common.

Unarguably, some of the experiences in the preceding sections would be common to bosses promoted from outside the organization. Yet the preceding sections have also demonstrated how the seemingly ubiquitous nature of those experiences is specifically applicable to the situation of the peer who became the boss. The added nuance of being

promoted from within the work group seems to intensify some of those commonalities. To return to the adage above, the rocks and the hard places become honed and hardened by virtue of the new status differential with former coworkers and friends.

Thus, the experience of moving from peer to boss does present unique considerations. It is in itself a dialectic experience. That is, the positions of peer and boss are contradictory, and yet both are connected. How one functioned as a boss was both constructed and constrained by the former peer group. The image of how one appeared to former colleagues was in some way mentioned in all of the interviews, both with full and part-time bosses, indicating the importance of the former peer group, however close or collegial the relationships were.

The influence of the former peer group manifested itself in a variety of ways. Considerations of power in terms of dissent or resistance contrasted with the new authority of the former peer. Isolation or connection from former peers was at once driven by the former peers and the new bosses, according to individual actions or reactions. Relational history could be helpful or deleterious. Personal integrity and credibility collided with accusations from former peers.

Yet if the peer group was instrumental in how the new boss adapted to their role, so were other influences. New bosses found that simply having a title did not guarantee access to a new manager peer group. It might not even guarantee recognition by ones' own boss who still considered you one of the staff. Having a new job did not guarantee a well-developed list of job expectations. Nor did it guarantee additional time to perform new duties.

Intrapersonal challenges existed as well. Goal accomplishment necessitated changes to communication styles. Commitments to the job had to be balanced against commitments to home; commitments to organizational goals had to be balanced against personal beliefs; commitments to the success of the department had to be balanced against wishes or needs of former coworkers and friends.

While not all of the challenges outlined in the previous paragraphs applied to all of the participants, one central theme was present and pressing in all of the interviews. That is, the interviewees all expressed frustration with the lack of training they received prior to their promotions. Some had a more particular opinion about the lack of training. They specifically mentioned their perception of receiving less training than would be typically given to a person hired externally. Their own employment history with the company seemingly negated the need for formal training, even though their new positions came with far greater responsibilities. While acknowledging the resources the organization had to offer them as leaders, they also expressed frustration with the lack of resources available to them in preparation for their promotion. Simply put, lack of management training before the promotion added to the stressors and the strains of the transition for both full and part-time supervisors.

Rather than having prior exposure to the challenges of being a first-time boss, they found things out the hard way. They learned that knowing the technical aspect of the job was not enough for handling performance issues; having friends as coworkers did not ensure those same people would remain friends; being an informal leader as a peer did not grant automatic acceptance in a formal leadership role; communicating effectively as a peer proved to be different than communicating effectively as a boss, and managing

conflict among peers was different than managing it as a supervisor. While any new position requires time and learning, formal education and training helps to smooth the way. In the case of the peer becoming boss, the way would have been smoother for not just the new boss, but for the former peers as well.

In spite of the lack of training, and to the degree that each of the participants experienced particular challenges, they were also able to articulate ways in which they had dealt with or were dealing with the above tensions. Needing to make sense of behavior, they attributed negative behavior to external causes. Needing to ensure objectivity and fairness, they separated themselves. Needing to accomplish goals, they changed their communication style. Needing to build trust and credibility, they worked alongside staff. Needing to protect themselves, they isolated themselves. Needing information, they sought it out. Needing connection, they equalized their status through word and action.

The effectiveness of the above strategies allowed the majority of the new supervisors to move from uncertainty towards certainty; from exclusion toward inclusion (at least to the extent they sought it); from frustration and angst toward knowledge and relative security; from self-doubt toward self-affirmation. With varying degrees of outside support, they were finding ways to negotiate the tensions they faced.

