

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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CHAPTER 1: COMMUNICATION BASICS

After reading this chapter, students will be able to do the following:

- Describe challenges and opportunities in the context of verbal communication within an organization.
- Describe challenges and opportunities in the context of nonverbal communication within an organization.
- Describe challenges and opportunities in the context of listening within an organization.



SECTION 1: VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Verbal communication is a primary vehicle organizations use to maintain contact with their internal and external environments. Through the use of oral and written language, organizations—and all of their subsystems—coordinate, control, lead, and manage individual and group behavior. Verbal communication provides the tools needed to obtain, transfer, and store information and knowledge. “The competitive advantages achieved by those who use information well are formidable” (Wind & Main, 1998, p. 28). Although they are referring specifically to cutting-edge techniques and technology, the conclusion applies to everyone in an organization. Verbal communication has always been critical to organizations but the shifts toward service, information, and knowledge work combined with the increasing use of modern technology places an even greater emphasis on the use of language and symbols. Specifically, the digital age utilizes electronically transferred symbols increasing our reliance on various forms of written communication.



The key concepts in this [section] include:

- Verbal communication in organizations
- Understanding verbal communication—language and perception; language, culture, and discrimination; naming and understanding; denotative/connotative; jargon
- Semantic/symbolic analysis Verbal communication—organizational uses: stories and myths; transmitting values; metaphors; language and management; inconsistencies; humor
- Verbal communication and cultures

Organizations are affected by verbal communication in at least three ways. First, the environment provides extensive information to an organization through verbal communication. Second, individuals and teams use verbal communication to direct, manage, comprehend, and respond. This allows us to understand the organization's cultural expectations. Finally, knowledge conveyed through verbal communication is critical to individuals and organizations (Drucker, 1993). Verbal communication is the key means for obtaining, transferring, utilizing, and storing the information that underpins knowledge.

Verbal communication also allows us to understand the complex nature of communication in an organization because we are brought directly in touch with an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, clarity and directness are required to be effective in

giving instructions, making assessments, and dealing with colleagues. On the other hand, language is powerful precisely because it is highly symbolic of much broader meanings. In a sense, language becomes almost magical when it reinforces and motivates, creates an *esprit de corps*, or enhances a company image (Kotter, 1990). This second category includes stories, myths, heroes, metaphors, and humor. Look at phrases like cube farms, idea hamsters, and ohnosecond—popular phrases in many leading organizations. A cube farm is an office filled with cubicles. Idea hamsters are people who always seem to have their idea generators running. An ohnosecond is the fraction of time in which you realize that you have just made a big mis-take—taken from saying “oh no” when you hit the delete button by mistake. These phrases express a larger message than the words alone. Symbolically, they allow organizational members to talk, express frustrations, show respect, create a common bond, and display humor.

Two additional examples show the symbolic importance of language. Early in 1999, the New York City Transit Agency ordered its conductors to drop the word “please” as they ordered riders to “stand clear of the closing doors” as a time saving technique (“Conductors,” 1999). Riders and commuters complained and the order was rescinded. Once again in the Big Apple, then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani said that officers should use “hello,” “thank you,” and similar polite terms during arrests and official duties in an effort to

reduce “tensions between New York City police and the public” (Bacon, 1999, p. 8A). We are making an arbitrary division between verbal and nonverbal communication in order to facilitate our analysis. However, these two factors are, for all practical purposes, not separable. By and large, organizational members, because of their organizational roles or personal preferences, learn to depend on particular means of communication for specific needs and out-comes, but the verbal and nonverbal aspects are always in play. Before discussing the functions of verbal communication, we examine its importance to organizations.

Verbal communication in organizations

Language, the underpinning of verbal communication, allows us to assign meaning to things. We are not just naming something. Instead, language “is core to the process of constituting indeterminate and ambiguous external world into specific objects” (Deetz, 2001, p. 6). We are capable of using language to make sense of the external world through drawing attention to specific objects. This allows us to distinguish between different objects.

As we assimilate into an organization, we create individual realities based on language so we can predict and control our own behavior. We are forced to decipher from a variety of clues what messages mean and which messages are important. As such,

verbal communication provides the written and unwritten, spoken and unspoken rules and procedures. These lead to a common purpose, or a set of ground rules, which constitute the process of organizing the various subsystems. Understanding the nature of verbal communication can be difficult because “language is both commonplace and enigmatic, both superficially simple and infinitely complex” (Bowman & Targowski, 1987, p. 22). Gass and Seiter (1999) conclude: “Words are the primary means of persuasion. They not only affect our perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions, they create reality” (p. 144). Language has a major impact on all individuals and shapes their organizational reality. Verbal communication is written and oral.

Written communication

Written messages have numerous organizational functions. These include mission statements, corporate goals and values, short and long range plans, job descriptions, work orders, e-mail, announcements, bulletins, informal notes, house magazines and organs, annual reports, handbooks, procedures, operation manuals, official guidelines, regulations, codes, contracts, performance appraisals, and meeting agendas and minutes to name a few. The organization’s public statements, such as annual reports or press releases, provide a great deal of information about the type of culture an organization would like to project. No less important are the ongoing memos, e-mails, letters to an

letters to an organization's customers and other interacting systems in the organization's environment, intranet and other electronic communications, and the written credos, sayings, and general culture forming messages surrounding the work-place. "The amount of text generated by office workers exceeds all other forms of printed matter. Original documents created by office workers are 80% of all documents" (Ward & Snider, 2000, p. 10D). The power of the written word is clear. For example, although oral praise is appreciated, putting it in writing often has a greater impact because the written form remains as a record that can be reviewed (Pell, 1995). A sarcastic comment made in passing becomes carved in stone when committed to the written page or sent by e-mail. Because it is virtually impossible to erase e-mail, great discretion should be used when responding to colleagues or copying others. Memos and electronic messaging are the most frequently used means of written communication.

If you review the last paragraph, you note that many of the examples of written communication focused on the more formal uses. However, "written communication is not as common as one might imagine, nor is it a mode of communication much respected by managers" (Griffin, 2005, p. 593). In fact, in one survey, managers "indicated that only 13% of the printed mail they received was of immediate use to them" (Griffin, 2005, p. 593). Even more disturbing, more than 80% responded to another survey by indicating that the written communication they received

was of fair or poor quality (Buckley, 1999). Current and future reliance on modern technology is leading to a highly interactive, instantaneous communication system with unlimited information storage possibilities.

Oral communication

In chapter 1, we indicated the strong bias toward oral communication in organizations. Managers and supervisors prefer speaking to writing (Armour, 1998; Griffin, 2005). Oral communication is used in practically any activity requiring coordination. For example, interviewing, delegating, meetings, performance appraisals, giving and receiving orders, public statements, and instructing are primarily verbal. The less formal oral communication behaviors are just as important and include greetings, reinforcement, break time, and the ritualizing of particular informal, but expected behaviors.

Functions of verbal communication

Verbal communication is used in three ways. First, to enhance task accomplishments through task ordering; second, to make sense out of content with a process orientation; and third, to supply the bridge between myth and reality through narrative (Morris, 1971; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967).

The first level, *task ordering*, involves cognitive meaning, which focuses on either/or choices. At this level, when given instructions, we either follow them, or we do not; understand them or not; or comprehend them or not. In many ways, contracts involve this level of meaning. This is a *task orientation*. Two examples are company rules and organizational charts. First, certain company rules are absolute. Prohibitions against the use of alcohol and drugs in most factories are, for example, clear cut statements regarding employee behavior that almost always lead to dismissal if ignored. Many safety violations simply will not be tolerated. Rules against sexual harassment, stealing, or plagiarism can be included. On a wider scale, organizational charts, which outline job functions and responsibilities, are efforts at task ordering.

Level two, *affective*, accepts the concepts of both/and, and isolates issues in terms of degrees of difference rather than absolute choices. Level two is a *process orientation*. When we think about content, we are in the process of sense-making. At this point, we are adding meaning to the hard reality of the language initially used and developing a more complex understanding of what is actually occurring. At this level, someone can be both a good worker and often late to work. This same worker can violate an important safety rule and still be worth retaining.

Two terms should make this second level clear. When we talk about leadership, many of us feel we have a relatively clear,

recognizable cognitive definition. A leader is someone who leads, commands, or is in charge of others. Using the first-level task ordering, we say someone is or is not a good leader. In fact, excellent leaders quickly learn that simply being in command or in charge does not make for successful leadership (Kotter, 1990). Instead, a leader is someone who plans, organizes, sways, conjures, persuades, adapts, reprimands, and carries out many other functions (Bennis & Townsend, 1995; Blank, 1995). They are *leading* rather than just being the leader. The emphasis moves from simply being a good or bad leader to the process of leading. Excellent leadership can require almost paradoxical views of the job requirements. For example, managers are expected to produce harmony through healthy conflict, facilitate change by providing stability, draw strength from being vulnerable, and have fun while working (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

In the same vein, the word *organization* may be more appropriately labeled *organizing*. "Organizing is used to denote the processual, sequential, time vary-ing nature of the behaviors of members in an organization" (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977, p. 19). Because organizations are simultaneously static and dynamic, predictable and chaotic, and understandable and mystical, they are not fixed or set simply because there is a particular label attached such as South-west Airlines or IBM. Although their organizational charts outline the structure, the process of behavior more correctly explains what actually occurs.

SECTION 2: NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

This leads to the third level, narrative, which involves the combination of myth with reality. The things we say, for example, become both very real, in that we accept them as valid, yet they are based on a narrative form of proof. This level most accurately reflects how we actually think. At this point, we use metaphors, irony, humor, paradoxes, and the vast array of stories that fuel all organizational cultures. Great leaders or outstanding organizations are known because individuals pass on stories about them. Once these narrations are assigned credibility, we believe in the characterizations.

Concepts, at this third level, are *transformable, reversible, and simultaneously reality and myth*. These stories provide individuals with the understand-able, shared reasons for why things occur. In every organization, stories exist to explain what leadership actually is supposed to be. Microsoft, Southwest Airlines, or Harvard become bigger than life because of their halo of esteem based on shared stories and myths.



The transformable nature of meaning can be demonstrated by seeing how consultants suggest organizations handle customer complaints. Virtually every customer service consultant argues that customer complaints should be viewed as an opportunity (Whiteley, 1991). By shifting the emphasis, the employee's reality concerning the complaining customer is altered from an adversary to a collaborator. In the same vein, organizations are encouraged to solicit employee suggestions and heed employee complaints. When we discussed the self-fulfilling prophecy earlier in this text, we indicated the dramatic shift that can occur when people use a different perspective to view a problem or issue.

This third level of language use is vital to an organization. In the extreme, plans are offered to make an organization appear to be on course and care-fully structured. "Thus language trappings of organizations such as strategic plans are important components of the process of creating order. They hold events together long enough and tightly enough in people's heads so that they act in the belief that their actions will be influential and make sense" (Weick, 1987, p. 98). Organizational decisions often are "lucked into" through rational appearing processes. This becomes a backward decision-making process, where organizational members look back on a decision and see why it was rational. This process is used to make sense of complex, ever-changing situations, so that they can be managed (Conrad, 1985).

At first glance, delineating these three levels might appear unnecessarily complex. However, we need to understand the three ways we establish mean-ing through the use of language. The cognitive level involves the explicit choices we make. We either take a job, for example, or we do not. But the word job does not describe what we actually do. Chances are the affective level, where the job is both interesting and boring, or easy and hard, comes closer to describing our daily activities. The very nature of organizations leads us to the third level of narrative. Organizations often jerk, lurch, and slide into deci-sions and directions, and we are able to follow the organization because of the rich body of myths and stories that provide a guiding force for us.

Understanding verbal communication

The relationship between language and perception and the symbolic nature of language are two important aspects of verbal communication.

Language and perception

Language, the basis for verbal communication, is the most logical place to bring our discussion. Language both facilitates and hinders our effectiveness in communication. Because we place a strong belief in the written word, as manifested in contracts, policy statements, and possible legal challenges, the impact of language

in an organization can be one of the first communication processes we encounter. Our business and legal ethics mandate a dependence on language. To “get it in writing” or have the statement “signed” or “initialed” provides written proof of commitment. We also are guided in how to do our jobs by written and oral language. A large amount of operational information, or how to perform tasks, appears in writing and is explained verbally.

Language is an excellent paradigm to demonstrate the influence of perception on our understanding of reality. There is “the inescapable relation of language to the user’s and the receiver’s schemes of perception. To say things in a particular way is to advance a particular way of seeing—a way based on values” (Rentz & Debs, 1987, p. 38). Managers are counseled: “When planning an important communication, the focus should be on language, because it’s language that governs thought, persuasion, and the perception of character, attitudes and values” (Blake, 1987, p. 43). Unfortunately, “some managers refuse to believe that the most important aspect of communication is not what is said or written, but the perception left by the communicator” (Barton, 1990, p. 32). Language does more than just relay facts.

The language used can determine a decision’s outcome. In one study, managers who were told that a hypothetical business maneuver has an 80% chance of succeeding usually opted for the

decision (McCormick, 1987). In a similar group, when told the decision had a 20% chance of failure, the overwhelming majority of managers decided not to accept the maneuver. “Decision-makers often allow a decision to be framed by the language or context it’s presented in” (McCormick, 1987, p. 2). Killer statements, as shown in the list on the following page, often stop creative thinking because of the statements’ ability to reframe an idea in a negative fashion.

Organizations frequently resist change because of the framing of the alternatives (Kehrer, 1989). In the 1980s, U.S. organizations held onto the concept that products made in Japan were inferior and provided no real competition in the marketplace (Nora, Rogers, & Stramy, 1986). With the spectacular successes by Japanese corporations in numerous arenas in the late 1980s, U.S. corporations recognized their incorrect framing and began focusing on increasing quality—the key ingredient in Japanese success. The dramatic increase in quality in the United States provides support for the critical premise that how we view and discuss an issue tends to determine how we think about that issue. Public opinion researchers refer to response bias to explain how the wording and context of a question can “trigger connotations or interpretations in the respondent’s mind that can have a major effect on how a question is answered” (Jaroslovsky, 1988, p. 56). Language, or how the problem is described and framed, can influence our perception.

