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Just-in-time: organizing the Lakota Sun Dance

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate the organizing practices of a Lakota Sun Dance, and to contribute to the literature on rituals and ceremonies in organizational culture.

Design/methodology/approach – The researcher acted as participant-as-observer during this extended ceremony. Fieldnotes capturing observations and informal interviews with Lakota elders were the source of data as recording devices were not permitted on the Sun Dance grounds. Observations were conducted for approximately 45 hours over the course of five days.

Findings – The Lakota Sun Dance can be understood through organizational theory, particularly through a unique integration of the concepts of agency, loosely coupled systems, and just-in-time organizing. The current research highlights the role of agency in organizational ceremonies.

Originality/value – This research offers a thick description of the organizing practices of an extended Lakota ceremony. The integration of traditional Lakota organizing principles with modern organizational theory is absent from the literature, and offers a unique perspective on organizing from a non-Western perspective.

Keywords Organizing, Just-in-time organizing, Lakota, Organizational rituals and ceremonies, Sun Dance, Loosely coupled systems

Paper type Research paper

Researchers have turned their attention to non-traditional organizing activities to gain new perspectives on the complexities of modern organizational life. For example, attention has been focussed on an annual community-based festival in Sweden (Lucas, 2013), stories of jazz performance (Humphreys *et al.*, 2011), and a pre-Mardis Gras, anti-corporate establishment parade (Islam *et al.*, 2008). Focussing attention on non-traditional activities such as these has led to a deeper understanding of how organizing processes, mildly constrained – if constrained at all – by formal institutionalized structures (Meyer and Rowan, 1983), are enacted and embodied. In particular, the role of agency, typically "lost in the overly bureaucratized state of institutional structures" (Meyer and Rowan, 1983, p. 24), is reinstated as a central element in organizing processes.

The concept of agency has been particularly minimized in the research regarding organizational rituals and ceremonies. Researchers in this area have argued that rituals and ceremonies are especially revealing of an organization's culture (Beyer and Trice, 1987; Trice and Beyer, 1984), and serve to reaffirm collective identity and the social order (Di Domenico and Phillips, 2009; Smith and Stewart, 2011). Attending primarily to these institutional outcomes, however, minimizes how rituals can serve individual purposes as well (Koschmann and McDonald, 2015). Focussing on institutional outcomes has left a gap in the literature regarding the micro-practices in organizing these cultural events.

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate the organizing practices of a Native American ceremony (a Lakota Sun Dance), and to contribute to the literature on rituals and ceremonies in organizational culture. The data reported on here are one aspect of a long-term project investigating the traditional organizing and communication practices of the Lakota on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota in an attempt to understand how they may inform modern organizational life (Modaff, 2014). Prior to European contact, the Lakota faced many of the same challenges contemporary organizations are facing – scarce resources, turbulent environments, and the need for stability in the face of constant change – yet were able to maintain a strong, value-based society that readily accepted these challenges (e.g. Hassrick, 1964; Marshall, 2001; Standing Bear, 1933/1978). Lakota culture and spirituality are performed and reified, in part, through ceremonies, such as the pipe ceremony, sweatlodge ceremony, vision quest ceremony, yuwipi (calling the spirits) ceremony, and Sun Dance ceremony (Powers, 1982; Stolzman, 1995).

The current paper offers a thick description of a Lakota Sun Dance held in July, 2011, which the author was invited to attend by the medicine man conducting the ceremony. The Sun Dance is one of the seven sacred rites brought to the Lakota by the White Buffalo Calf Woman (see, e.g. Amiotte, 1987; Brown, 1989; Feraca, 1998; Hull, 2000; Powers, 1975). It is a yearly event, typically taking place in mid to late summer, and is led by a medicine man with the assistance of other spiritual leaders in the *tiyospaye*, or extended family group. During this four day ceremony, Sun Dancers dance barefoot in the Sun Dance circle from before sunrise until sunset with no food or drink for sustenance, staring up at the sky toward the sun, and sacrificing their energy and strength as a means of prayer. While data reported on here are informed by interviews with Lakota elders from 2003-2015, observation of the 2011 Sun Dance in conjunction with informal conversations with Lakota participating in and observing the ceremony serve as the primary data for the present paper.

This paper begins with an explanation of the theoretical context for the study, emphasizing organizational rituals, agency, organizing, and loose coupling. Next, a description is offered of the methods used to gather and analyze the data. Third, details regarding the context of the study and the major findings are offered. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings in light of the concepts of just-in-time organizing and loose coupling, and final remarks are offered tying the results of this project back to the literature on organizational rituals and the roles of agency and embodiment.