To some degree this will continue to be an on-going process for the participants. There will be new organizational policies that may not be in alignment with one's personal viewpoint. New challenges to authority or credibility may arise. Personal needs for autonomy or connection may change as one becomes more ingrained in their new role. While participants may not wish to believe so, reality may demand more of

continuous adaptation, rather than a resolution. The reality is that they may once again find themselves in that spot of transition and transformation, between a rock and a hard place.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As a non-traditional Master's student in search of a thesis, it became clear that my research needed to be engaging, personal, and valuable. An article on dialectic theory provided the classic "Eureka" experience. The article, along with my own experience of this particular job transition, provided the perfect thesis option. Being a peer and being a boss of that same group are in themselves contradictions. Relationships are changed because of the new differential in status. Yet, in other ways they are not changed as one continues to work with the same cohorts. Organizational alignment is changed. Yet, one continues to be a part of the same department and same organization. Therein resides the source of many of the questions and tensions surrounding the issue of moving from peer to boss. This study sought to understand those questions and tensions.

Surprisingly there was little research about this topic. Yet among healthcare organizations, promotion from peer to boss is a common occurrence. Individuals are regularly promoted from within the organization. Management is often comprised of clinical staff members who have been promoted to manage their former peer groups. Evaluating whether or not clinical expertise translates to managerial effectiveness was not a goal of this study. Rather the goals surrounded the lived experience of individuals who were immersed in this particular job transition. A primary aim was to provide pragmatic value to organizations that have a vested interest in facilitating the successful transition of new managers. A secondary goal was to lay the groundwork for future exploration of this topic.

The following section will address each of those goals in turn. Limitations of the present study will also be examined. Thus, it is hoped that future researchers may be prepared to further examine the topic at hand.

Applied value

The successful adaptation and socialization of employees is critical to the future success of an organization. This is supported by the work of many authors, including Kramer and Noland (1999), Graen and Binsburgh (1977) and Graen, Liden and Hoel (1982). Nicholson (1984) speaks of the importance of successful work role transitions to future individual and organizational development. It is somewhat surprising then to hear of the scope of organizational inadequacy related in the stories at hand. This is not to assume any ill will on the part of the organization, but simply points to the reality experienced by this group of employees. Several of the interviewees commented on this specifically. A common perception surfaced. They received less support and orientation from the organization because they were promoted from within.

Although presumably highly successful in their former roles, the description of lack of organizational support was striking. It may have been assumed by the organization that employees promoted from within would have a strong working knowledge of the organization, its policies, procedures, and processes. Yet a front-line employee certainly has a different knowledge of the organization than a person in a leadership position. This was often reflected in the words of the interviewees. To a large degree, these individuals did not have the knowledge they needed as they assumed a management position. How they understood their new job duties and position was often at odds with the reality of their experience. At a minimum, clear job descriptions and

clear expectations for both the new bosses and the former peers, would have reduced uncertainty and frustration.

While any new position carries elements of uncertainty and anticipation, the transitions of these employees could have been further supported by more up-front and mandatory training. Training could include information on conflict management, performance issues, and basic human resources policies to name a few issues. While acknowledging the importance of taking the initiative to seek out information on one's own, it is also true that one needs to have a certain level of knowledge from which to act and inquire further. Ashford and Taylor (1990) aver that individuals often experience rocky work transitions in spite of their own efforts. Organizational support is therefore needed to successfully adapt to their new role. Care must be taken that managers promoted from within the organization and within the department do not fall through the proverbial crack.

Even though many of the participants did tap into organizational resources, this often occurred well after they had taken their new positions. In some cases, the more immersed they became in their administrative duties, or as time for administrative duties waned, they simply had no options to avail themselves of further educational opportunities. Missteps and mistakes might have been minimized if those opportunities had been offered or mandated early on. Organizations may consider offering educational opportunities even prior to the actual promotion date.

More difficult perhaps than dealing with organizational support are the needs at the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. As has been noted earlier, part of the interpersonal strain could be reduced by clear expectations on the parts of all involved.

Beyond this however is the need for new bosses to understand in a more holistic way how their promotion may impact them, and the relationships they had with their peers.

The importance of this can be found within the words of the interviewees. All but one person described an awareness of the potential for impacted relationships (if not having experienced it directly). All but one included descriptions of intrapersonal tension or difficulty. While an individual brings their own personality and history to any experience, and some people seemingly handle stress more easily than others, the ubiquity of this theme underscores its importance. Rather than seeing this as an individual issue, organizations would do well to provide resources to address this.