Language, culture, and discrimination

In subtle and not-so-subtle ways, our language use communicates messages about our background, education, and heritage. We utilize language to express our views of other groups. Recall in chapter 1, we outlined the rapidly changing workforce demographics. One language-based difference often overlooked is literacy. “About one in 20 adults in the United States is not literate in English, meaning 11 million people lack the skills to handle everyday tasks” (Feller, 2005, p. 3A). Although recent immigrants “with limited or no English skills account for most of the group, the survey suggests that even the average adult has low skills” (Toppo, 2005, p. 1A). For example, the average adult group had difficulties interpreting a table on blood pressure, age, and physical activity or comparing per-ounce costs of two cans of soup (Toppo, 2005). Immigrants account for obvious cultural differences in English proficiency, but low literacy also creates a subculture of individuals who are likely to be underemployed or destined for low-paying occupations. This analysis also underscores the importance of not assuming that your colleagues communicate with the same language proficiency. For example, “nearly half the 14.7 million undergraduates at 2- and 4-year institutions never receive degrees” to a large extent because they are ill prepared in basics such as reading and writing (Schemo, 2006, p. 8A). The 2006 ACT college entrance examine indicates that only 21% of students applying to 4-year institutions are ready for college-level work in all four areas tested: reading, writing, math, and biology (Schemo,

2006). Studies indicate that there is a “deep disconnection between what high school teachers think that their students need to know and what professors, even at 2-year colleges, expect them to know” (Schemo, 2006, p. 8A).

Killer statements

1. We tried that before.
2. Our place is different.
3. It costs too much.
4. That’s beyond our responsibility.
5. That’s not my job.
6. We’re all too busy to do that.
7. It’s too radical a change.
8. We don’t have enough time.
9. Not enough help.
10. That will make other equipment obsolete.
11. Let’s make a market research test of it first.
12. Our office is too small for that.
13. Not practical for operating people.
14. The staff will never buy it.
15. Bring it up again in 6 months.
16. We’ve never done it before.
17. It’s against company policy.
18. Runs up our overhead.
19. We don’t have the authority.
20. That’s too ivory tower.

21. Let's get back to reality.
22. That's not our problem
23. Why change it, it's still working OK.
24. I don't like the idea.
25. You're right, but...
26. You're 2 years ahead of your time.
27. We're not ready for that.
28. We don't have the money, equipment, room, and/or personnel.
29. It isn't in the budget.
30. Can't teach an old dog new tricks.
31. Good thought, but impractical.
32. Let's hold it in abeyance.
33. Let's give it more thought.
34. Top management would never go for it.
35. Let's put it in writing.
36. We'll be the laughing stock.
37. Not that again.
38. We'd lose money in the long run.
39. Where'd you dig that one up?
40. We did all right without it.
41. That's what we can expect from the staff.
42. It's never been tried before.
43. Let's shelve it for the time being.
44. Let's form a committee.
45. Has anyone else ever tried it?
46. Customers won't like it.

47. I don't see the connection.
48. It won't work in our company.
49. What you are really saying is...
50. Maybe that will work in your department, but not in mine.
51. The Executive Committee will never go for it.
52. Don't you think we should look into it further before we act?
53. What do they do in our competitor's company?
54. It won't pay for itself.
55. It can't be done.
56. It's too much trouble to change.
57. I know a person who tried it.
58. It's impossible.
59. We've always done it this way.

Within any country, there are subgroups whose cultural experiences provide unique language usages. "In addition to subgroups based on race, religion, or national origin, we are also experiencing an unprecedented growth in subgroup cultures and language communities associated with generation, social class, and political interest groups" (Verderber & Verderber, 2001, p. 111). So, language usage that appears to be quite clear to one individual can be equally murky to another because of significantly different literacy skills or cultural background.

Language can also reflect prejudice by labeling certain groups through *sexism*, *ageism*, *racism*, *classism*, *heterosexism*, and *tokenism*. These "isms" regard all members of a particular group

as the same, which means we fail to see that within any categorization there are differences. For example, “racist terms are used by members of one culture to disparage members of other cultures—their customs or accomplishments. Racist language emphasizes differences” (DeVito, 2004, p. 173). Likewise, language that stereotypes any group is inherently prejudicial. *Political correctness* is an attempt to use inclusive speech through nonsexist, nonageist, and nonracist language (Hoover & Howard, 1995). We do have a choice regarding our language usage and verbal communication that excludes or marginalizes others creating unnecessary and potentially harmful divisions.

Different cultural backgrounds impact in all aspects of verbal communication. “Language is one of the most conspicuous stamps of a culture” (Sweeney & McFarlin, 2002, p. 379). Cultural characteristics are knowledge-based and provide a framework from which to understand more about a particular group but they do not define all members of the group (O’Mara, 1994). For example, Western languages focus on objects or referents and their logical relationships. Asian languages focus more on promoting and maintaining harmony. So, how something is said can be more important to Asians than the actual content of the message (Calloway-Thomas, Cooper, & Blake, 1999). In addition, whereas a word might translate easily, the interpretation can be quite different. A contract to a German, Scandinavian, American, Swiss, or British person is something to be signed and adhered to.

Japanese, on the other hand, regard a contract as a starting document to be rewritten and modified as circumstances require. South Americans see a contract as an ideal unlikely to be achieved but necessary to avoid argument (Lewis, 1996). These differences are compounded by naive assumptions regarding other cultures. A 1999 Harris poll showed that the average American believes 52% of the world speaks English when actually it is about 20% (Carey & Laird, 1999). One of the ironies of language is that even the concept of English is not clear. As Table 4.2 shows, there are dramatic differences between English, as used in the British Isles, Australia, and American English. There are 74 countries where English is the primary language. Imagine, for a moment, all the possible differences between English speaking groups.

In the United States, misunderstandings based on language differences are becoming increasingly important. In medical facilities, dealing with the 50 million U.S. residents who speak a language other than English creates serious caregiving issues (Weise, 2006). For law enforcement officers, an inability to understand a victim or deal with someone under suspicion jeopardizes effectiveness (Taylor, 2006).

Few Americans speak foreign languages well (“Multilingualism,” 2005). The gap can be seen when we realize that “in China, more than 200 million students study English. In the USA, just 24,000 American kids are studying Chinese “ (Lynch, 2006, p. 6B).

Do you speak English?	
England	United States
Dual carriageway	Divided highway
Ground floor	First floor
First floor	Second floor
Biscuits	Cookies
Dustman	Garbage collector
Carrier bag	Shopping bag
Flat	Apartment
Lift	Elevator
Underground	Subway
Queue	Waiting line
Way out	Exit
Sweet	Dessert
Australia	United States
Cheesed off	Annoyed
Chook	Chicken
Cobber/mate	Friend
Crook	Sick
Fair go	A chance
Macca's	McDonald's
To get knicked	To get caught
On yer bike!	To get going
On ya/good on ya!	Good for you/good job
Tinnie	Can of beer
Whinge	To complain

However, “in retooling for future global com-petition, the United States has a long way to go. Less than 1% of today’s high school students are studying the languages likely to be among the most important to the USA’s future: Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, Korean, Russian and Urdu, according the Education Department” (Lynch, 2006, p. 6B). Some companies are taking proactive steps. UPS, in 2002, “established a ‘global trade curricula’ for its more than 407,000 employees on the company website and seeks new hires who speak multiple languages” (Lynch, 2006, p. 6B). Not surprisingly, 61% of executives surveyed believe Spanish is the most useful second language in business (Yang & Lewis, 2005).

Some languages have hundreds of thousands more words than other languages, and others do not even have words for things that are commonly referred to in other languages (Rothwell, Sullivan, & McLean, 1995). In some Southeast Asian languages, there is no word for “no” and these languages lack an imperative verb form. What may seem logical, sensible, and reasonable to a person from one culture may seem irrational, stupid, and unimportant to a person from another culture. One source for this difficulty is that when we talk about other cultures, we tend to describe differences, not similarities and we may stereotype differences as negative and threatening. Verbal communication can reveal ethnocentrism or a refusal to value the differences between cultures.

Finally, there are gender differences in communication that are “the culturally determined behaviors and personality characteristics that are associated with, but not determined by, one’s biological sex” (Verderber & Verderber, 2001, p. 124). In the workplace, female managers tend to be more positive, relational, facilitative, empowering, and cooperative when they communicate, whereas male managers tend to be more authoritative, directive, depersonalizing, and commanding (Byers, 1997; Gass & Seiter, 1999). Male-oriented language tends to be based on military and sports metaphors as a means for gaining acceptance (Harrangan, 1997; Rizzo & Mendez, 1990). You should note our use of the word tend before both the female and male generalizations.

Naming and understanding

A fundamental characteristic of language is its capacity to name things as we explained in the Introduction. During the naming process, language necessarily provides *signification* to the item and excludes everything else from that particular category. This provides both *division* and *unity* because it excludes certain factors as it allows a common understanding of previously disparate ones (Burke, 1969). If someone is called a student, union leader, lawyer, or IBMer, this label provides a category that explains what the person is not as well as including what the person is. In the opening chapter, we discussed different generations, such as baby

boomers or Gen Y, as if all generational members were somehow the same—that is clearly not possible.

Perception...is the selecting, organizing, and interpreting of sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world. Language is a primary mechanism used to accomplish this end. Imagine, for a moment, waiting to be introduced to your new manager and having one of your colleagues label the manager a “real stickler for detail.” If you accept a job with the organization, you probably will be influenced by the initial description of the manager’s biases. Although your job might entail a large variety of tasks, it will be difficult to not focus on paying attention to details as a major priority in everything you do. Assigning a name or label allows us to make the item or activity more understandable. For example, the number of terms that have been added to business since the advent of the computer is remarkable. *Computerphobia* is the study of the 20% of adults or cyberphobes who have a fear of computers. A short list involving computers includes browser, bandwidth, CD-ROM, desktop, data-base, disk drive, DOS, download, e-mail, gigabyte, hard disk, and Internet. We intentionally stopped our list at the I’s. You probably have thought of additional digital age, computer-related terms that easily fit into this list created by the Internet such as chat room, spam, and Web site. MySpace, for example, “is nothing short of a cultural phenomenon,” which, in 2006 accounted for 82% of the traffic on social networking sites (Sellers, 2006, p. 68). In 2005, “it

surpassed Google in terms of traffic, and now MySpace ranks second to Yahoo for page views, with one billion daily (Sellers, 2006, p. 68). In addition to the likelihood that you recognize MySpace, an arbitrary name designed to clarify the site's purpose, you also had no difficulty in identifying Google and Yahoo. If you had difficulties, you might have turned to Wikipedia.

However, naming also limits the application of the word because we now have a specific reference. Although we are certainly dependent on nonverbal and sensual messages, verbal communication provides a basic underpinning for how we will interpret our world. Because words are an arbitrary determination of a particular item, they can have an unpredictable impact when applied internationally. Coca-Cola in Chinese means "Bite the head of a dead tadpole." The Chevy Nova was *no va* in Spanish, which means "doesn't go." Broderbund, which means "brotherhood" in German, is a software-maker in California and a Ku Klux Klan-like group in South Africa. The Pepsi advertisement "Come alive with Pepsi" becomes "Come out of the grave with Pepsi" in German (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 1994). To prevent these misunderstandings, Sony's leaders chose the name for its ease of pronunciation in a variety of countries. Mercedes names its vehicles by letter and number (e.g., M-Class) to eliminate unintentional interpretations.

Finally, the boundary-setting nature of naming can create difficulties. One readily available example of how bureaucracies

can limit adaptability to current and future needs is the National Asset Database that "is used by Homeland Security to divvy up the hundreds of millions of dollars in antiterrorism grants each year" (Lipton, 2006, p. 4A). Although New York City and Washington, DC, have seen their funds cut by 40%, the Old MacDonald's Petting Zoo, the Amish Country Popcorn factory, the Mule Day parade, Sweetwater Flea Market, Beach at the End of the Street, Nix's Check Cashing, and many other seemingly less than obvious terrorism targets are receiving antiterrorism grants (Lipton, 2006). The source of the problems appears to be definitions or standards tied to how the grants are defined. For example, under current definitions, the District of Columbia has half the monuments of Washington State.

Denotative/connotative meaning

One useful way to understand the impact of language is to distinguish between denotative and connotative meanings. With denotative meaning, there is no disagreement about what is meant because the reference is explicitly clear to everyone. On the surface, people should have little difficulty in clearly understanding each other. We use about 2,000 words in our daily conversations, which should facilitate shared meaning. But, the 500 most-used words have more than 14,000 dictionary definitions.

Connotative meanings depend on our own subjective reality and

the immediate context. The emotional and affective responses that a word evokes from us are the connotative meanings. So, we have a fuller meaning for each word than its specific denotative intent (Locker, 1992). This is a powerful perceptual issue for organizations because it involves the impression or aura surrounding the word, based on experience instead of the prescribed meaning. So, words such as *strike*, *union*, *downsizing*, or *management* cause different reactions depending on who responds (Gould, 1996). For example, when a boss says “I’m empowering you to make that decision,” employees may hear “You know exactly what I want you to do but I want you to feel good about it” or they may hear “I trust you to do the right thing so please follow your own best judgment.”

Recognizing the impact of words, many organizations decided to abandon the term *employee* with its potential baggage regarding subservience or traditional working processes. The new titles include associates, team members, consultants, service providers, technicians, careholders, co-workers, employee-owners, job-owners, and partners. In addition to these general words, there are Microstrategists (Microsoft), Scitorians (Scitor), and AMSers (American Management Systems).

When you put ASAP (as soon as possible) on a request, you probably mean you want it as soon as possible and you are expressing a sense of urgency. Shipping departments in some

organizations interpret ASAP as meaning whenever possible, so take your time. Responding to the overuse of the term, shipping departments simply strike back by disregarding the urgency through their own idiosyncratic interpretation of ASAP.

A very specific example of language interpretation is *sexual harassment*, which is defined as unwelcome sexual attention based as much on language as on physical actions. When one person “exhibits sexual approach behaviors and the other counters with sexual avoidance behaviors followed by continued sexual advance behaviors” there is sexual harassment (Stewart, Cooper, Stewart, & Friedley, 2003, p. 190). We need to remember that sexual harassment is a power issue not a gender issue and discussing illicit behaviors at work could easily offend someone (Fritz, Brown, Lunde, & Banset, 1999). Perception, once again, plays a role. In one survey, 75% of the men said they would be flattered by unwelcome sexual advances whereas 75% of women said they would be offended (Lubin, 1991). The issue of sexual harassment is much more complex than this brief discussion. Our point is that language need only be interpreted by one party to be communication and if that party claims to be offended it could be harassment.

Rednecks are not a protected class, leaving them open to organizational humor. One popular Internet message begins “you know the computer belongs to a Redneck if ... (1) the mouse is

referred to as a critter; (2) the keyboard is camouflaged; (3) there is a Skoal can in the CD-ROM drive,” and continues through fifteen items. If you found these comments humorous, then you are supporting the connotative power of naming. However, if the intent of this joke was to diminish the importance of a colleague who happens to come from a Redneck background, then the power element of harassment emerges, although not legally. Put another way, the exact meaning of the word is not as important as the connotative meaning.