Theoretical context

Rituals and ceremonies in organizational culture

Organizational culture includes the artifacts and behaviors, values, and basic assumptions that form and are re-formed as organizational members interact over time (Keyton, 2011; Schein, 1985). As values and basic assumptions are intangible, organizational rites, rituals, and ceremonies are considered to be observable outward manifestations of those central features of organizational culture (Beyer and Trice, 1987; Islam and Zyphur, 2009; Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983; Trice and Beyer, 1984).

While ritual as a term of analysis in the study of societal structures seems to have emerged in the nineteenth century (Bell, 1992), the work of Durkheim (1915/1961), Goffman (1967), Turner (1969), and Geertz (1973) serve as the basis for much of the theory and research on organizational rituals. Turner (1969), for example, indicated that rituals may put the ritual subject into a liminal state following a detachment from some fixed state in the social structure and/or cultural conditions. Turner's perspective

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of the ritual subject seems to have informed organizational theorists in such a way that organizational rituals and ceremonies are often conceived of as a means to move organizational participants into a state that serves to reinforce the social order, communicate organizational values, and enhance group solidarity (Di Domenico and Phillips, 2009; Smith and Stewart, 2011).

Early conceptions of organizational rites and rituals come from Trice and Beyer (1984), who argued that "they involve (1) relatively elaborate and planned sets of activities, (2) carried out through social interactions, (3) usually for the benefit of an audience, (4) with multiple social consequences" (p. 655). Islam and Zyphur (2009) stated that since Trice and Beyer (1984), few data-based studies of rites and rituals had been conducted despite the wide recognition of their contribution to the theory and research on organizational culture. In proposing a theory of organizational rituals, Islam and Zyphur (2009) argued that, "The study of rites, rituals, and ceremonies, allows researchers to study processes in organizations that might be overlooked in rationalistic, means-end approaches to behavior" (p. 133). They question, as does the current project, whether integration of organizational members and group solidarity are the only key outcomes of rituals and ceremonies, or could there be other aspects that should be considered, such as agency and the motivation that emerges not from reinvigoration of values, but from the individual's performance in the ceremony itself?

Agency and loose coupling: organizing ritual events

The problem of agency with regard to organizational rituals and ceremonies stems from the notion that these cultural events are regarded as tradition-bound, thereby relegating the role of the individual actor to the background. Bloch (2004), however, urged a different perspective: "Thus, although we normally think of tradition as something being handed from the past to the present, the appeal to the authority of tradition, something that is socially much more central, involves being handed from the present toward an indeterminable past destination" (p. 73). What Bloch does with this perspective is afford a bit more agency to those involved in the ceremony, as there is a level of consciousness in attending to tradition rather than being unconsciously guided by tradition in the execution of the event.

Current organizational research has begun to address the possibility that rituals could contribute to more than instrumental functions in organizations and could involve issues of agency. Flores-Pereira *et al.* (2008) focus on the embodiment of organizational culture in their organizational ethnography of a beer drinking ritual in a Brazilian bookstore network. They argued that culture is learned and understood as the body interacts with the culture. The concept of embodiment alludes to the importance of agency, which Koschmann and McDonald (2015) addressed specifically as they investigated the possibility that rituals could contribute to more than collective goals. They developed the concept of ritual agency to show that rituals do not just serve instrumental functions, but can make a difference for the individual participants as well.

Inherent in the recent concern for agency in organizational ritual and ceremony is the notion that such events do not just happen, but are performed (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). While past research has tended to focus on the meaning of the events and how they contribute to the social order (e.g. Di Domenico and Phillips, 2009; Smith and Stewart, 2011; Trice and Beyer, 1984), attention must now be paid to the organizing processes of the events themselves.

Weick's (1969) concept of organizing has led to thinking about an organization less as a concrete entity, and more as an ongoing process (Bakken and Hernes, 2006;

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Bantz, 1989). Weick (1969) argued that organizations are not static, but "must continually be reaccomplished" (p. 36) as they are impermanent (Weick, 2009). When applied to organizational rituals and ceremonies, the concept of organizing forces researchers to look not only at the outcomes of the events, but at the processes involved in organizing them. Despite the contention that organizational rituals, and ceremonies in particular, are considered to be planned and often inflexible events (Smith and Stewart, 2011; Trice and Beyer, 1984), the concept of organizing necessitates investigating the processes involved in the (re)accomplishment (e.g. Flores-Pereira *et al.*, 2008; Islam *et al.*, 2008; Lucas, 2013).