Individuals moving from peer to boss need to be told up front of what may lie ahead. They have to know of the potential for lost or changed relationships. They have to know they will be under a microscope. They have to know their authority will be challenged. They have to know they will be suspect as part of the administration. They have to know they may not be part of the same old gang. They have to know they may not be immediately accepted by the new gang. They have to know that people may act differently toward them. They have to know it takes time. They have to know there are resources to help them.

Beyond the utilization of a formal Employee Assistance Program, other options for assistance could be helpful as well. For instance, providing regular opportunities for new supervisors to meet and discuss their experiences would serve two purposes. It would help increase the sense of belonging to a new peer group, thereby mitigating potential feelings of isolation from the old peer group. It could also simply provide an opportunity for sharing similar experiences and strategies. Again, this could be done

informally, but as was heard in the stories, many individuals felt squeezed between administrative duties and staff duties already. The organization may need to provide the formal infrastructure to make this happen.

Another option exists to help new bosses make a successful transition from their old peer group. Having the opportunity to discuss issues with a neutral third party, perhaps someone from the human resources or organizational development department could be valuable in identifying potential areas of conflict or tension before they reached a critical juncture. Individual or small group meetings with other new managers could provide a forum for sharing ideas and issues.

The suggestions above are not to suggest that organizations are solely responsible for a successful job transition. Individuals in management positions are there presumably because they have had some success as front-line staff, and have been identified to have management capabilities. To that end, individuals also need to be assertive in seeking out assistance or answers. Yet it is also clear that individuals continue to need the support of the organization in making a successful transition.

Limitations and future possibilities

Because the limitations of this study also point to the possibilities for future research, they will be discussed within the same section. Before proceeding further, it is necessary to reinforce the statement that this researcher had a personal interest in studying this topic. Rather than assuming an unreasonable researcher bias, however, personal experience provides the potential for a more complete understanding of the stories of the participants. Yet that does point to one potential limitation of this study and suggests a future direction.

Qualitative research methods were specifically chosen in order to hear as complete a description as possible of the participant experiences. In this way, themes could emerge and be analyzed within a dialectical framework. Yet there is precedence for using quantitative methods (Bridge & Baxter, 1998) to explore dialectic themes. Survey instruments that quantified to what degree different dialectics are experienced could either refute or support this author's work.

Quantitative methods would also allow for a larger sample size than the study at hand. Although twelve participants is an adequate number for the research methods used herein, a larger sample size would serve to increase the applicability of the findings. Using samples drawn from both other healthcare institutions and non-healthcare organizations would also address a potential limitation of this study. Doing so would again increase the applicability of the findings reported here.

One further limitation related to sample is in regard to gender. While perhaps not an uncommon ratio for healthcare workers, the fact that there were only two male participants may raise some questions. Further, one of the males was directly involved in patient care areas, and the other in an area related directly to patient care. As in employment trends seen elsewhere, healthcare is seeing increasing numbers of men and women in non-traditional roles. Yet the fact remains that the vast majority of healthcare workers involved in direct patient care are women. While the sample group then is not surprising in terms of gender, it does suggest an area for further work. Exploring the peer to boss transition from more gender balanced sample groups could enhance understanding of the experience and assist organizations in training efforts.

Another limitation regards the time frame captured in the responses of the interviewees. As this study sought to capture information about the experience of the transition, it provided a snapshot of the experience rather than a documentary about the experience. While questions regarding perceived changes were posed, the time frame for evaluating those changes was small. A longitudinal study could help identify the significance of this transition in terms of the relative success or failure of the individuals in adapting to their new positions. If individuals who are promoted from within a peer group to manage that peer group have a higher rate of resignation within a specified time frame, successful adaptation to the new role becomes even more critical.

Other limitations and opportunities for future exploration surround the issue of part-time and full-time management positions. Although not anticipated by this author, the inclusion of both full and part-time leaders provided both contrast and cohesion. For instance, both groups struggled with too much to do in too little time. Only full-time leaders, however, seemed to welcome opportunities to assist staff. The part-time bosses had less of a choice. They were still expected to perform staff duties and often it was the administrative duties that were set aside. Future work may examine the retention rate of people who were in part-time supervisory positions versus those in full-time supervisory positions.