Connotative meaning also extends to a collective interpretation of a phrase, word, or concept that does not have to be explained. When an organization is described as being on the “cutting edge,” people seem to understand the characterization even though it is unlikely that everyone knows what the phrase really means. The organizations studied in *In Search of Excellence* initially were chosen because of a halo of esteem (Peters & Waterman, 1982). General Electric and Coca-Cola frequently are listed among the most admired companies in annual surveys. Yet few individuals would agree on the specific reasons.

Jargon

Although increasingly part of everyone’s communication, many terms such as *perks*, *just-in-time suppliers*, *VAM* (value added manufacturing), *CI* (continuous improvement), *robotics*, and *MBWA* originated in certain organizations. These terms began as

jargon, which is the specialized or technical language used in an organization. It functions as a shorthand code comprehensible to coworkers. “A single word of jargon can identify an object, concept, or task that would require an elaborate explanation for someone outside the field. The special language of an occupation speeds communication within a closed fraternity of workers, while effectively excluding others” (Kunerth, 1983, p. 1). Each organizational culture develops specific terms for describing events.

Jargon serves to both include members of the profession and exclude out-siders. It can be wielded as an instrument of power, intimidation, and evasion. A physician might refer to *axilla bromidromsis* instead of an armpit’s foul smelling odor and make the patient fearful of a problem that might simply be a long shower away from being cured. Legal terminology is often beyond the grasp of the uninitiated.

As the pressure for innovation continues, several increasingly popular examples of jargon are: circling the drain, meaning failing or about to go down the tube; mouse milking, which refers to a venture with maximum effort for minimal results; or fortune cookie, which is a witty way to refer to something you heard that is insightful. Have you encountered these examples of jargon? Probably not because jargon is organization-, task-, or industry-specific.

Decoding device for letters of reference and performance reviews	
Code words	Translation—may really mean
Careful thinker	Won't make a decision
Strong principles	Stubborn
Spends extra hours on the job	Miserable home life
Active socially	Drinks too much
Alert to company developments	Is a gossip
Average	Not too bright
Takes pride in work	Is conceited
Meticulous attention to detail	Nitpicker

you heard that is insightful. Have you encountered these examples of jargon? Probably not because jargon is organization-, task-, or industry-specific.

The government frequently uses terms such as revenue enhancement for tax increases and organizations use selective cutbacks to mean firings. The Department of Defense seems to be especially adept at using jargon to alter meaning. A hammer is called “a manually powered fastener driving impact device,” a steel nut is a “hexiform rotatable surface compression unit,” and a tent is a “frame supported tension structure” (Marklein, 1987, p. D1). During military operations, civilian casualties become collateral

damage, killing selected targets is neutralizing, and combat activities are peacekeeping. When discussing the Challenger tragedy, NASA called it an “anomaly,” the astronauts’ bodies “recovered components,” and their coffins “crew transfer containers.” An Air Force Cruise missile “terminated 5 minutes earlier than planned” because it “impacted with the ground prematurely.”

Finally, one set of high school football players was just “deficient at a grading period” rather than failing their classes (Marklein, 1987, p. D1). Chrysler received the 1989 English teachers’ doublespeak award for telling AMC (American Motors Corporation) workers their new “career alternative enhancement program” meant they were fired. Although these euphemisms were used to obscure meaning, careful wording also can help prevent offend-ing people. Officials at Expo 86 in Vancouver, British Columbia, proved to be masters at euphemisms by expecting “the occasional protein spill” from people on park rides, police were “security hosts,” and rest rooms were “guest relations facilities.” Using terminology that lessens or misdirects individuals is often termed *euphemisms*.

Letters of reference and written performance reviews can use carefully chosen terms to provide an insider’s knowledge, which is for the individuals reviewing the application, of the possible meaning as shown in the table in the opposite column. Being obscure is a tactic that is not limited to the use of jargon.

Buzzwords are a special category of jargon. In a survey of the Fortune 1,000 vice presidents, buzzwords were seen as being inappropriate for formal reports, but useful for a variety of other business-related activities. "Most respondents feel that business slang can sometimes improve communication, make talking easier, make talking more comfortable, be amusing, or be the most precise and exact way to say a thing. Many also felt, however, that business slang expressions are boring, almost four fifths said they sometimes do not understand a given business slang expression" (Gilsdorf, 1983, p. 41). In organizations, being Dilberted is to be exploited or oppressed by your boss. Geeksploration is taking advantage of your high-tech workers willing to work long hours if bolstered by junk food, flexible schedules, and no dress code. The I-way is the information superhighway. Prairie-dogging is popping up from your cubicle to glance around and see what your co-workers are doing. Uninstalled, a euphemism for being fired, augments the remarkable 1990s down-sizing list including rationalizing, rightsizing, outsourcing, business process reengineering, slimming, forced reduction, release of resources, career change opportunity, or force management program. These all replace the earlier designations of being fired, sacked, canned, or laid off. We work in cube land, are wired to the web, and may have the bandwidth (ability) to handle a job. Jargon is a specialized form of verbal communication that occurs in all organizations and professions.

Before we leave this analysis, we have highlighted some current words and phrases in the next table on the following page that you should understand. Although these might not be familiar to you now, they are common concepts in most organizations.

Semantics/symbolic analysis

Semantics offers an explanation for why organizations can develop new names and why words are so open to multiple interpretations. Three principles underlie semantics.

First, *meaning is in people, not words*. Words do not mean, people mean. These two sentences are popular summations of the important principle that everyone has his or her own interpretation of reality (Craig, 1997).

Second, language is *representational*. As we already have seen, the word is not the thing. Words are symbolic representations of ideas or objects (Condon, 1975). We are free to create whatever words we choose, as we found out with jargon and buzzwords, and our only limitation is what other people interpret the word to mean. We can take a term and make it represent a reality, but the shared meaning is transactional.

Third, *both observations and inferences occur* when we use verbal communication. This semantic distortion needs to be identified,

although there is little likelihood you would want to eliminate it. A statement of observation is factual, can be observed and verified, and is about the past or the present. Inferences can be made by anyone about anything in any time frame (Haney, 1967). As a consequence, inferences are much less reliable if we are interested only in the facts. However, inferences comprise a substantial portion of organizational communication.

Organizations spend a great deal of time trying to prevent overly abstract instructions. In one organization, there is a large sign saying “never ASS-U-ME” anything is clear, unless both individuals can agree on the meaning. Too many errors occur because people assume they have been understood or that they understand and end up making the sign’s message come true.

In conclusion, we have focused on three principles: Meaning is in people not words, language is representational, and there is an important distinction between observations and inferences.

Verbal communication—organizational uses

First, all organizations use specific means for obtaining organizational goals, and language is one of the most important of these means. A sense of identification between the individual and an organization is vital. In essence, language outlines the goals and values important to our becoming a productive member of the

Some current verbal communication concepts/buzzwords	
Benchmarking	Comparing business activities to those of the best companies
Collaborative workplace	Rejecting hierarchy, embracing teamwork
Constant whitewater	Important/radical change will never end
Core competencies	Building capabilities customers value and competitors cannot replicate
Core management competencies	Managers with key skills including planning, communications, and leadership
Customer satisfaction measurement	Focus on identifying and meeting customer needs
Delaying	Eliminating a layer of an organization without downsizing all
Derailment	Running afoul of some taboo
Disconnect	Couch a disagreement or ineffective communication
Empwoerment	Pushing decision-making as far down in the company as possible
Face time	Time spent in the office
Growth staretgies	Aim to lift profits by expanding revenues, not cutting costs
In alignment	Values and attitudes of employees align with the organization
Mission and vision statements	What the company will become and how it will get there
Pay for performance	Compensation tied to business goals
Process-centered organization	Structuring around processes, not departments
Reengineering	Radical redesign of business practices

organization. Even more fundamentally, “language is the primary vehicle in this process of identification, and the ways in which it is shaped and used by the individual often reveals his or her organizational personality—the extent to which the person has adopted the values of the organization” (Rentz & Debs, 1987, p. 44). We return to values shortly. Very little of this type of information is obtained through the cognitive level. In fact, organizations frequently operate at the affective level and myths become reality.

Stories and myths

A tremendous amount of information is passed on to members of an organization through the telling of stories and myths (Sweeney & McFarlin, 2002). These explain “how the organization dealt with key competitors in the past, how it developed a new and exciting product, how it dealt with a valued employee, and so on, not only to spell out the basic mission and specific goals (and thereby reaffirming them) but also to reaffirm the organization’s picture of itself, its own theory of how to get things done, and how to handle internal relationships” (Schein, 1985, p. 81). “Every leader tells a story. Forget bullet points and slide shows. The best leaders use stories to answer three simple questions: Who am I? Who are we? Where are we going?” (Weil, 1998, p. 38). In order to be a leader, we must understand that “a key—perhaps the key—to leadership...is the effective communication of a story” (Gardner, 1995, p. 62). Although an organization’s formal documents spell

out the official statements of ideology, these informal means are what actually guide the organization. Stories provide a teachable point of view. Sony cofounder Akio Morito told this story to all of his salespeople: “Two shoe sales representatives find them-selves in a rustic backwater of Africa. The first writes back, ‘No prospect of sales. Natives do not wear shoes.’ The second writes, ‘No one wears shoes here. We can dominate the market. Send all possible stock.’”

This story could become simply another of the great salesperson stories that dominate all sales cultures. But, it takes on a mythical nature because it clearly spells out the need for optimism and opportunity hunting by Sony salespeople. Because it was delivered by the cofounder to all sales recruits, the story has an added dimension and significance. It becomes perceived reality for how a Sony salesperson must think and act.

All organizations have stories about past events. Of particular value to many organizations are the “stories recounting the histories of these visionary heroes (which) pass from generation to generation of managers” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 44). Hewlett-Packard’s founders have used stories to under-score the company values. Cofounder “Dave Packard toured an HP factory, saw a cheap, thin prototype for a new product, twisted it into a mangled ball, and declared it ‘a hunka junk.’ It’s a great lesson in prizing quality as well as cost” (Weil, 1998, p. 40). Tom Watson (IBM), Steve Jobs,

William Kellogg, and Robert Welch (GE) all have extensive stories told about them that reinforce the importance of the individual. “In many firms stories are told about ‘average’ employees who became heroes by breaking dumb rules that contradicted firm values, or, conversely, by steadfastly sticking to practices that exemplified the culture” (Sweeney & McFarlin, 2002, p. 340). So, “through stories, parables, and other forms of oral and written history, an organization can communicate its ideology and basic assumptions—especially to newcomers, who need to know what is important not only in abstract terms but by means of concrete examples that can be emulated” (Schein, 1985, p. 82).

Because of the power of language, stories are not neutral (Mumby & Clair, 1997). By drawing attention to the interests of dominant groups, they reify structures, and reproduce power, they can create and maintain a culture of obedience (Witten, 1993). When organizational members are seeking guidance in making decisions, for example, stories offer easily remembered principles. If the principles are created by others who are interested in production and output over individual development, or unusual heroic efforts demanding unfair practices, or any other outcome that is not clearly in the interest of others, then a story can be an implement of power rather than simply a clarification of organizational values.

In organizations where the culture does not foster positive employee responses to management, heroes still emerge as the

voices for the mistreated. Stories about these “counterculture” heroes also provide employees with rules, only these explain how to beat the system rather than support it. These stories, and other forms of verbal communication, become the backbone of symbolic resistance where the counterculture uses similar stories, values, and myths to take a stand against the prevailing norms.

Transmitting values

The values “are the basic concepts of an organization; as such they form the heart of the corporate culture. Values define success in concrete terms for employees—‘if you do this, you too will be a success’—and establish standards of achievement within the organization” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, pp. 13–14). An organization that carries the message “never be responsible for making a mistake” (or at least getting caught) passes on a very different sense of values from the 3M Company, who states: “Never be responsible for killing an idea.” The use of slogans and creeds allows companies to emphasize their organizational culture’s particular emphasis, as shown in Table 4.5. If you would like to expand your list of slogans and creeds, almost any business-oriented magazine will have advertisements from the major organizations with an accompanying slogan.

Visions are used to express values in a clear and simple manner. The Girl Scouts of America want “to help a girl reach her highest

potential.” Merck Pharmaceuticals states: “To preserve and improve human life.” “To give ordinary folk the chance to buy the same things as rich people” drives Wal-Mart. Walt Disney wants “to make people happy.” Mary Kay Cosmetics states that wants “to give unlimited opportunity to women.” Nike concludes that its vision is to experience the emotion of competition, winning, and crushing competitors (Collins & Porres, 1996).

Heroes personify the values of the culture and act as role models for other employees to follow. All of this information is transmitted through the cultural network. As the primary (and informal) means of communication within an organization, this cultural network is the “carrier” of the corporate values and the heroic mythology. Storytellers, spies, priests, cabals, and whisperers form a hidden hierarchy of power within the company and can be powerful spokespeople.

Metaphors

Metaphors operate as verbal statements about the organizational culture and reflect the individual member’s perception (Offstein & Nick, 2003). They function to symbolize something as if it were something else (Borman & Deal, 2003). When we say the world’s a stage we conjure up an image of people putting on performances with the goal of gaining audience acceptance. “Metaphors play a critical role in the communication process. They are the best

Slogans, creeds, and shared values		
Company/ organization	Slogan/ creed	Shared values
Merrill Lynch	“A breed apart”	Expresses concern for meeting customers needs
Toshiba	“In touch with tomorrow”	Product development
General Electric	“Progress is our most important product”	Product development
Honeywell	“Together, we can find the answers”	Teamwork and research
Dana Corp.	“Productivity through people”	Commitment to and from employees
Chubb Insurance Co.	“Underwriting excellence”	Summation of goals
NYSE	“The world puts its stock in us”	Placement of exchange
Cyrix	“The liberation of information”	Semiconductors’ technology role
TIAA	“Ensuring the future for those who shape it”	Summation of goals
Ontario, Canada	“The future right here”	Emphasizes desirability of area
Hewitt	“Improving business results through people”	Importance of people

devices to use when describing abstract concepts and expressing emotions” (Johnson & Hackman, 1995, p. 100). Metaphors, like stories and myths, compress complicated issues into understandable images and allow members to make sense out of the organization, discuss and understand change, and bridge the known with the unknown (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). They affect our attitudes and actions. For example, a college president who sees the university as a research center will act differently from one who sees the university as a teaching organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003). “Metaphors, then, are unique because they trigger an individual’s memory and sensory capacities...” (Offstein & Neck, 2003, p. 24).