Integral to the notion of organizing is the idea that the parts of an organizational system should be considered to be loosely coupled (Weick, 1976). When events or parts are loosely coupled it means that they are "responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of physical or logical separateness" (Weick, 1976, p. 3). This loose coupling allows for the parts of any organization to be both stable (coupled) and flexible (loose) (Orton and Weick, 1990). When considered in conjunction with organizing, loose coupling can inform the study of organizational ritual and ceremony as it allows one to see how individuals taking part in such events may be more than scripted participants. They may pursue individual ends while taking part in organizational rituals, and because they are loosely coupled, can enact agency while remaining within the structure of the ritual.

Method

This research project began in September 2003 when I spent a month on three different reservations in South Dakota – Rosebud (Lakota), Pine Ridge (Lakota), and Lake Traverse (Dakota). I interviewed five elders on each reservation regarding traditional Lakota culture, communication, and organizing practices, gaining access to them through tribal colleges, snowball sampling, and visiting reservation landmarks (e.g. Wounded Knee Memorial). Given that the current research occurred on Rosebud, I will focus the following discussion on how I became connected to the interviewees there and gained permission to attend several Sun Dances over the years.

Rosebud was the first reservation I visited in 2003, and since I knew no one there, I started at the Lakota Studies department at Sinte Gleska University, which is the tribal college on the reservation. There I met Albert White Hat, Sr., a Lakota language and culture expert, who agreed to be my first interview. Based on that interview, Albert connected me with three other Lakota Studies faculty members, all full-blood Lakota. Through another contact on the reservation, I was introduced to Roy Spotted War Bonnet, who has since served as my sponsor on the reservation. In 2005, Roy gained the permission of a medicine man on Rosebud, Roy Stone, for me to attend a few hours of a Sun Dance. The experience was overwhelming, as there was so much going on, and I was unclear as to what I was seeing and hearing. The Sun Dance became an important topic in my interviews with Roy and other Lakota elders over the next few years.

In 2006, Roy took me to meet Roy Stone at his home in Parmalee, South Dakota. I had the chance to visit with him several times in the years that followed, and was allowed to assist in the building of a fire for a sweatlodge ceremony. Roy Stone came to trust me and my intentions to learn about the Lakota culture and traditions, and in 2011 he invited me to observe the entirety of the Sun Dance that year, as well as assist in any activities with which they needed help in preparation for the ceremony. This opportunity was one that allowed me to have direct experience with their most sacred (and non-public) ceremony; one which few other non-Lakota have the chance to experience. My role in the field is best described as participant-as-observer (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). While I was not a

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participant in the dancing itself, I was deeply immersed as a supporter – an individual there to provide mental and spiritual strength to the dancers and provide assistance in any way as requested by the medicine man in charge.

My primary interest for this project was in the performances of the Lakota as they interact with each other, as they enact the cultural rituals and rites, and struggle to endure the sacrifices demanded by the Sun Dance. I employ the term performance as Bauman and Sherzer (1989) described it: "Performance here is seen as a creative and emergent accomplishment, a form of social production and reproduction" (p. xviii). As a participant-as-observer, I was aware of how my presence as a supporter shaped, in some small part, the social production of the ceremony.

For this particular Sun Dance, I observed the ceremony for approximately 45 hours over five days. I also had informal conversations with at least six Lakota attending the Sun Dance in an attempt to help make sense of what I was observing. There is no recording or photography of any kind allowed at the Sun Dance, so the events and informal conversations could not be captured in any way other than through attendance and writing fieldnotes at the end of each day in the field. Within hours of leaving the Sun Dance grounds each evening, I would return to my cabin and write extensive fieldnotes organized around the chronology of events (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). The fieldnotes contained four specific types of notes (Richardson, 2000): observation, methodological, theoretical, and personal. The fieldnotes consisted of approximately 13,000 words and several accompanying sketches of the Sun Dance grounds. I returned to the reservation in August, 2015 while revising this manuscript to check details and interpretations with my key informant, Roy Spotted War Bonnet. We had an extensive discussion, which was not recorded as it took place on the medicine man's property. Soon after the discussion, I wrote several pages of notes in an attempt to record his observations. Some of those insights are included in the findings here to supplement my descriptions.

Given the tremendous amount of observational and interview data, the first steps in analysis were data management and data reduction (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Since the primary focus of this particular paper is the organizing practices of the Sun Dance, I reduced the fieldnotes down to those that most directly related to those practices. I then created a thick description of the major events and activities based on my observations, informal conversations at the Sun Dance, and subsequent member-checking. What follows is a description of the Sun Dance grounds and the relevant major events, including: the beginning of the ceremony, piercing, healing and heyokas, and the closing of the ceremony.