Future inquiry might also address the limitation posed by the one-sided perspective of the interviewees. Relational dialectics is, by its very name, about interaction that occurs between the partners in a relationship, as well as between them and the other systems within which it is placed. Admittedly, this study hears only one

voice in those relationships. Future scholarship is needed to listen to the stories of all partners in the relationship. Doing so would illuminate questions on several levels.

On one level, the idea of power as a dialectic (Collinson, 2005) could be further explored from the perspective of the led. How do the led experience the power of their dissent? Whether or not they even acknowledge dissent or resistance as “power” would be a question to explore.

On another level, hearing the voices of the former peers would serve to balance the perspective offered by the new bosses. Where this study only examines the behavior of the former peers as perceived by the participants, it would be worthwhile to examine the behavior of the new bosses as described by former peers. Are the bosses exhibiting what the former peers believe to be isolating behaviors? If new bosses are building walls to protect themselves from perceived threats by former peers, what does that look like to the former peers?

Finally, exploring the stories of the former peers would also address questions related to group dialectics. A boss has both individual relations and group relations with former peers. Issues of public and private faces may look differently to the former peer. Issues of perceived favoritism may be felt and expressed differently from the perspective of the former peer group.

As with any research, limitations must occur and this study is no exception. While there are numerous possibilities for future research, both in terms of quantitative and qualitative methods, the suggestions above are starting points for what may be the most pertinent and productive efforts. To that end, this study does provide a firm

foundation for additional inquiry. It has demonstrated that dialectics is a useful theoretical concept in helping to understand the experience of going from peer to boss.

Summary

As I proceeded with this study and progressed to the actual writing, a phrase from the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke recurred over and over in my musings about this effort. In a response to a letter from a young poet, Rilke wrote “At present you need to live the question ...perhaps you will gradually find yourself experiencing the answer” (as translated by Burnham, 2000). In a culture of seemingly instant information and answers, this quote may seem anachronistic. However, the idea seems to align well with dialectics and with this study. Peers who became managers had to live with questions and contradictions. A subtle twist on Rilke’s quote, “At present you need to live the tensions...” might be sage advice for peers who are now managers.

This study has begun to identify some of the tensions experienced by these new bosses. Yet the utility of dialectics extends beyond a simple labeling of tensions. Dialectics has shown that it is a useful tool for understanding the contradictions and resultant tensions that surfaced within this particular job transition. It is this understanding that will prove most useful to both organizations and managers. New bosses may need to live with the tensions, but understanding those tensions will help pave the way on their journey of moving from a peer to a boss.

Appendix

1. How long have you been in your supervisory position? Was this a promotion that you actively sought? Did you go through a formal interview process for the promotion? How many people do you currently supervise?
2. How long were you in your prior position?
3. Please describe for me the nature and quality of your relationships with your peers prior to your promotion.
4. Please describe your experience in making the transition to your new position. What factors contributed to that experience? What were some of the challenges and opportunities you experienced? Can you describe an example that illustrates your experience? How did you negotiate those challenges or opportunities?
5. Please describe how your former peers received your promotion. Can you describe an experience that led you to that conclusion? Specifically how did your former peers interact with you? Did you notice any differences in your interactions with your former peers now that you were their supervisor? How did you manage those differences? Please describe an incident or experience that illustrates your experience.
6. Have you noticed any changes in how you manage those differences now as compared to how you managed those differences when you were first promoted?
7. Did you have any unexpected experiences as you became more familiar with your role? Did you notice any unanticipated consequences of your move from peer to supervisor? How did these contrast with your expectations?

8. What were some areas in which you were successful in your new position? How did you know you were successful?
9. There is often a difference in how a person relates individually and how they relate in a group. As a supervisor you have to relate both individually with people and with the entire work group. Please describe any differences you experience as you relate to both your work group and to individuals in that group.
10. What is the nature of your relationships with your former peers now? Have there been changes in those relationships? Please describe an interaction that illustrates this.

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