If an organization is perceived as a fighting unit (military metaphor based on war), a well-oiled machine (structural and mechanistic metaphor based on machines), or a winning team (a sports metaphor based on games), three entirely different assumptions of reality are being presented. For a moment, consider the strengths and weaknesses of these types of metaphors (Clancy, 1989). The strengths for a war metaphor include being goal-oriented, recognizing the difficulty of the process, and expecting strong and courageous leadership. At the same time, it emphasizes destroying the opponent in order to claim victory. In the pursuit of destruction, few sacrifices are too great. We go on “missions,” “attack” the problem, are “outgunned,” and can be “loose cannons.” The machine metaphor emphasizes predictability,

efficiency, goal direction, and sees itself as a serious wealth-producing tool. It is very clear. However, it treats people in an unfeeling way and overemphasizes rationality. Game metaphors stress goals, fun, teamwork, and leadership, but fail to recognize the complexity and ambiguity of business. Underneath the game metaphor is a naïve stress on winning because all games require opponents and winners.

This metaphor permeates many organizational discussions. We use “teamwork,” celebrate a “slam dunk,” “huddle” over an issue, and see issues or people as “out in left field.” Both the war and game metaphors have tended to minimize women because they are not as likely to have had athletic or military experiences (Cleary & Packard, 1992).

Throughout this discussion of metaphors, the difference in gender usage has not been highlighted. Whereas males are likely to focus on war and sports metaphors, women are more likely to utilize metaphors dealing with stronger relationships.

The table on the following page presents some commonly used metaphors and shows how the four frames presented in chapter 3 can be applied. “One of the best ways, for instance, to identify a manager’s style of managing is to listen carefully for the metaphors he or she uses when referring to the company, the job, or to employees” (Redding, 1984, p. 105).

Metaphors

Our department Our department or organization or group or project or boss is (something else)...

Big happy family	Police department	Cornucopia
Athletic team	Santa Claus	Volcano
Zoo	Military unit	Battlefield
Well-oiled machine	Disneyland	Insane asylum
Play pen	Circus	Garbage can
Penitentiary	Garden	Snake pit
Pyramid	Boiling cauldron	Steamroller
Circle	Draagon	Swamp
Windmill	Quicksand	Stage
First class	Explorers	Warriors
Black hole	Family	Savoir

Active metaphors—compare a situation with these active concepts

Cooking a meal	Piloting an aircraft	Sailing a yacht
Fishing	Watching a video	Jogging
Climbing a mountain	Playing tennis	Sunbathing
Getting married	Reading a novel	Blogging

Metaphors applied to the four frames

<i>Frame</i>	<i>Metaphor</i>
Structural	Well-oiled machine
Human relations	Big, happy family or team
Political	Chain of command, enemies, troops
Symbolic	Family, greater vision

Language and management

Managers and supervisors are encouraged to use language that makes people feel good about themselves and the job they are doing. This demand for the use of positive reinforcement through language shows a strong belief in the power of the spoken word (Redding, 1984). In addition, numerous suggestions have been made for managers to learn to use the right word at the right time to enhance employee motivation. The trick, or needed insight, for the manager is to choose the correct wording for the situation by accurately perceiving the needed symbolic message. For example, managers must be adept at giving less than positive feedback in order to correct problems without damaging the relationship.

Not only is verbal communication used to motivate, it also is used to pre-dict, control, manage, coordinate, and perpetuate organizations. Managers and others in charge define for employees, subordinates, and colleagues what is expected of them in a given situation.

Inconsistencies

When faced with difficult verbal communication situations, organizational members may choose to present inconsistent statements to maintain the strategic advantage of being able to claim deniability. Negotiators of contracts may “deliberately use ambiguous or unclear language to avoid squabbles that might slow down or prevent a settlement” (Scott & Bain, 1987, p. 10).

This same pressure often influences the manager who may say one thing and mean quite another. As the table on the following page shows, the stated message actually has a much deeper meaning. The difference between these messages and euphemisms is that managers are monitored directly by subordinates who must implement the vague statements because some *strategic ambiguities* in organizations can maintain interpersonal relationships and supporting status distinctions (Eisenberg, 1984). There are times when the only way to deal with apparently impossible situations is to be unclear. We all have been faced with a situation where a compliment was required for something we did not think was well done. So, we issued an ambiguous comment like: “that’s certainly different,” or “you don’t see many done that way anymore,” or “only you would think to put those items together.”

Paradoxes also can occur in the nature of commands, such as the manager who tells you “don’t regard everything I say as an order, and that’s an order,” or the parent who tells the child “I’ve told you a million times, don’t exaggerate!” To be told that all generalizations about organizations are incorrect also would appear to be paradoxical, although perhaps true (another paradox). The need for more employee creativity has become apparent to many organizations. In response, they have ordered employees to “be creative” which, as you probably already have noticed, is a *paradoxical injunction*. It often can be turned into a

double-bind when there is a time limit placed on when the solution must be ready. So, if the employee takes the time to be creative, the answer will be late. If the answer is on time, it might not be very creative.

The oxymoron provides a nice example of the paradoxical phrase. “An oxymoron is two concepts that do not go together but are used together. It is the bringing together of two contradictory terms” (Blumenfeld, 1986, p. 36). For example, neat freak, near-miss, even odds, justifiably paranoid, almost can-did, intense apathy, postal service, deliberate speed, qualified success, almost perfect, eloquent (or deafening) silence, negative benefit, original copy, routine emergency, same difference, minimum competency, functional illiterate, pure filth, a firm maybe, extensive briefing, awfully good, objective rating, second deadline, constant variable, pretty ugly, perfect misfit, and pure non-sense are oxymorons that appear in a variety of organizations and conversations (Blumenfeld, 1986, 1989).

Although many of these are humorous, a large number of these terms are actually the strategic use of ambiguity. By saying something is a qualified success, the originator of the comment still can criticize the outcome because the praise is carefully hedged.

How to distinguish between a subordinate you like and a subordinate you do not like	
The one you like	The one you do not like
Is aggressive	Is pushy
Is good on detail	Is picky
Gets depressed from work pressure	Can't stand the heat
Is confident	Is conceited
Drinks because of excess work pressure	Is a lush
Is a stern taskmaster	Is impossible to work with
Is enthusiastic	Is emotional
Follows through	Doesn't know when to quit
Stands firm	Is bullheaded
Has sound judgment	Has strong prejudices
I'm afraid to say what s/he thinks	Is mouthy
Is close-minded	Is secretive
Exercises authority	Is tyrannical
Climbed the ladder of success	Married into the boss's family

Humor

Humor is an excellent example of the importance of incongruences. A great deal of humor is based on paradoxes and incongruences (Bateson, 1972; Duncan & Feisel, 1989). Although

managing and work are supposed to be “serious business,” humor provides organizational members with a means for coping with the various paradoxes and incongruences that are inherent in any organized activity (Lippitt, 1982). Sometimes laughter is the best medicine for tough organizational situations that are steeped in tension (Gibson, Ivancevich, & Donnelly, 1991, p. 253). “Surgical teams, cockpit crews, and many other groups have learned that joking and playful banter are an essential source of invention and team spirit. Humor releases tension and helps resolve issues” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 293). Female middle managers often use humor as they confront a paradox of being in such a position, because they are expected to be both subordinate and controlling simultaneously (Martin, 2004). In fact, “it is less important to ask why people are humorous in organizations than to ask why they are so serious” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 268). Southwest Airlines “encourages its associates to be themselves; have fun; and, above all, use their sense of humor” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 401). When you fly on Southwest, do not be surprised to hear a comedy routine or singing as the flight attendants deliver the required FAA safety briefing. The result? Passengers tend to listen more carefully because of the humor and incongruence.

Humor has numerous organizational uses. It can: share messages, relieve stress, motivate employees, make a point in a strategic manner, relay interest, enhance group behavior, facilitate team-building, reduce personality conflicts and resistance to change,

unmask power relations, and allow the discussion of delicate issues without requiring a full commitment (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Dwyer, 1991; Harris & Sherblom, 2005; McClane & Singer, 1991). Among its many uses, “humor integrates, expresses skepticism, contributes to flexibility and adaptiveness, and indicates status. Humor is a classic device for distancing but it can also be used to socialize, include, and convey membership. Humor can establish solidarity and promote face-saving” (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 164). One organization, demanding that supervisors improve the work climate, found a plaque appearing that stated “firings will continue until morale improves.” Because the supervisors could not openly question the order, paradox and humor were used to partially alleviate the stress.

Organizations use humor to draw attention to specific issues. Consider some actual business signs around the United States. On an electrician’s truck: “Let us remove your shorts.” In a veterinarian’s waiting room: “Be back in 5 minutes. Sit! Stay!” In a nonsmoking area: “If we see you smoking we will assume you are on fire and take appropriate action.” Outside a radiator repair shop: “Best place in town to take a leak.”

A professor once remarked that teaching would be a great job if it were not for the students. Although his comment was funny, the paradox he raises actually exists when it comes to customer service. The professor may simply have been overworked because

of pressures to publish and serve on committees. Table 4.7, in addition to highlighting inconsistencies, also points to the errors managers may make when they evaluate subordinates. Because it overstates the potential biases, managers can simultaneously smile at the examples and identify their own tendencies to make incorrect judgments and couch them in carefully terminology.

Organizations can be characterized in a humorous fashion. The Dilbert cartoon strip has become a famous debunker of management fads. Organizations are portrayed as organized anarchies where problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities interact almost in a random fashion as the organization moves toward the future (March & Olsen, 1976). Ideas and possible solutions are tossed into the garbage can. After enough people sift through the contents, some type of decision emerges out of a process of interpretation (Robey, 1991). Both depictions debunk the concept and perception of a rational model of organizations or decision making.

These characterizations strike a cord of reality for organizational researchers, or practicing managers, who are trying to make sense out of certain organizational behaviors. Organizations rarely are “tightly run ships” that concern themselves with rational decision making. One obvious limitation relates to the size of an organization. A small family business will operate with a much smaller “trash can,” and probably will be a little less monstrous and

octopoid, simply because the store or business must open on a daily basis. In addition, the chaotic description carries more validity with upper level management, who are in charge of the planning functions, than with frontline supervisors or managers. However, in both of these examples, the individuals involved still must deal with the external environment replete with whatever octopoid tendencies it may possess (e.g., government regulations, incompetent bosses, late delivery of supplies).

This short discussion underlines that a “both/and” perspective is most likely to assist you in understanding organizations.

Organizations are chaotic and predictable. Decisions are justified after the fact and also carefully planned. Both are true and the popularity of Murphy’s laws may be attributable to the unpredictable nature of organizations, as shown in the two lists on the following page. We have discussed the impact of stories, myths, metaphors, inconsistencies, and humor in organizations. The particular type of culture operating also has an effect on the verbal communication. In turn, the verbal communication perpetuates the predominant culture.

Conclusion

Verbal communication is a critical part of every organization’s behavior system. It acts as the link between the various groups, subsystems, and individuals in the organization. Both written and

oral communication are important, although practicing managers and supervisors prefer oral communication. Language has a direct impact on our perception of our organizational reality. That reality is cognitive, affective, and narrative and we continually move between these three perspectives.

Language allows us to label parts of our working environment and, in so doing, provide signification. By naming someone blue collar, white collar, pink collar, gray collar, or gold collar, we both include and exclude individuals. *Gold collar* is a term being applied by personnel directors to recent college graduates who expect to receive lucrative jobs immediately upon graduation. Denotative and connotative meaning occur every time we use verbal communication. Calling someone a “suit” has a connotative meaning that is much more important than the denotative description of a person’s working attire.

Murphy’s laws

On the next page, read the two lists— (1) Murphy’s laws and (2) Murphy’s law and the college experience, and see how they relate to nonverbal communication, organizational communication, and students’ college experiences.

Murphy's law

1. If anything can go wrong, it will.
2. Nothing is as simple as it seems.
3. Everything takes longer than you expect.
4. If there is a possibility of several things going wrong, the one that will go wrong first will be the one that will do the most damage.
5. If you play with something long enough, you will surely break it.
6. Left to themselves, things go from bad to worse.
7. If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something.
8. If you see that there are four possible ways in which a procedure can go wrong, and then circumvent these, then a fifth way, unprepared for, will probably develop.
9. Nature always sides with the hidden flaw.
10. It is impossible to make anything foolproof, because fools are so ingenious.
11. If a great deal of time has been expended seeking the answer to a problem with the only result being failure, the answer will be immediately obvious to the first unqualified person.
12. The other line moves faster.

Murphy's law and the college experience

1. During an exam, the pocket calculator battery will fail.
2. Exams will always contain questions not discussed in class.
3. All students who obtain a B will feel cheated out of an A.
4. Campus sidewalks never exist as the straightest line between two points.
5. At 5 minutes before the hour, a student will ask a question requiring a 10-minute response.
6. When a student finally does a homework assignment, the instructor will not ask for it.
7. If an instructor says "it's obvious," it isn't.
8. If students have to study, they will claim the course is unfair.
9. Students who obtain an A for a course will claim the instructor is a great teacher.
10. Books and materials on reserve, aren't!

SECTION 3: LISTENING

Listening is a critical part of the organizational communication process. The accurate perception and interpretation of messages is vital for effective organizational communication transactions to take place. To enhance our understanding of the role of listening in organizational communication, this chapter unfolds in the following manner. First, we examine the current status of organizational listening. Second, the four stages of listening—sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding—are analyzed. Third, active, passive, deliberative, and empathetic listening are addressed. Fourth, the special requirements of organizational listening are developed; feedback constitutes the fifth issue. Finally defensive and supportive climates are presented. This analysis concentrates on the following issues: (1) importance of listening, (2) costs of poor listening, (3) current status of organizational listening, (4) difficulties in delineation, (5) four listening stages, (6) types of listening, (7) feedback, and (8) defensive and supportive climates.



Importance of listening

In a sense, this should be an obvious point. We cannot communicate success-fully with someone unless the message is received and understood. The case for the importance of listening is significant, as we now discover.

Benefits of effective listening

The advantages of effective listening are almost endless. Listening has been shown to be a vital skill for successful managers, supervisors, and professional employees occupying more than 60% of their average day on the job (Cooper, 1997; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). Oral communication, as exhibited through the four skills of listening, following instructions, conversing and giving feedback, “was consistently identified as the most important competency in evaluating entry-level candidates” (Maes, Weldy, & Icenogle, 1996, p. 78). A survey of The American Society of Personnel Directors ranked listening as a critical communication competency for successful job performance (Curtis, Winsor, & Stephens, 1989). Misunderstandings are reduced, innovation increases, and morale improves at the workplace as a result of effective listening (Yukl, 1994). Bone (1998) links effective listening with learning, building relationships, being entertained, making intelligent decisions, saving time, enjoying conversations, settling disagreements, getting the best value, preventing accidents and mistakes, asking intelligent questions, and making accurate

evaluations. In addition, it paves the way toward better personnel relationships, fewer mistakes and errors, more successful meetings, shared viewpoints and perspectives, a stronger culture, and a greater organizational cohesiveness (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). Good listening is essential to business success (Goby & Lewis, 2000).