Context of the study

Sun Dance grounds

The Sun Dance grounds are modestly constructed at the top of a hill at the end of a dirt road near Parmalee, South Dakota. Two concentric circles form the center of the Sun Dance grounds. The outside circle (approximately 130 feet in diameter) is a shade area for the supporters and singers/drummers. The shade is made of vertical 2×4s serving as posts, supporting an open, circular structure about eight feet tall and topped with plywood to serve as the roof. This structure provides some protection from the intense heat for the supporters and singers during the ceremony. There are two breaks in the structure. The one to the west leads to a pine bough covered arbor where the dancers gather, rest between rounds, purify, and pray. The other break is to the east – the direction from which the Lakota believe the White Buffalo Calf Woman will return and help restore strength to the people.

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The inner circle, where the dancers will dance, is approximately 100 feet in diameter, and is delineated by sage that has been laid on the ground. There are four breaks in the inner circle, each approximately three feet wide and marked by red cedar trees (approximately five feet tall) on either side of the break. These breaks – called gates – represent the four directions, and are each marked with colored flags specific to the direction: blue, red, yellow, and white. The drum and singers are situated under the shade behind the north gate. In the center of the circle, there is a hole where the Sun Dance tree will be set when it arrives. Next, I describe the findings of this study, organized around the major events of the ceremony.

Findings

The Sun Dance ceremony begins

The four day Sun Dance is preceded by tree day, or the day that the Sun Dance tree is brought to the hill and placed in the center of the circle. When the flatbed carrying the tree arrived, it was parked at the entrance on top of the hill, and all of the dancers and supporters were there to unload it and carry it on their shoulders to the east gate of the Sun Dance circle. The tree, often referred to as a "man" whose sacrifice makes the ceremony possible, is honored, not worshiped, during the ceremony, and thanked for all that he has given so that others may live. Roy Stone led the procession with his pipe, and they stopped four times on the way to the east gate to pray to the four directions. Before they entered the east gate, everyone who was going to enter the circle had to take off their shoes out of respect for the circle. Taking off the shoes while holding a 70 foot cottonwood tree on your shoulders is no easy feat, but through careful, unspoken coordination, they all did with no apparent injury despite the strain.

Once the tree was in and the medicine man had prayed, the people were invited to tie their prayer flags and tobacco ties to the tree. The dancers who will be pierced through the skin on their chest with choke cherry sticks or buffalo bone and connected to the tree through a rope over the next several days also tied their ropes at particular spots on the tree. When all of the ties were in place, several men moved in to lift the top of the tree, and the dancers with the ropes all pulled in the same direction to get the tree upright in the hole. They moved with tremendous efficiency and with little more coordination than a few swipes of the hand by the medicine man and his associates.

At this point, the approximately 125 participants and those offering prayers move to form a large circle around the tree. The pipe is smoked by the medicine man, and then passed to every person. When the pipe has made its way around the circle, the medicine man moves clockwise around the circle, and shakes each person's hand. The first person he shook hands with moves behind him, and eventually everyone shakes everyone's hand in the circle. Roy invited me join in this process, and I noted quickly how it bonds everyone there together and reinforces the mutual support of each other as evidenced by warm handshakes, respectful tones, and words of encouragement spoken to all of the dancers.

The evening of tree day, the medicine man gathers all of the dancers under the arbor for an advice session. According to Roy, the medicine man uses this time to instruct the first-time dancers about protocol, such as how they should enter the sun dance circle, what to do with their pipes, and the order of events. He also asks the dancers if they have any questions or if they need anything, such as a feather or sage, or something else that will help them be successful. The experienced dancers are also there to provide their advice on what to expect. This discussion is the most active vocally that many of the dancers will be that evening. According to Roy, who has danced four times, each

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dancer attempts to stay inside him/herself in order to remain positive, focussed, and because the commitment each has made is between him/her and Tunkasila (God).

Each following morning of the four day Sun Dance ceremony began in a similar way. The medicine man, up well before the dancers, walked through the ceremonial grounds ensuring that all had been done according to tradition and the instructions he had received from the spirits over the past year. The dancers, generally rising about 4 a.m., were in the sweatlodge for purification; singing their prayers, and asking for strength as they began their four day sacrifice. As the eastern horizon lightened slightly, eagle bone whistles were blown to let all of the dancers know that they were to get lined up and ready. It was also the signal for the drum group and singers to make their final preparations. As the horizon grew a bit brighter (approximately 4:50 a.m.), Roy Stone led them in a song, eagle whistles were blown, and he yelled out "Hoka" as a way of saying "Let's do it!"

The procession out of the north side of the arbor (outside the circle) to the Sun Dance circle was led by several younger girls who were followed by Roy Stone, the male dancers, and then female dancers. Almost all of them were carrying a pipe in one arm and an eagle feather fan in the other hand. The procession of dancers (approximately 75) made its way clockwise from the arbor exit area, stopping four times to pray to each direction, and entered the circle through the east gate.

