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Industrial Relations as Communication: The Strange Case of the FCA-UAW Agreement

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Abstract : After having posed a theoretical framework combining framing theory and new rhetoric, the paper analyze the shift in communication both adopted by UAW and FCA during the negotiations in fall 2015. The paper argues that mistakes and adjustments played a determinant role respectively in the rejection of the first tentative agreement and in the ratification of the contract. The purpose of the paper is to set a new theoretical framework for the analysis of communication in industrial relations, by describing a narrative construction of reality from the perspective of the new rhetoric. The paper thus analyze all public text, speeches, tweets and Facebook posts by the union reading them as part of the narrative set by the organization condensed by the slogan 'it's our time'. That narrative tried to gain consensus from the members matching the expectations due to the industry recovery after more than five years of workers' sacrifices. In doing so, the analysis points out a shift in the communication strategy of the union after the first rejection of a tentative agreement in 15 years. The findings suggest that, from the communication point of view, consultation in industrial relations can be conceived as a particular kind of political communication where identification with the audience through deliberate narrative may not be effective if it is not preceded by a listening campaign.

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