Listening and the communication process

Listening is the most used channel of communication. We spend up to 70% of our waking day communicating (Osborn & Osborn, 1994). Of this 70%, from 42 to 60% (or more) is spent listening (Purdy, 1996). In organizations, the percentage is frequently greater. Executives spend between 45% and 93% of their day listening (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). Covey (1989), in his perennial Business Week best seller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, identifies Habit 5 as “seek first to understand, then to be understood” (p. 235). He argues that we must listen with the intent to fully, deeply understand the other person emotionally and intellectually before we offer advice or prescribe action (Covey, 1991). The table on the following page further supports Covey.

Research indicates, however, that although about half of our communication time is spent listening (Johnson, 1996), most of us are not very good listeners (Alessandra & Hunsaker, 1993). The average college student listens effectively to only about 50% of what is said and remembers only 25% of that content after two

A story illustrates the danger of the leader always being in charge and refusing to listen.

NAVY:	Please divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid a collision.
CIVILIAN:	Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.
NAVY:	This is the captain of a U.S. Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.
CIVILIAN:	No, I say again, you divert YOUR course.
NAVY:	THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER ENTERPRISE, WE ARE A LARGE WARSHIP OF THE U.S. NAVY. DIVERT YOUR COURSE NOW!
CIVILIAN:	This is a lighthouse. Your call.

days (Wolvin & Coackley, 1996). In medical situations, where accurate diagnosis would seem critical, many physicians do not listen care-fully enough to their patients' stories (Nyquist, 1996). Measured by its ramifications, or by the percentage of communicating time consumed, listening is important. This importance is underscored by examining organizations, our third point.

Listening in organizations

Listening plays a role in almost any occupation or business. For example, negotiating is a prized skill in many organizations. Fisher and Ertel (1995) conclude that “Regardless of intentions or favored tactics, listening to the other side, so that you can then make good choices about what to do and how to do it, is universally important” in negotiations (p. 77). High performance teams have “an open communication structure that allows all members to participate. Individuals are listened to regardless of their age, title, sex, race, ethnicity, profession, or other status characteristics” (Wheelan, 1999, p. 42). Increasing employee involvement through the shift from vertical to horizontal communication, as discussed earlier, requires a free flow of information between colleagues where mutual understanding is the responsibility of the participants and not just a reliance on vertical communication. Cohen & Fink (2001) add, “the skills required of employees— teamwork, conflict resolution, initiative, openness— are increasingly likely to be required of all employees and will enable organizational development not yet imagined” (p. 44). Build-ing relationships, especially in a digitally driven, knowledge-based economy is a skill based on effective listening.

Earlier we outlined the shifts in organizations toward service and information processing. Customer contact is the sine qua non for service organizations (Albrecht, 1988; Boyle, 1999). CRSS, one of the world’s premier architectural firms specializing in construction

management and managing power cogeneration plants, sees listening as a cornerstone of its organization. Peters (1992) explains. “CRSS’s remarkable record includes designing some of the world’s most complex projects. Its approach to working with its clients is what sets the company apart. Amazingly, CRSS architects established, and then maintained for over four decades, preeminence and competitive advantage via one ‘simple’ tactic—taking listening seriously. CRSS builds on listening, worries about listening, works ceaselessly at improving its listening skills. CRSS’ technology of listening turns out to be a benchmark knowledge-management saga” (p. 399). Procter & Gamble (P&G), makers of products such as Bold, Crest, Cover Girl, and more than 300 others (with 98% of all households in the United States using at least one of their products), employs a variety of techniques to remain one of the 10 most-admired U.S. companies for 8 consecutive years. P&G believes the customer is most important, and lists 99 rules for its employees to pursue. Rules 4 and 5 encourage employees to find out what the customer wants and does not want. Rule 6 admonishes to “listen carefully. It’s easy to misunderstand the consumer.” Rule 7 counsels to “Keep listening after the sale is made” (Decker, 1998).

Listening to employees is equally important. Merck, chosen by *Working Mother* as one of the 10 best places to work in America, “invests in people by listening to them” (Caudron, 1998, p. 102). Industries where individuals communicate primarily through digital

processes, such as information acquisition and utilization, have found an increased importance for the role of face-to-face communication (Zuboff, 1988). Dependence on computers decreases interpersonal contact. Electronic mail, individual computer workstations, and specific task assignments isolate individuals from interactions. Hollingshead and McGrath (1995) conclude that all “forms of computer mediation, to some degree, place limits and structure on the communication process itself, necessarily limiting the channels and modalities by which members can communicate with each other...” (p. 31), meaning each interpersonal listening opportunity takes on even greater importance. The problem is that decreased interpersonal contacts create fewer opportunities to double check listening accuracy to make certain an error has not occurred. In addition, as digitized workplaces allow more individuals to pursue full or part-time work at home via a computer modem linked to the office system, casual, ongoing work contacts become fewer and fewer. Colvin (2000), reviewing the promises of 21st-century organizations, concludes, “But we make a foolish and ancient error if we forget that quirky humans still very much need interaction, recognition, and relationship,” which require excellent listening skills (p. F-9).

For all organizations, effective listening is important (Deal & Kennedy, 1999). Service industries, now comprising more than 70% of jobs in the United States, maintain and improve customer satisfaction through effective listening. In information-based

industries, opportunities to communicate interpersonally are diminished, making each listening event potentially more important. Quality can be achieved only through coordination between individuals and subunits, which requires excellent listening.

Managers and leaders

For leaders, listening is often the most important skill (Ray, 1999). When 1,000 human resources professionals were asked to rank the number-one skill of effective managers, they listed effective listening (Windsor, Curtis, & Stephens, 1997). In another survey of personnel directors in 300 businesses and industries, listening was ranked as the most important skill for becoming a manager (Whetten & Cameron, 1991). Leaders need to “solicit feedback from others. Listening that accurately interprets verbal and nonverbal messages is a primary linking skill” (Hackman & Johnson, 2000).

Listening helps in discovering emerging problems, dealing with hostile employees, managing interpersonal conflicts, enhancing employee morale, and adding to the manager’s professional image (Morgan & Baker, 1985). Bosses are admonished to “develop formal and informal devices aimed at spurring intense, proactive listening” (Peters, 1987, p. 304). The managerial functions of exchanging job information, receiving and giving directions,

seeking and providing information for decisions, coaching and counseling, meetings and conference participation, performance reviews, interviews, and negotiating all require effective listening skills. In the article, “Leaders Thrive on Practical Listening,” Hart (1998) explains: “Patience is the key to good listening. This is a fast-paced world, both personal and professional. Many studies confirm that the single greatest reason for conflict is misunderstanding. Misunderstandings are universally prevented if you slow down, listen, and understand what the other person is saying” (p. 49A). O’Toole (1996) concludes that a value-based leader must listen to dissenting opinions in order to test ideas, without being a prisoner of public opinion.

Subordinates

An examination of 24 different studies found effective listening to be the most important skill for persons in entry-level positions (DiSalvo, Larson, & Seiler, 1976). Once hired, listening is critical to learning, understanding, and participating in communication (Burley-Allen, 2001; Hamilton, 2005).

Costs of poor listening

Second, ineffective listening is expensive. For example, a simple \$10 mistake, if made by 100 million workers in this country, would cost more than a billion dollars. Usually, our mistakes have a

multiplier effect because they must be corrected or redone, doubling the time used. If the error is passed onto a customer, there might be additional costs in terms of future business. If the error requires the involvement of others, then the costs skyrocket. Disregarding the dollar cost, “those little mistakes waste time, cause embarrassment, irritate customers, alienate employees, and, ultimately, affect profits” (Wakin, 1984, p. 45). Poor listening can lead to numerous problems.

“On average, people are only about 35% efficient in listening. This lack of effective listening often results in missed opportunities to avoid misunderstandings, conflict, poor decision-making, or a crisis because a problem wasn’t identified in time” (Burley-Allen, 2001, p. 119). So, although we may hear important information, our efficiency in processing and utilizing the input is poor. In conclusion, “the list of problems caused by ineffective listening is endless, and the exact cost is incalculable” (Gibbs, Hewing, Hulbert, Ramsey, & Smith, 1985, p. 30).

Current status of organizational listening

Based on this universal agreement regarding the importance of listening, you might assume that effective listening is practiced in most organizational settings. Consider several studies and reports that call that conclusion into question. Training and development managers feel listening is one of the most important problems

leading to ineffective performance or low productivity (Hunt & Cusella, 1983). Retaining staff is a critical issue for many organizations (Hudson Institute, 2000). A Linkage, Inc. survey which questioned “655 employees about their willingness and intentions to stay with their current employers found that the managers and organizations who actively listen to employees’ input ranked very high” (“Survey says,” 2001, p. 8). Trust was the most important issue (Hudson Institute, 2000).

Many individuals and organizations seem immune to the evidence and continue to neglect listening. Individually, we seem unaware of our deficiencies. Fuller (1991) observes that “there are few people with IQ’s above room temperature who wouldn’t say they were good listeners” (p. 54). He goes on to point out that this confidence is not supported by the listening effectiveness research. Donaldson and Donaldson (1996) add, “The reason most people don’t listen more effectively is that they don’t want to listen. They just want to talk. You must decide listening is worth doing; then you must do it” (p. 118).

We have risked belaboring the point regarding listening because the case for improved listening would seem to be too great to ignore. If our premise is correct, why is listening not dealt with more effectively by organizations and, in many cases, textbooks on organizational communication?

Difficulties in delineation

Three factors cause listening to be a difficult topic to cover. First, listening often falls prey to the same type of reasoning preventing a fuller understanding of organizational communication in general. Either listening is so obvious that we all should be asked simply to be better listeners, or it is too complex to be easily understood (Burley-Allen, 2001). If you feel a sense of *deja vu* regarding this possible dilemma, you would be correct because we confronted the same issue in Chapter 1 regarding the study of organizational communication.

Second, for all practical purposes, listening cannot be separated from other organizational communication skills. For example, our verbal communication is meaningless unless someone else listens, and being able to respond effectively to verbal communication is contingent on effective listening. In addition, listening to the nonverbal aspects of a message is critical to understanding.

Third, organizational members conceptualize effective listening by others based on nonverbal and verbal responses during the process (Hunt & Cusella, 1983). We are judged to be effective listeners, in other words, by how nonverbally and verbally responsive we seem to be during the transaction (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988). A listener's overt messages are perceived as an important component of their listening behavior. So, questions, praise, advice, and thanks are positive listening behaviors, along

with nonverbal behaviors such as eye contact (Hackman & Johnson, 2000). There are gender differences in listening styles that impact how individuals behave in transactions (Brownell, 2002). In the United States, "feminine communicators are more likely than masculine ones to show they are listening by nodding, keeping eye contact, and gesturing in response to messages" (Wood, 2000, p. 68). Put another way, women communicate in an effort to build rapport whereas men tend to communicate to report (Tannen, 1990).

Globalization draws increased attention to listening because there are "general cultural tendencies in regards to listening that can create misunderstandings" (Hall, 2002). Learned behaviors such as eye contact, (see chap. 5) occur simultaneously while we listen and unaccustomed actions, such as reduced eye contact, might make us believe someone is not listening (DeVito, 2004).

In conclusion, effective listening is vital to organizational health. Although listening's role seems obvious, organizations often overlook listening precisely because it appears too apparent to require highlighting. Next we examine the four listening stages and the listening behaviors most important to organizations.

Four listening stages

The four listening stages are sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding. In most cases, these four stages occur in rapid

succession with little awareness on our part. Because listening is a complex process, understanding each of the stages, and the possible barriers, will enhance our abilities to listen. In most cases, improving our own listening abilities will bring greater rewards than trying to force others to be better listeners. An important exception to this generalization is the power of feedback, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Sensing

Good listening begins with sensing the message. There is a difference between simply hearing and listening with understanding. Hearing involves the biological senses that provide for reception of the message through sensory channels (Verderber & Verderber, 2001). In addition to the auditory senses, we depend on our visual senses, which sometimes are called our third ear (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 1996). Nonverbal communication cues provide a great deal of what we sense as we listen to others. Finally, there are physical barriers in organizations, such as distance or loud background noise, which prevent listening.

There are numerous perceptual barriers that may alter or screen the messages we receive. The specific organizational barriers we discuss include external noise, internal noise, organizational distance, and selective attention.

External noise

In many organizations, sound levels, distracting stimuli, and competing messages can prevent effective sensing. Many manufacturing plants have noise levels, for example, that make listening difficult and work-places have numerous ongoing activities. Multitasking, an increasingly apparent external distraction in many organizations, requires dividing attention. Poor acoustics, other ongoing activities, or street sounds can inhibit the listening process. Noise and distractions generated by the environment can distract from listening (DeVito, 2004).

Internal noise

Internal noise, or interference created by the listener, occurs when we are preoccupied, under pressure, or have other priorities. Sometimes this is referred to as *nonhearing*, because we may be physically present but not processing any messages (Tracey, 1988). We can all be primary candidates as we focus on other issues (e.g., hungry, tired, defensive, other tasks or job pressures, external issues). Referred to as an *internal monologue*, the receiver does not give full attention to the task of sensing the message (Howell, 1982). Even the time of day can make a difference regarding our listening effectiveness because it influences attentiveness and overall motivation (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). In addition, the amount of time a person has to engage in the

listening process also will affect the outcome.

We may *prejudge* the sender. Deciding the individual lacks credibility, is not worth paying attention to, or reminds us of someone we were sorry we listened to at some earlier point will prevent us from being effective listeners. More general forms of stereotyping can prevent us from seeing beyond a sender's outward label of management, union, professor, tall, old, young, or any other characteristic. The potential distrust brought on by stereotyping can prevent a valid sensing of the message.

If the message is *not assigned significance*, it is likely to be ignored. Frequently, messages about safety or work rules “go in one ear and out the other,” according to people who are in charge of safety. A good example is provided by the story of a worker in a chocolate factory who fell into a vat of chocolate. She began yelling: “Fire! Fire!” Immediately several fellow workers came to the rescue. After they pulled her out, they asked, “Why did you yell, ‘fire!’” She answered, “Would you have come if I had yelled ‘chocolate?’” Her fellow workers needed a message to which they would assign significance.

Finally, a listener may be so *apathetic or hostile* that he or she does not even pick up on the message (Tracey, 1988). For subordinates, and superiors for that matter, ineffective listening can be a useful form of self-protection (Timm & DeTinne, 1995). In order *not to be*

changed, embarrassed, or hurt, we simply do not listen accurately. The multiple changes impacting on organizational members require developing new skills and knowledge. A *fear of failure* created by difficult material or procedures also can create poor listening (Floyd, 1985). These three factors of apathy, fear of change, and fear of failure can operate throughout the listening process.