After walking around the circle and putting down their pipes on a rack near the west gate, the dancers, all facing the tree in the center, formed a circle around the perimeter of the Sun Dance circle. At the signal of the medicine man (a simple wave of his eagle feather), all of the dancers would rush to the center to touch the tree and pray, and would then back up to their original position. They do this four times. After the fourth time, the medicine man signaled them all to fall into formation at the east gate to dance and help the sun rise. The formation is three lines of male dancers and three lines of female dancers. The medicine man is always at the lead corner of the front row. The dance is simple – to the drum beat, the dancer lifts his/her foot and puts it back down again, alternating feet with each beat. The dancers stayed in this formation at this position until the sun made its way fully over the horizon. When he was ready, the medicine man signaled with his eagle feather that they should move clockwise to the south gate.

This (and every) round continued until the dancers made their way to the fourth gate, where they danced a while, and then at the medicine man's signal two of his leaders left the formation. One walked toward the tree and moved clockwise toward the pipes, while the other picked one of the supporters to receive the pipe. The leader with the pipe returned after praying at the tree with it for a moment, and the community member was waiting outside of the circle at the gate. The leader is dancing about six feet away from the gate holding the pipe horizontally. He lifts it above his head, and moves toward the gate. He offers it to the community member, but pulls it back and returns to his position six feet away. On the fourth time, he gives it to the community member through the gate. As he gives it to the community member, the drumming stops and the singers finish their song quickly with no drum. This is a time of relief for the dancers as they can now leave the formation single-file (beginning with the medicine man), move clockwise around the tree, and head toward the west gate to rest in their rest area. Roy emphasized that at this point, though very tired, the dancers must remain positive and focussed on the ceremony.

Piercing

A piercing round begins with the dancers getting back into the full circle facing the tree. On the first day of this Sun Dance, six male dancers were pierced through

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the upper-chest with choke cherry sticks or buffalo bones, and then they remained tied to the tree with a rope at different distances in different positions depending on their vision and commitment. The dancers who were getting pierced were brought out of the circle by one of the leaders and run clockwise around the circle and then taken to the center. They were laid down on a buffalo skin under the tree, and the medicine man's primary helper made two incisions in the chest of each dancer and then pierced each of them with the sticks or bones. Each would get up, find his rope, and loop it around both sticks and head to his position in the circle. A scream or any indication of pain was never heard.

After the six had been pierced and found their spots, the rest of the dancers fell into formation at one of the directions to begin the dancing for the round. By this point, the sun was beating down relentlessly, and the dancers were already starting to tire. Over the course of this round, several dancers went individually and knelt at the tree. This means that they were pushed past the point of being able to continue. Two of the pierced ones had to be led off as did several of the women. Throughout the day, more than a dozen would be led off.

The second to last round of the day again had the dancers come out in a circle. This time, a dozen or so of the dancers assembled behind one of the pierced dancers, and by the energy in the circle and the beat of the drum it was clear that he was going to break free. When a dancer breaks free, he gathers his rope and walks from his spot in the circle to the tree and back again three times. The fourth time he walks to the tree, he runs backwards and the sticks pull out of his chest. One of the leaders takes him by the arm and runs him around the circle, and then his rope is gathered up and he is put into formation with the other dancers. In cases where the sticks do not pull through the skin on the first try, the dancer either pulls backward as hard as he can until they are freed, or returns to the tree for strength and runs backward until he breaks free.

A particularly intense form of piercing is accompanied by the dragging of buffalo skulls. Dragging buffalo skulls is a spectacular sacrifice, and done as a way to deeply suffer for something important – usually for a family member's health or something of equal importance to the dancer. At this Sun Dance, the first piercing of this kind happened mid-morning on the second day. A male dancer was pierced through the skin on his back with two choke cherry sticks near his shoulder blades. He then walked through the west gate to where six buffalo skulls were chained together in a line with rope. The rope is attached to the choke cherry sticks on the dancer's back, and he begins to pull them around the outside of the sun dance circle, in the area between the circle and where the supporters are. The skulls are very large, and as they get pulled they bounce around, and the horns and teeth and jaw bones regularly dig into the grass making them even harder to pull. The circle is not exactly on flat ground, so at times the dancer has to walk slightly uphill, making it even more difficult.

The dancer dragging the skulls is accompanied by several male dancers encouraging him, the medicine man, and is followed by family members or loved ones. The task is so incredibly hard that it takes the encouragement of everyone there to help him through. The goal is to have the sticks break through the skin as the dancer drags the skulls around the circle; however, if the dancer makes it around four times without breaking free, then several of his supporters will sit on the buffalo skulls at the west gate and he will run and break free that way. The intensity was indescribable. The suffering was immense. The prayers were visible and appreciated by everyone.