Organizational distance

The inherent organizational distance between the various job classifications (boss–employee, doctor–staff, professor–student) can create perceptual differences. In the past, subordinates were expected to listen and superiors were supposed to talk. Bosses provided answers with little input from subordinates. This century requires changes in these traditional behavioral role expectations.

At a different level, superiors and subordinates have very different perceptions of organizational reality. Although a manager might be “fired-up” about a proposed change in procedure, a subordinate might be wondering what additional job responsibilities would be involved.

Finally, verbal and nonverbal differences may exist because of culture, educational backgrounds, or occupational activities, making comprehension difficult.

Selective attention

To be effective, a listener must fully sense the message. Four explanations are offered to explain why selective attention is given to one particular message over another.

1. First, there are automatic, unconscious rules, such as focusing on a sender who states our name or mentions a subject important to us. Our chocolate factory story is a good example.
2. Second, we make conscious decisions about which messages we are likely to accept. If there are multiple messages, we unconsciously prioritize our listening activities. Choosing to concentrate on the boss's message, rather than a co-worker's simultaneous message, is a normal occurrence in organizations.
3. Third, we may be put off by the difficulty of the mental task, because complex tasks require more concentration and energy. Fourth, we have a strong need for consistency. When messages contrast with our preconceived notions, we may dismiss them. Roadblocks exist even as we are receiving the message, which can detour the listening process. Listening is the process of becoming aware, to the degree possible, of all the cues that another party emits (Van Slyke, 1999).

In summary, we have examined how external and internal noise, organizational distance, and selective attention prevent effective sensing of the message.

Interpreting

Hearing a message, and then attending to it, are two vital aspects of effective listening. However, the listener must interpret or assign meaning to the message. This is an immensely complex process because we are taking messages and deciding in which category the message belongs.

A quick review of some of the issues we have covered so far in this text will underscore the complexity. When we discussed language, for example, we observed that words have numerous meanings and various levels of interpretation. When you started reading this text, some words did not fit into previously developed categories—you lacked a clear means of interpreting the information.

Perception and paradigms act as additional filters or limiting factors in organizational communication. And so it goes through each of the topics we have covered.

Understanding occurs when the listener fully comprehends the other person's frame of reference, point of view, and feelings regarding a subject. The expression "I know you believe that you

understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant” speaks to the importance of understanding.

A frequently told story regarding the original TAB commercial revolves around the jingle “Let’s taste new TAB.” A fourth-grader wrote to Coca-Cola and explained that it came over the radio as “Less taste, new TAB.” Coca-Cola immediately changed the ad.

Finally, consider the following story. A boy is involved in a serious automobile accident. His father was driving the car and was killed instantly. The boy was rushed to the hospital in critical condition. The doctor in the emergency room took one look at the boy and screamed: “Oh my God, it’s my son!” What is going on in the story? Some individuals are confused because the father was killed in the accident. The answer, of course, is the doctor is the boy’s mother. Interpretation, because of preset assumptions, can be inaccurate. This story leads into the third part of the listening process.

Evaluation

The third stage is evaluation. At this point, we make judgments regarding our acceptance of the messages (DeVito, 2004). These decisions to accept, alter, or reject the messages are based on the receiver’s own knowledge or opinions. In theory, this is an

important quality control step. We decide if the message supports the point being made, or if the individual and the message have credibility. This stage can be used too quickly, resulting in messages being accepted or rejected without any real justification. Effective listeners are careful to evaluate the message by weighing the evidence, and sorting fact from opinion, as they strive to make this a useful stage.

Thought speed

During the interpreting and evaluating stages, listeners can capitalize on thought speed to sort through messages. Senders have a normal speaking rate of 125–150 words per min. On average, we can understand approximately 300 words per min (Wood, 2004). This differential can be used to enhance listening.

Role requirements

Role requirements can lead to incorrect evaluations. As Callerman and McCartney (1985) explain, “A supervisor must believe subordinates have experience, ideas, problems, and solutions to contribute to the organization and must demonstrate that belief through active listening so that subordinates will gain greater respect for themselves as individuals and for their supervisors” (p. 39). Traditionally, subordinates have been expected to show interest in their superiors’ communication without providing any

real feed-back (Bormann, Howell, Nichols, & Shapiro, 1980). So, in addition to the organizational distance discussed under sensing, role requirements often impede interpretation and evaluation. Managers can increase their listening effective-ness in the judgment stage by listening for what is not said, considering the other person's emotions and background, and allowing criticisms of a manager's "brilliant" policies (Peters, 1987). The evaluation stage provides us with the opportunity to judge a message's quality (Verderber & Verderber, 2001). Thought speed allows for strong analysis. However, role requirements can lead to a lack of credibility by managers to a subordinate's ideas.

Responding

This final stage involves the various types of feedback. In some ways, compliance—doing what we are told—can be seen as a form of responding. More likely we expect some type of response in most listening situations. This final stage provides data to the sender for judging the success of the communication process. Research indicates that effective listeners provide and use more feedback than do ineffective listeners (Lewis & Reinsche, 1988). Studies of listening in organizations indicate that listeners are expected to make some type of overt response, whether it be verbal or nonverbal, to be judged a good listener (Tracey, 1988). This admonition becomes somewhat complex when we introduce the importance of silence. In negotiating or conflict management

training, participants are reminded that "it is better to remain silent and appear to be a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." Silence encourages the other person to continue just to fill in your silence, which can be a key skill for organizational members (Blair, 1999). If you choose silence as a strategy out of respect, humility, self-defense, or for some other reason, remember the importance of some form of nonverbal attention (e.g., head nods, eye contact).

These four stages explain the listening process. Although we have discussed each one in detail, in the listening process these stages occur rapidly. The examination of each one highlights many of the factors that can limit effective listening. In addition to the listening stages, there are specific types of listening behaviors, which we now explain.

Types of listening

Listening behaviors can be divided between passive and active listening, and deliberative and empathetic listening.

Active listening

When we assume that listening only requires the receiver to be in attendance, we are referring to passive listening. This is listening without directing the speaker verbally or nonverbally. Some

individuals are quite adept at pretend-ing to listen, and others simply assume that being present is the same as actually listening (DeVito, 1989).

Active listening is a process where the listener sends back to the sender signals indicating what the listener thinks the sender meant (Harris, 1997). The receiver becomes part of the transaction and takes an active responsibility for understanding the feelings of the other person. Donaldson and Donaldson (1996) observe that “listening is something you do—not something that gets done to you” (p. 117). Understanding the sender’s total message, including both verbal and nonverbal information, along with the content and feelings expressed, is the receiver’s responsibility. Active listening enables receivers to check on the accuracy of their understanding of what a sender said, express acceptance of feelings, and stimulate senders to explore more fully their thoughts and feelings (Wilson, Hantz, & Hanna, 1989). Listening is “build-ing rapport and relationship rather than simply receiving the speaker’s words accurately” (Harris, 1997, p. 9).

Learning to listen rather than be in control can be difficult. “There is a common thread to difficult doctors: most have problems talking to, or listen-ing to patients” (Kolata, 2005, p. A16). One suggestion provided for doctors to become better listeners is rather than immediately offering advice, say “uh huh” three times. So, if the patient says he or she is having chest pains, simply say “uh huh.”

Then the patient says, I’ve also been having headaches.” “Uh huh.” The patient finally says, “It all started when my brother died of an aneurysm in the brain. I wonder if it’s related?” By holding off and listening, the doctor discovers the potential root cause of the problems (Kolata, 2005).

Three techniques for developing your active listening skills are *paraphrasing, expressing understanding, and asking questions*. Paraphrasing is stating in your own words what you think the sender meant. This is not part of the interpretative stage. Instead, you really are providing the sender with your summary of the content of her or his message. This allows you to check the accuracy of your perception of the message. By using objective descriptions, you are responding to the verbal and nonverbal signals given by the sender.

Fighting the tendency to *daydream* or focusing on other issues can be especially difficult (Kreitner, 2005; Verderber & Verderber, 2001). One means of fighting daydreaming is to paraphrase actively. Paraphrasing also works well in emotionally charged situations. If another confronts you in an angry manner, an excellent defense is to acknowledge the issue as you paraphrase. Statements like “before we go any further, let me make certain I understand,” followed by a paraphrase takes the issue from emotion to content. The other person will be responding that you are correct, or incorrect, in the paraphrasing but both parties are now discussing

issues, not emotions.

We must heed an important word of caution regarding *paraphrasing*. It can be redundant and annoying if it is simply trading words. The goal is to restate the same meaning presented by the sender, but in a different form. This allows the sender to verify, modify, or reject the listener's interpretation. So, if it seems to be simply parroting the sender, paraphrasing becomes extremely awkward.

When you echo the *feelings of the sender*, you are using the second technique—*expressing understanding*. This restatement of the feelings that you hear from the sender as correctly as possible allows the receiver to check more accurately on how well the sender's feelings have been perceived and understood. Additionally, your expressed understanding might allow a sender to view her or his feelings more objectively.

Finally, *asking questions* designed to encourage the sender to express the feelings he or she wants to express is important. By allowing the senders to explain fully their thoughts and feelings, we encourage senders to provide additional information. Questions help to clarify areas of uncertainty. Remember that questions designed to make us look like debaters or lawyers are not appropriate. For years, professionals have cautioned against questions posing false dilemmas such as “Do you still beat your

wife, husband, child, or companion?” Regardless of how you answer, you are guilty of currently engaging the objectionable behavior—you answer “yes,” or having done it in the past by answering “no.” In organizations, these types of questions might include “Do you still cheat on your travel expense vouchers?”; “Do you still come in late every morning?”; or “You don't still believe that stupid plan will work, do you?”

Deliberative versus empathetic

Some authorities divide organizational listening into the two categories of deliberative and empathetic (Koehler, Anatol, & Applebaum, 1981). *Deliberative listening* focuses on the listener's capacity to hear, analyze, recall, and draw valid conclusions from information presented. Because reducing mistakes and increasing task coordination often are organizational priorities, a large number of training programs and listening tests are concerned with deliberative listening (Cooper, 1997). When the goal is to be an *efficient* listener who listens accurately, this approach works. Although being accurate in receiving messages is important, there is more to being an effective listener in today's organization.

Empathy is putting ourselves into the other person's “shoes.” Many authorities see empathy, or the ability to see an idea or concept from the other's perspective, as the key to effective listening (DeVito, 2004). *Empathetic listening* concentrates on the feeling

part of the sender's message. The listener's goal is to relate to what the other person is thinking or feeling regardless of the content. For this to work, you must be non-evaluative in the listening process. The listener should not interrupt the speaker, nor present a threatening environment. Increased diversity changes, with all the potential advantages for organizational success, demand an even stronger capacity to be an empathetic listener. Different backgrounds guarantee a different set of expectations regarding work. A colleague, for example, who is suddenly thrust into caring for an aging or ailing parent needs to be listened to with a sympathetic ear.

Empathy is easier to describe than to actually use. How, for example, can a manager really understand what it means to deal with angry customers everyday? How can a first-year employee relate to the trials and tribulations of a senior-level executive? The answer lies in truly suspending judgment and accepting, for the moment, that the messages carry validity.

Differentiating organizational listening

The majority of the early research on listening was conducted in classroom settings. The results indicated that good listening habits were tied to mental set, skills and habits, general intelligence, and some specific intelligence-related traits (Nichols, 1962). With an educational setting as the paradigm, it is no surprise that the focus

was on how well the audience could be trained to receive the message (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988). The major impediments to listening were identified, and methods were offered to overcome these barriers to listening. Classroom listening research has been oriented primarily to gaining information.

Organizations expect a greater use of job-oriented listening behaviors. Effective organizational listening is based on the relational aspects of the communication process. Specifically, it is related to active listening including empathy and receiving skills, verbal and nonverbal behavior, relationships, and managerial style. When we are interested in organizational effectiveness, we should remember that "listening skills cannot be separated from other communication concerns within the organizations" (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988, p. 49). Our verbal and nonverbal skills are tied to listening effectiveness. Table 8.2 provides a humorous, tongue-in-cheek, list of listening behaviors typical of poor listening by managers. Ironically, this management style also limits the manager's effectiveness as we noted, in addition to their own limited listening profiles. Reverse each statement in the table on the following page and you have a useful guide for effective leadership listening.

We have outlined values and types of listening. Our final concern is with the use of feedback and the impact of climate in the listening process.

Twenty listening habits designed to help you irritate your subordinates

1. When they come in with a problem, you do all the talking.
2. Don't fail to interrupt them when they talk.
3. Don't look at them when they talk so they can't tell if you're listening.
4. Make them feel they're wasting their time so they won't come back.
5. Continually shuffle papers or play with a pencil or pen.
6. Pace around the room while they talk.
7. Use your poker face to keep them wondering if you understand them.
8. Ignore them to take incoming phone calls, and have your secretary not hold your calls or ask anyone to call back later.
9. Don't ever smile—this makes them afraid to talk to you.
10. Ask questions about everything they say—this will let them know you doubt everything they say.
11. Get them off the subject by asking questions and making comments that don't pertain to the subject at hand.
12. Keep them on their toes by putting them on the defensive when they make a suggestion about improving things.
13. Embarrass them by answering their questions with a question—one you're sure they can't answer, of course.
14. Continually take notes while they're talking. This will get them so worried about what you're writing, they'll forget what it is they want to say.
15. Let them know you're doing them a favor by listening to them.
16. Never do today what can be put off until tomorrow—tell them: "we'll have to think about it."
17. If other people are in the room, be sure to ask the employee some personal questions.
18. If they happen to have a good idea, be sure to let them know you've been thinking about that too.
19. Every couple of minutes look at your watch or the clock while they're talking.
20. Keep on using your computer, don't lift up your gaze from the screen, and assure them: "Just keep on talking, I'm listening."

Feedback

In the simplest of terms, feedback is the receiver's verbal and nonverbal response to a sender's communication. Feedback is an ongoing part of the relational process. Because we cannot not communicate, verbal and nonverbal feedback are occurring at all times during a communication transaction. So, no overt response is still a response. At various points in this book, we discuss feedback.

Positive and negative feedback

When we first encountered positive and negative feedback in Chapter 1, we presented the systems thinking perspective that positive feedback was a message to continue deviating or perhaps even accentuate the deviation. Negative feedback called for a return to the earlier protocol of the system thereby decreasing the deviation.

For most of us, the more common connotations for the term *positive* means "supportive" and the term *negative* means "modify," "change," "alter," or "correct the source" or the source's messages (Benton, 1995). For example, head nods and smiles might encourage us to continue telling a story, whereas frowns or yawning might discourage us. In organizations, this is too simple an approach. For our purposes, *feedback is the vital process of developing individuals and organizations toward improved*

performance. We now consider several issues.

First, honest feedback regarding job performance is a requirement for individuals looking for opportunities for self-understanding and for sustaining job satisfaction (DuBrin, 1999). People like to know how well they are doing. A survey of nearly 1,500 customer service representatives and call-center managers found that “timely feedback can contribute to a positive call-center environment” (Salopek, 1999, p. 16). Organizations providing feedback that includes recognition and job performance measurements enjoy higher levels of job satisfaction among their employees. The Gallup Organization and Carl-son Marketing Group found a strong correlation between employee satisfaction and increased company profits, according to their nationwide survey of U.S. workers (“Recognition,” 1999). “Employees indicated that they favor recognition from managers and supervisors by a margin of 2–1 over recognition from coworkers or other sources. And nearly seven out of 10 (69%) employees say nonmonetary forms of recognition provide the best motivation” (“Recognition,” 1999, p. 5).

Second, feedback involves more than individuals. McIntyre and Salas (1995) explain: “Teamwork implies that members provide feedback to and accept it from one another” (p. 24). As we have already indicated, organizations seeking improvement need rigorous feedback (Collins & Porras, 1994). Successful

organizations that retain employees and develop excellent morale provide formal feedback opportunities for employees including surveys (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999).

Honest should not be confused with brutal or destructive feedback. Harsh criticism is a useful example. In a study of 108 managers and white-collar workers, the poor use of criticism was one of the five most openly mentioned causes of conflict at work (Karp, 1987). One source of destructive feedback is the tendency to *manage by exception*, which is limiting feedback to others to situations where something has gone wrong. In this type of environment, we hear little or no comments regarding our performance until a mistake is made. Managers forsake their responsibility to develop people and people assume that no news is good news. When the criticism arrives, it appears to be abrupt, out of context, and harsh.

A more productive approach is to spend sufficient time reinforcing positive actions, so that any criticism is interpreted as part of an effective coaching and development process between the superior and subordinate. For example, some companies encourage subordinates to reveal mistakes in order to open up the communication channels by creating a positive feedback process. Temps & Co. offers to pay employees \$250 for describing an interesting mistake (Levinson, 1987). Although \$250 may seem extremely supportive, employees must explain how the mistake

happened to their peers in order to prevent repeating the problem. The reward encourages an early detection of potentially serious problems. So rather than hiding the problem as a means to avoid criticism, Temps & Co. has developed a process that proactively tackles problems and develops solutions. To further understand feedback, we discuss defensive and supportive climates and then effective feedback techniques.

Supportive and defensive climates

One of the most widely used concepts in the teaching of communication is *defensive communication*. In his classic article, Gibb (1961) outlined the different consequences from feeling defensive and feeling understood. Gibb's article "is the most requested communication article in the history of the field" (Weick & Browning, 1991, p. 9). Essentially, he argues that we have a choice in how we offer feedback to others. Defensive producing messages focus on the other as a person, whereas supportive messages focus on behavior or the problem.

Naturally, we become defensive when someone blames us. Consistent with our view throughout this text, both verbal and nonverbal behaviors tend to produce supportive and defensive climates (Wolvin & Coackley, 1996). Gibb (1961) contrasted six defensive and supportive climates in the following manner. When we provide feedback, we have a choice between *evaluating* or

describing an issue. Evaluation judges and looks for blame, whereas description offers neutral statement of fact. Contrast trying to change someone's attitude or to influence how they act through *control* with the use of a problem orientation, which attempts to change the *problem*, not the person. A third contrast is between *strategic* communication where we manipulate or use gimmicks instead of being *spontaneous* by being honest and open. An additional issue is the contrast between being *neutral* and showing *empathy*. If someone is indifferent to us, we tend to become defensive. Fifth, making it clear that we are *superior* to someone else, including the ability to exercise power, will make him or her defensive. The contrasting behavior, *equality*, forecasts a willingness to work together and is clearly a desired stance in today's organization. Finally, being dogmatic, or a know-it-all unwilling to change, is indicative of *certainty*. The supportive contrast is *provisionalism* where we offer tentative conclusions open to discussion and change.

The consequences of these two types of feedback responses in organizations are significant. Defensive producing feedback impedes effective communication (Sweeney & McFarlin, 2002). On the other end of the continuum, empathetic understanding promotes greater job satisfaction, lower job turn-over among subordinates, and greater mobility within the organization (Gordon, 1988).

Effective feedback techniques

Judgments should be reworded in order to be descriptive. The key is to have some objective measure that compares actual behavior with some standard, and a non-evaluative means of providing the feedback. The following list outlines the steps and issues in using effective feedback. Most feedback, in an organizational setting, should deal in specifics, focus on actions, not attitudes, determine the appropriate time and place, and refrain from inappropriately including other issues (Karp, 1987).

Feedback should be:

1. Descriptive rather than evaluative.
2. Specific rather than general.
3. Appropriate, taking into account the needs of the sender, receiver, and situation.
4. Directed toward behavior that the receiver can do something about.
5. Well timed. Usually, the more immediate the feedback, the more effective. There are the wrong times also.
6. Honest rather than manipulative.
7. Understood by both parties. Additional input is sought, if needed, to enhance and clarify the process.
8. Proactive and coactive. When it requires changes in past behaviors, specific directions should be provided for the

expected change. Both parties should agree on the need for change and the remedy.

9. Never “dump” past grievances on an individual. It should be a natural process in the ongoing relationship between superior and subordinate, co-workers, or any subsystem in the organization.

The underlying power of feedback lies in its capacity to validate the assumptions, constructs, and ideas we have about other people’s actions. Before offer-ing performance feedback, consider asking permission. By predicating our feedback with an offer to the other person along the lines of “Do you want to hear my position or opinion?” we share the power of feedback rather than imposing it. Similarly, being aware of the importance of good timing, being positive, taking responsibility through “I” statements, and being direct, allow the feedback to be toward helping someone rather than criticizing them.

The constructive use of feedback, coupled with a supportive climate, allows individuals and groups to move toward clearer interpersonal understanding. So, in addition to listening to an individual, adding the dimension of feed-back allows both parties to respond to the intended meaning of a message. Although we are presenting feedback as a separate issue, we always are providing feedback. The key is to make certain the feedback is supportive to enhance the quality of the transaction.

Conclusion

Listening is a major communication factor in organizations. Not only is listening important to organizations and individuals, ineffective listening is costly. The current status of organizational listening is not strong. A major reason for this weakness lies in the difficulty in delineating listening factors from the overall communication patterns. In fact, focusing on listening is the most important contribution of this chapter. By being aware of the lack of emphasis, we can be more effective in understanding and using listening.

Examining the four stages of the listening process allows us to focus on the numerous factors that can prevent effective listening. Each stage—sensing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding—is significant in the listening process.

Active listening is designed to enhance the ability of the sender to successfully complete the message. Organizations make different uses of deliberative and empathetic listening. Most important, research indicates that active participation by the listener in the communication process is important.

Feedback and climate are the final areas of concern. In organizations, feedback is vital. However, the transaction can be supported or limited depending on the type of climate. Defensive producing climates limit the willingness of the sender to participate

in the transaction. So, effective feedback must be provided to enhance the listening process.

At the very least, this chapter should provide some important information regarding the relative lack of effective listening in organizations. In spite of overwhelming evidence for the need for better listening, it often is ignored as an important issue. To enhance our own effectiveness, we should concentrate on making our listening behaviors more effective. By and large, good listening encourages others also to listen more effectively.

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CHAPTER 2: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

After reading this chapter, students will be able to do the following:

- Describe the use of networks and channels within an organization.
- Describe organizational behavior as symbolic.
- Analyze organizational behavior as a product of organizational culture.
- Analyze the impact of diverse experiences and perspectives in organizations.
- Apply symbolic behaviors to the systematic and everyday experiences of organizational members.



SECTION 1: SYMBOLIC BEHAVIOR

The power of communication to create and maintain meaning that is shared by members of an organization is a theme that has permeated this text. In the introductory chapter, we established that communication functions as the lifeblood, and sometimes the embalming fluid, for all organizations. This chapter places in context the most human part of organizations—symbolic behavior that results in various degrees of shared meaning and values between organizational members.

The following topics are explored: (1) seven basic propositions of symbolic behavior (organizational complexity creating reliance on symbolic messages, uncertainty promoting continual organizing process, symbolic behavior creating and maintaining organizational cultures, symbols constituting the basis for interpersonal reality, groups reaffirming the importance of symbolic behavior, leadership requiring effective symbolic behavior, and incongruences and paradoxes managed through acculturation), (2) tools of symbolic behavior, (3) the six limitations of symbolic behavior, (4) performances (roles, front, dramatic realization, mystification, and rituals), and (5) complexity.



Symbols allow individuals, groups, and organizations to engage in the complex behaviors required to work together. “Symbolic action includes all the behaviors we engage in that are meaningful—that is, that come to represent to others our attitudes, beliefs, or intentions” ranging from language to nonverbal acts to group phenomena (Cooper & Nothstine, 1992, pp. 2–3). Symbols stand for something else so they can be used to explain past behavior, respond based on past experience, use accumulated knowledge, cope with the present and the future, and create unity and division. They allow us to make sense of our organizational environment.

Symbolic behavior’s impact is evident at the organizational, group, and individual levels. This is hardly an insight at this point in our examination of organizational communication, because you are well versed in the importance of symbolic behavior. Throughout the first six chapters, you have been provided numerous examples of symbolic behavior in organizations, their cultures, and the various subcultures.

This section takes these pieces of the jigsaw puzzle, which have appeared at the appropriate points in our discussion of other issues, adds the remaining pieces, and provides a comprehensive picture of symbolic behavior. Although the justifications for a symbolic perspective are strong, you already were forewarned in the beginning of this text that selected views of organizations, including symbolic, could be parochial and myopic.

With this disclaimer in mind, this chapter begins the analysis by presenting seven propositions underscoring the symbolic perspective. Then, verbal and nonverbal communications, as the delivery mechanisms for symbolic behavior, are examined. Five important limitations to symbolic behavior are provided to make certain our understanding is well situated. Finally, we examine the concept of performance as it relates to organizations.

Basic propositions: symbolic behavior

Overview

The symbolic behavior perspective argues that organizational reality is socially constructed through communication (Cheney & Christensen, 2000; Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996). Because of uncertainty, individuals constantly are organizing themselves by creating and responding to a group based reality (Weick, 1995). These processes and interactions create, maintain, and transform the organizational structures. This collective sense-making means there can be multiple realities produced through the various cycles of human interactions. “Symbolic behavior refers to a person’s capacity to respond to or use a system of significant symbols” (Faules & Alexander, 1978, p. 5). The following issues, which are examined as propositions, are intertwined with symbolic behavior: complexity, uncertainty, cultural creation and maintenance, interpersonal reality, group behavior, leadership, and

the management of incongruences.

Complexity

Proposition 1: Organizational complexity creates a reliance on symbolic messages. Most organizations are too vast, unpredictable, and complex for easy understanding. When we enter the experience called “work,” we are faced with uncertainty regarding the goals, power structure, road to success, or even how to get the work accomplished. This complexity is compounded by the multitude of ongoing behaviors including transactions between individuals, individuals to groups, groups to groups, groups to organizations, organizations to organizations, and organizations to public behaviors. “In many ways the crisis in business today is a crisis in meaning....Those who would aspire to leadership roles in this new environment must not underestimate the depth of this human need for meaning. It is a most fundamental human craving, an appetite that will not go away” (Albrecht, 1994, p. 22). In other words, the maze of interactions requires some symbolic clarity.

As a consequence, our world of work is an interpretative experience. “As for the present, each member of an organization has directly experienced only a ‘sliver’ of the non-symbolic; each member’s overall picture is but a construct provided by the symbol systems of words, numbers, and nomenclatures. Refusing to see

or acknowledge the dominating role of symbolicity in shaping notions of ‘reality’ is to cling ‘to a kind of naive verbal realism’” (Tompkins, 1987, p. 85). Organizations are subjective realities rather than objective phenomena (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983).

Symbolic messages allow members to make sense out of their environment creating a social reality (Faules & Alexander, 1978; Mills, 2002). For example, few individuals can comprehend a behemoth like IBM with its international realm or a large university’s sphere. Being unable to grasp the entire scope of an organization, we respond to the organization’s essence as it is presented symbolically. Highly bureaucratic organizations, such as schools, colleges and universities, business conglomerates, research and development organizations, political campaign organizations, and government bureaus have been labeled organized anarchies (Cameron, 1980). Within these organizations, there are ambiguous connections between structure and expected activities. Therefore, subunits carry out their parochial activities based on their own interpretations of the organization’s purposes, goals, and consequences for performance. Clarity for individuals and groups is more localized.

Most individuals are disconnected from the underlying strategies or top management planning so the overall purpose of the organization is clarified primarily through symbolic messages

ranging from language usage to parking arrangements to formal and informal dress standards. “A critical task in organizations is creating and evolving shared understanding, a kind of sense-making that is basic to creative leadership” (Palus & Horth, 1998, p. 2). These “basic assumptions provide a map by which we engage in our organizational lives” (Keyton, 2005, p. 26).

Even the smallest business must respond to bureaucratic restraints, such as tax and building codes. Although individuals may be their own bosses, they still are subject to the labyrinth of rules, regulations, and conflicting advice (e.g., “make a profit” and “always place the customer first”). Complexity and incongruity can leave us feeling helpless but the lifeline is our ability to identify with symbolic images (Boulding, 1961).

Organizations develop a standardized set of meanings through micro-cultural verbal and nonverbal symbols. The mechanisms chosen for delivering the messages— verbal and written channels, nonverbal communication, networks, interpersonally, in groups, by leaders, and electronically— carry significant symbolic consequences, which are created and maintained by the organization or subsystem within which we function. Note that even posted rules like no running, no talking, no eating, no cheating, and no smoking provide us with symbolic clarification. At the beginning of this text, we noted that Ford Motor Company has provided a home computer for all employees and access to the

Internet. Although the increased communication is important, the symbolic importance is even more revealing.

Uncertainty and organizing

Proposition 2: Uncertainty promotes a continual process of organizing. The symbolic interpretation of organizational reality deals with the process of sense-making. In other words, we are constantly organizing our shared experience. “Organizing is defined as a consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviors” (Weick, 1979, p. 3). Because organizing is complex, meaning is provided through symbols. This meaning is negotiated between individuals, within groups, and during an individual’s passage through an organization (Eisenberg & Riley, 1988). Organizational members make sense out of the everyday events through a set of shared symbols (Brown, 1986). The complexity and vastness of most organizations means the different subcultures create a multitude of potentially different stories, explanations, and interpretations of reality (Boje, 1995).