Piercing rounds can exact a tremendous toll on the dancers. In one round on day two of this particular sun dance, three dancers were pierced in front and broke free, and two dancers were pierced on their backs and dragged the buffalo skulls. Two of the

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dancers who were pierced in front broke free on the first try, but the third did not, and you could tell it hurt. He did break on the second try. The skull draggers had a very hard time as well, each taking quite a bit of time, and having extreme fatigue due to the heat and the many hours they have been dancing. Male and female dancers were going down left and right during this round, and energy was being pulled from all of the supporters. The break after this round was quick, which meant that the next round would be the last. Roy Stone knew the dancers had been pushed to and past the brink, and he ended the ceremony for the day around 8 p.m.

Healing and Heyokas

On the afternoon of the third day of the ceremony there was a special round – a healing round – and many members of the community had arrived to take part. Anyone wanting/needing to be healed would enter the outside of the circle from the north and south gates, make their way to the east gate of the circle, drink medicine made by Roy Stone, and then proceed through the center of the circle where they could pray at the tree and then go out through the west gate. All along the way through the center of the circle, the community members would be lined on either side by all the Sun Dancers who would pray on them and touch them with their eagle feathers.

The community members are to pass through the east gate to get a drink of medicine. The person wanting to be healed would pick up a piece of sage from the circle, get smudged, drink a full ladle of medicine given to them by one of two Sun Dancers, and then walk through the gate, moving slowly through the center of the circle to the other gate. It was incredibly hot at this point in the day (approximately 102 degrees), and so the elders were escorted to the front of the lines, followed by those in wheelchairs or on crutches, then the little babies and their parents, and then everyone else. There was no jockeying for position, and a person gladly gave up his or her spot in line for someone else. The ceremony took a very long time – there were hundreds of people to drink the medicine and pass through the Sun Dancers.

As the last person approached the circle, Meredith, who helps with security and other duties at the Sun Dance, pointed to me, and motioned for me to come in. I took off my boots quickly, grabbed a piece of sage from the circle, and was handed a ladle of the medicine. Roy called the liquid pejuta, and it tasted like a weak tea. Though it was 102, the medicine was refreshing, and I decided to take complete advantage of the opportunity to ask for healing and protection for my children, wife, parents, in-laws, and brothers and sister. Passing through the Sun Dancers was surreal. They were thanking us for supporting them, and while some would make a simple tap on me with their feathers, some would stop me, and place their feathers at particular points. Given that I was thinking so hard about my children and my wife, I do not find it odd at all that they concentrated on my stomach, heart, head, and back – all representing areas that were of immediate concern. I was not a white man to them – I was a supporter in need of healing, and they worked as hard for me as they did for every other person there.

As the healing ceremony came to a close, Roy yelled to me, "It's the heyokas – the clowns!" I looked at the west gate in time to see five dancers dancing backwards into the circle. Their heads were covered with black cloth, and their skirts had lightning bolts on them. Roy told me the heyokas are friends with the thunder spirits, and they are very powerful. They dream of lightning and thunder, and the medicine man tells them that it means they will be a heyoka (Lewis, 1990).

All of the other dancers were in a large circle facing the tree, as if ready for a piercing. One heyoka was dancing around the tree in a counter-clockwise fashion

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shaking a rattle to symbolize the thunder. There was another heyoka dancing this way as well, but with no rattle. There was a female heyoka too, and she was doing the same. The other two heyokas were taunting – no, torturing – the dancers. They had a five gallon bucket of water and they went counter-clockwise around the circle putting the ladle full of water up to each dancer to tempt him or her, and then threw the ladle full of water on the ground. This was a test of strength for the dancers, and it was very difficult for them given how thirsty they must have been.

The heyokas left out of the west gate when they were done, and then the dancers took two trips around the circle so they could all get back in the proper formation by the north gate to offer the pipe to the community. This healing round lasted nearly two hours, and was exhilarating and exhausting.

Closing of the Sun Dance

The final round on day four of the ceremony began around 2 p.m. The dancers emerged from the west gate, did their clockwise circle, and picked up their pipes, eventually gathering in formation near the south gate waiting for Roy Stone to give them the signal to charge forward three times, with the fourth time being their final charge toward the east gate. In the meantime, an announcement was made that anyone making a commitment to dance next year should enter the circle at the north gate. They fell into formation with the other dancers, and the look of determination coupled with fear was palpable. They knew they were making a commitment for themselves, their families, and the community, but also saw the looks of exhaustion, hunger, and thirst in the other dancers.

As the dancers emerged from the circle, they headed clockwise toward their rest area. Many community members were lined up on their path to shake their hands and to thank them for their sacrifice. At this point in the day it was very hot again, and the number of supporters was smaller than I had expected. Community members could take up the red sticks that denoted the perimeter of the circle. I was fortunate enough to be allowed to have two of them, and could not be more proud to have them.

The dancers went into the rest area to pray and do one final sweatlodge ceremony for the day, and when they emerged they (along with some community members) dug up the tree, and carried it out the east gate. With this, the ceremonial circle was now just another circle of ground, though I cannot help believe it was consecrated with the sacrifices made upon it. Roy told me that the dancers would be back the following morning to sweat and pray once again.

Discussion

The Lakota Sun Dance appears from a Western perspective to be disorganized. There is no apparent central authority coordinating the activities in an explicit fashion – if you did not know who the medicine man was, you would probably not recognize him except for a few subtle, directive activities. There are no headsets, no flowcharts, and no written timetables. Despite this seeming lack of explicit organization, there is an underlying interdependence among the parts (e.g. the medicine man and his helpers, the dancers, the drummers/singers, the supporters, the cooks, and security), such that everyone tends to be where they need to be, when they need to be there, doing what they need to be doing. By most Western standards, this form of organizing is not particularly evident and may actually appear to be a sign of disorganization and impending entropy.

I proffer the term just-in-time organizing to explain this approach to organizing. Just-in-time organizing is a term derived from just-in-time inventory practices, a philosophy attributed to Toyota's inventory and cost reduction practices in the 1950s

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(see e.g. Chapman and Carter, 1990; Matsui, 2007; McLachlin, 1997; Ríos-Mercado and Ríos-Solís, 2012). As with just-in-time inventory, just-in-time organizing suggests that unused resources are not kept on hand, and relies on subtle cues from relevant subsystems to mark the need for change or resources. This level of organizing allows for the subsystems to coordinate activities with little impact on the overall event.

The just-in-time organizing practices are actually quite stunning in that the coordination of activities (most of them arduous in and of themselves) seems effortless. For example, with a nearly imperceptible wave of his eagle feather, the medicine man signals to the dancers that it is time to shift from one gate to another. With no other fanfare, the formation moves to its new location, and the dancers continue their sacrifice. Another example involves the end of a round of dancing when the pipe is presented through the gate to the community member. As the medicine man's assistant presents the pipe, the drummers/singers are always singing the same song in the same way, such that when the pipe is finally presented the drumming stops and the singers finish the last few words without benefit of the drum beat. This coordination happens invisibly to the supporters despite the events unfolding out in the open. A third example comes from Tree Day, when the dancers carry the massive cottonwood tree from down the hill to the center of the circle. The strain of the tree is tremendous, but the coordination of the efforts to bring in the tree and raise it in the center of the circle are nearly imperceptible and executed with little wasted effort.

McLachlin (1997) argued that four management initiatives are necessary for successful implementation of the just-in-time philosophy in inventory/manufacturing processes: promotion of employee responsibility, provision of training, promotion of teamwork, and demonstration of visible commitment. We see all of this initiatives in the just-in-time organizing behavior of the medicine man in the Sun Dance ceremony. According to Roy Spotted War Bonnet, the medicine man makes it clear to every dancer that s/he is the one responsible for his/her own success in the Sun Dance. He provides them spiritual and cultural training in the years and months leading up to the Sun Dance, and offers final advice and wisdom to the dancers the evening of Tree Day. He encourages the dancers to help each other, not in a traditional team sense, but with mutual support in the form of prayer and encouragement for each other. Finally, the medicine man, despite being the oldest dancer in the ceremony, is up first in the morning, continues dancing through the heat, fasting, and pain, and continually offers his support to the dancers through either a kind or harsh set of words.

A broader organizational concept that allows just-in-time organizing to work successfully in the Lakota Sun Dance is Weick's (1976) iteration of loosely coupled systems. Loose coupling, Weick described, involves "the image that coupled events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness" (p. 3). The Lakota Sun Dance is a loosely coupled system; the subsystems each connected to the other, but in such a way that independence is maintained. While the dancers are part of a group of sun dancers, they are also individuals out there suffering for their own needs or the needs of their family or community. They are not controlled to the point that they are unable to meet their own unique needs, but they are also connected enough to help ensure the success of the other dancers and the ceremony itself. The ceremony is structured such that it can absorb problems (i.e. dancers going down, a van fire, storms, etc.), and still continue in a productive, sacred manner. Weick (1976) argued that this ability to absorb and cordon off crises is an advantage of loosely coupled systems.

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The Lakota Sun Dance provides an answer to one of the central questions Weick (1976) posed when he first described loosely coupled systems. He asked: "how does it happen that someone can take a series of loosely coupled events, assemble them into an organization of loosely coupled systems, and the events remain both loosely coupled but the organization itself survives" (p. 14)? The answer drawn from the Sun Dance is deep cultural understanding; the success of the Sun Dance is predicated on deep cultural understanding of all participants. In order to endure the sacrifices they are making, the dancers must know how their individual actions are connected to Lakota culture and spirituality. Without this understanding, the ability to endure and the capacity to constantly and consistently act according to the instructions of the White Buffalo Calf Woman and the medicine man would be impossible. This deep cultural understanding serves as the foundation upon which the loosely coupled systems are built.

Final remarks

As some organizational culture theorists posited (e.g. Trice and Beyer, 1984), ceremonies serve to reinforce the values of the organization's culture; however, the Sun Dance ceremony suggests that individual goals and values can also be attained and/or reified. The cultural values are continuously reinforced and reaccomplished (Weick, 1969) through prayer, song, repetition of behavior in fours, dress, the tree, the colors of prayer ties, and the shape of the ceremonial grounds. At the same, the individuals participating in the Sun Dance, while engaged in behavior constrained by ceremonial tradition, are all seeking to accomplish personal goals, whether it be to honor the creator, sacrifice for a loved one's health, or conquer personal struggles.

The research that has begun to argue for the role of agency in organizational ritual and ceremony (e.g. Koschmann and McDonald, 2015) is supported with the current research. For example, as individual dancers are pierced, tied to the tree for minutes or days, and then break free, they are doing so in a traditional way, thereby reifying the culture; however, they are also exerting agency as they are sacrificing for their own personal goals. Their sacrifice during the ceremony may help to maintain the tradition of the culture, but the sacrifice also serves their own pragmatic and spiritual goals. This is the essence of the embodiment of culture (Flores-Pereira *et al.*, 2008) – dancers living, breathing, and sacrificing their bodies in the ritual but for themselves and their community. As they embody the culture through the ritual, they are indeed enacting ritual agency (Koschmann and McDonald, 2015), in that they are not only serving the instrumental needs in the execution of the ritual, but are also fulfilling individual goals as well.

In the Sun Dance, the dancers' commitment to their spiritual goals and the requirements of the ceremony were tested by the heyokas (the clowns). The presence of the heyokas, with their performing of everything in reverse and torturing the dancers with water, served as an opportunity for each dancer to recommit to the ceremony and their goals during an otherwise very difficult time (i.e. intense heat during the third day of the dance with no food or water). From an organizational culture theory perspective, heyokas are akin to outlaws, which are "individuals who seem to be paradoxes in the organization, who defy organizational practices or values yet remain as valued members of the organization because they exemplify countercultural values that the organization wishes to cultivate" (Driskell and Laird Brenton, 2005, p. 47). Heyokas are valued in Lakota society, despite the fact that they do most things in an opposite manner (e.g. turn counter-clockwise, enter rooms backwards, etc.). Their presence in the Sun Dance ceremony, though not necessary for the ceremony to occur, served to embody the cultural values through a display of the opposing values and the individual goals of the dancers by strengthening their resolve.

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The current project adds to the line of research investigating the organizing processes of non-traditional/non-corporate events (e.g. Humphreys *et al.*, 2011; Islam *et al.*, 2008; Lucas, 2013). Research investigating non-traditional organizational structures should continue as the results will inform our understanding of existing theory (e.g. rituals and ceremonies) or could have us look at organizing in new ways (just-in-time organizing). As demonstrated here, Native American rituals and ceremonies are particularly rich events deserving of the attention of organizational scholars. While these ceremonies are often difficult for non-natives to gain access to, they are valuable organizing processes to investigate as the underlying values and basic assumptions often differ dramatically from those of traditional organizations. It is in the differences that new approaches to organizing and relating could be found.

There is also warrant to continue the line of research pursuing the role of agency in organizational ritual and ceremony (e.g. Koschmann and McDonald, 2015). The current project adds to the developing argument that organizational rituals and ceremonies are not just instruments of the organization, designed to reify the espoused values of management. Instead, the Sun Dance demonstrates a distinct departure from this line of thinking that needs further investigation. It is possible, based on the results of the current study, that existing theory on organizational ritual has inadvertently minimized the role of agency based on the management bias in much of the early literature on organizational culture. Future research should explore how ceremonies are organized and performed such that the dual emphasis of organization and agency are embraced. In particular, the concepts of embodiment and ritual agency should be employed and further developed to advance our understanding of how individuals and organizations co-construct both individual and organizational outcomes through organizational rituals.

Finally, the current research forwarded the notion of just-in-time organizing, and demonstrated how it describes the organizing processes of the Sun Dance. Future research should seek to expand this notion by looking for the ways in which it is implemented in modern organizational structures.

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