An organization’s “reality is socially constructed through the words, symbols, and behaviors of its members” (Putnam, 1983, p. 35). In fact, this common ground is a prerequisite to effective organizational functioning. “One of the important defining characteristics of organizations is that within an organization, there

are consensually shared perceptions and definitions of the world” (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 12). Medtronic, the company that invented the battery-powered pacemaker in 1957 “so dominates the pacemaker, neurostimulators, and stents market that you’ll often hear it referred to as the Microsoft of the medical-device industry” (Whitford, 2001, p. 110). It is also one of the 100 best places to work, according to the 2000 study, and it connects its 22,000 employees together “by corporate culture—the stew of rules, mores, and traditions that says something about what it means to work at this company and not some other” (Whitford, 2001, p. 110). New hires are presented their Medtronic medallions inscribed with “Alleviate Pain, Restore Health, and Extend Life” extracted from the mission statement. Even its folklore adds to Medtronic’s mission. Bakken, the founder, became interested in the potential for electricity and medical care when he watched the 1931 film version of *Frankenstein*. This would be interesting trivia if the story did not remind all employees of Medtronic’s life sustaining mission and their responsibility to help others. As a result, “86% of Medtronic employees (in the survey for the 100 Best) said their work had special meaning, 94% felt pride in what they accomplished” (Whitford, 2001, p. 111). The social construction of the Medtronic experience creates fulfillment for its employees.

The *symbolic-interactionism* perspective pays heed to the symbolic reaction people have to their organizations. Employees, it is argued, form their organization-specific concept of self as a result of their ongoing interactions with other parts of the organization, ranging from individuals, subordinates, and superiors to work rules and architecture. The work environment presents us with an elaborate code of values,

attitudes, roles, and norms of behavior that are appropriate to the organization (Wood, 1999). Our role definitions and responses to situations are indications of the symbolic importance we have assigned to ongoing communication events. One Federal Express (FedEx) folk tale is about a delivery person who had been given the wrong key to a FedEx drop box. So he loaded it into his truck and took it back to the station, where they were able to pry it open and get the contents to their destination the following day. At FedEx, this employee is remembered as a hero who maintained the on-time, overnight goal. If you wonder just how powerful this type of lesson is, imagine what would happen at the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) if someone uprooted a mailbox from a sidewalk. They would be considered unbalanced and probably charged and dismissed for damaging property. Both reactions by the organizational members are a result of the processes of organizing and sense-making.

Organizational cultures prescribe the ways members react symbolically to organizational phenomena by presenting them with culturally approved explanations, shared perceptions, and a mutual sense of social order. This collective interpretation of social reality is vital to the effective functioning of an organization.

Cultural creation and maintenance

Proposition 3: Symbolic behavior creates and maintains organizational cultures. All organizations have cultures that are learned, shared, and transmitted. The cultural perspective represents a process orientation to organizational reality (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983).

“Organizational culture is socially acquired and shared knowledge that is embodied in specific and general organizational frames of reference” (Wilkins & Dyer, 1988, p. 513). For example, the metaphors—ranging from machines (people are merely part of the production process) to brains (information and intelligence processing) to psychic prisons (toe the company line, bound by golden handcuffs, working in a difficult environment) to voyages (adventure requiring teamwork)—used to characterize organizations set the stage for acceptable and unacceptable activities. If you were told you would become entangled in a psychic prison, you certainly would react differently than if you were invited to join one big, happy family (Clancy, 1989). Culture is the shadow side of the formal organization as reflected by its unique character, style, energy, commitment, and way of doing things. It provides the glue for cohesion and the oil for lubrication. As people perform their culturally sanctioned behaviors, their actions assist in creating and maintaining the organization. In addition, culture prescribes how we are to respond to a variety of situations with culturally specific rewards and penalties possible depending on our performance. “Culture has a pervasive influence on how an organization functions” (Sanchez, 2006, p. 33). Rewards, punishments, interaction with the business environment, work processes, patterns of social interaction, customer service, and numerous other attributes are directed by the culture.

The earlier Medtronic discussion provides one useful example. At Micro-soft, also one of the 100 best places to work, employees believe “that Microsoft is different from other places (and) ... that they themselves are different from other people” (Gimein, 2001, p. 126). A common theme among Microsoft employees when asked to describe their experiences makes the point. Gimein (2001) relates a story told to him over and over that he labels the secret garden. “Once I was lost, they said; I did not fit in; then I found the key to the magical garden of Microsoft, where I belonged in the first place” (p. 126).

Aligning employees through symbolic processes including culture can create awesome power. Medtronic, Microsoft, and a remarkable number of other organizations use culture to achieve this alignment. The changes associated with the new millennium require this aligning process. “In this emerging new era when so many people can work for whomever and from wherever they like, coalescing around shared values becomes a logical, effective organizing principle for a business enterprise. Creating, articulating, and sustaining the organization’s values thus become one of management’s most important jobs” (Colvin, 2000, p. F-9). In providing advice on how to move an organization forward, many experts focus on culture enhancements or changes (Galpin, 1996; Schein, 1994). In general, organizations should shift from being goal-directed to vision-directed; price-focused to value-focused; product-driven to customer-driven; rigid to flexible; and hierarchical

to flat and empowered (Wind & Main, 1998). Most organizational members accept these general goals even though the content behind the changes is never quite as clear.

In truth, most organizations could not operate if a strict, rational response was required as a basis for every action or behavior. So, cultures provide direction through the shared assumptions, values, and meanings. If nothing else, people have a reason for committing time, personnel, and resources to a particular activity. The culture, whether fully understood or simply accepted, provides useful, overriding rationale for activities that otherwise might seem meaningless. We need to emphasize that not all employees grasp the full impact of an organization's culture. When asked, "Do you agree that your company has a widely embraced and understood corporate culture?" only 44% of employees sampled (1,281 nationwide) responded yes, 37% responded not sure, and 19% said no (Yang & Gonzalez, 2005).

Meetings provide a useful example. In most organizations, people are spending more and more time in meetings. Surveys of participants indicate that more than 50% of the meeting time is wasted due, in large part, to poor planning, meeting format, and ineffective leadership (Dressler, 1995; Mosvick & Nelson, 1987). From a structural, time-and-motion perspective, bad meetings can be expensive. If there are eight people at the meeting averaging \$40,000 a year in salary and benefits, the "cost is \$320 an hour,

including salary and benefits, or \$6 a minute" (Dressler, 1995, p. 6B).

But, what if the real value in meetings arises from the ritual itself and not output or time spent? From a symbolic perspective, taking part in the "ritual of decision-making," by attending meetings and making the right comments, can be as important as actually making a decision. These activities can reaffirm the importance of the organization, goals and visions, certain issues, or the individuals in attendance. For example, our reasoning might be that this meeting, be it weekly, specially called, or task-based, must be significant if this many prestigious members are willing to commit their time and energy. The status or expertise indirectly assigned to the participants by being included in this important meeting also reaffirms that the organization carefully deliberates important issues. Even the seating format or the use of an agenda versus a somewhat free-for-all setting, speaks to the culturally accepted values and beliefs. So, two-day retreats, often isolated from the day-to-day pressures, provide a vital refurbishing of the *esprit de corps* by setting goals agreed upon during the retreat that may never be acted on. In fact, having some direction is rational and spending time sorting through conflicting agendas, dealing with different personalities, or stabilizing working habits provides a potentially worthwhile symbolic and pragmatic justification.

Symbolically important activities offer an excellent opportunity for change. Galpin (1996) calls for a change in the way we do things around here to connect culture to the change process. As examples, he offers replacing written memos with face-to-face weekly meetings, establishing ceremonies and events that reinforce the new way of doing things including award or recognition ceremonies, and using new ways to deliver communication including multiple channels. Rather than indicting bureaucracy and advocating a need for quicker decisions in order to be more customer friendly, Kotter (1996) suggests using metaphors, analogies, and examples as the following sentence reflects: “We need to become less like an elephant and more like a customer-friendly Tyrannosaurus Rex” (p. 92).

In the more successful organizations, cultures act as reinforcers for productive behaviors. They assist members in coping with environmental uncertainties and in coordinating activities. Cultural maps, made up of general and specific frames of reference, allow individuals to define situations they encounter and develop an appropriate response” (Wilkins & Dyer, 1988, p. 523). Our symbolic frame of reference defines “aspects of the culture such as general definitions of roles, relevant groupings of individuals, relationships between groups and the whole, relationships between the organization and outside groups, ideological orientations about the nature of humans, the kind of work that needs doing, repair strategies when things go awry, and so forth” (Wilkins & Dyer, 1988, p. 523). When Ford says, “quality is job one” (Q1), Pepsi

simply demands “Beat Coke,” or any organization states “the customer is always right,” the slogan provides a *master symbol*, which establishes that goal as paramount and easily understood.

Organizations and visions	
Match the following organizations with their visions:	
1. Girl Scouts	A. People work more effectively
2. 3M	B. Boundryless, speed & stretch
3. Steelcase	
4. Domino’s Pizza	C. Self-confident and self-respecting young women
5. FedEx	D. Respect for individual initiative
6. General Electric	E. Responsiveness, on time with no excuses
7. Crayola Crayon	F. Products & services when consumers want them

Note: The correct matches are 1-C, 2-D, 3-A, 4-G, 5-F, 6-B, 7-E

Mottoes, visions, and mission statements add to an organization’s ability to shape its own culture. In 1912, the following words were inscribed on the New York City Post Office: “Neither snow nor rain not heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” This pledge was never intended to be the official motto of the U.S. Postal Service (Burrell, 1997). Stamps (1999) observes: “And yet, such is the power of

words to shape belief that millions of Americans still take this pledge to be the motto of the Postal Service and imbue the words with an almost sacred trust” (p. 45). The table on the preceding page presented a sample of mission statements used by well-known organizations. Were you able to correctly match the statement with the organization?

We are familiar with broad missions and values such as “In God We Trust” (United States), “Live Free or Die” (New Hampshire), and “Manly Deeds, Womanly Words” (Maryland). Famous leaders use statements to provide clarity of purpose. For example, Malcolm X resolved: “I believe in the brother-hood of men, all men, but I don’t believe in brotherhood with anyone who doesn’t want brotherhood with me” (quoted in Stamps, 1999, p. 46). We are the makers “of meanings in the world that sometimes seems without meaning. Few things help us find meaning more than a cause to believe in, better yet, about which to get excited” (Waterman, 1987, p. 11).

This overriding ideology allows members “to take their lead from the organization’s own vision” (Mitzberg, 1991, p. 62). One organization boasted “the difficult we do immediately, the impossible takes a little longer.” Contrast the power of that group image with a popular sign seen in some small businesses that shows several figures bent over in laughter saying “you want it when?”

Cultural scenes outline the relevant times, settings, issues set forth to justify switching from one organizational frame to another (Wilkins & Dyer, 1988). For example, moving from a management meeting to an interaction with a customer changes the cultural scene. Working with a customer who has a long-term relationship with your organization presents different demands than a one-time encounter (Gutek, 1995). Individuals face different scenes, different skills, and a commensurate different set of role expectations in order to correctly respond to the scene. Understanding the implicit rules governing these role expectations can be vital to our own successful responses.

There are pluses and minuses regarding organizational cultures. Organizational cultures provide guidelines regarding the expected practices and communication functions as the choice individuals use when responding to the symbolic reality. As you are well aware at this point, cultures provide meaning, help organizations capture and direct the collective will, create distinctive norms, promote values, and encourage high performance. At the same time, cultures can create dysfunctional norms, groupthink, and counterproductive behaviors. A cynic might observe that even the psychic prison provides meaning, albeit unpleasant, in an uncertain setting. As you are already aware from our earlier discussions, cultures provide values, assumptions, informal ideologies, attitudes, myths, symbols, rituals, language, jargon, rumors, prejudices, stereotypes, social etiquette, dress, and

appropriate demeanor. “Symbolism, in short, creates organizational environments as well the motives of those who act” (Tompkins, 1987, p. 83).

The first analysis of *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America* concluded: “The 100 best offer an added benefit of such value that it’s difficult to place on the same scale: a working life for thousands of people really worth living and worth looking forward to every waking day” (Levering, Moshowitz, & Katz, 1985, p. xiv). The now-annual 100 best rankings confirm this critical attribute of the best companies—a potpourri of programs, actions, and accommodations that make an individual’s time at work satisfying.

Interpersonal reality

Proposition 4: Symbols constitute the basis for interpersonal reality. The stimuli to which we assign meaning create and maintain our own reality. As Frank and Brownell (1989) put it, “The concept of symbol is at the heart of human communication” (p. 199). There is a symbiotic process whereby we communicate with symbols and symbols create the meaning we are responding to (Burke, 1969). Therefore, all “communication processes can be seen as ways in which any organization attains personal meaning for its employees. From talk designed to accomplish tasks to talk designed to spread gossip, communication processes are the

lifeblood of any company, because they allow the company to do what it does” (Wilson, Goodall, & Waagen, 1986, p. 107).

Roles, symbols, and interaction deserve further attention. Our roles, constructed by our perceptions of organizational situations, are defined socially through communication (Duncan, 1962; Petrelle, Slaughter, & Jorgensen, 1988). Our idiosyncratic definitions of the workplace based on the symbolic experiences point us toward certain actions that we present through our role behavior. Role-taking, or role performance, does not represent a false persona. Instead, we are attempting to respond to the demands presented by the situation.

Verbal and nonverbal symbols allow us to formulate an understanding of what otherwise would likely seem unclear given the nature of organizational experience. There is *symbolic interaction* through the communication of significant symbols (Duncan, 1968). Working becomes a negotiated experience whereby we participate in creating organizational meaning based on our interpretation of the significant symbols. Our interpretation is reaffirmed or challenged by other organizational members who co-construct dialogues with us (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). Effective role understanding and performance requires an understanding of the culture’s meaning.

Finally, symbols clarify the *proscriptive norms* in an organization.

Most organizational norms are proscriptive rather than prescriptive because they specify whether a behavior is appropriate, not which behavior is appropriate. The historical practices, rituals, activities, and events of the organization provide the broad outline of meaning that allows us to act accordingly (Blumer, 1969, Giddens, 1984). Dressing conservatively, listening to employees, or providing excellent customer service are examples of proscriptive expectations based on a particular cultural setting, rather than specified means for carrying out the activity. Group expectations and sanctions bind individual activity, which brings us to the fifth proposition.

Group behavior

Proposition 5: Groups reaffirm the importance of symbolic behavior. In the end, individuals identify most with the subculture, or group, to which they belong. This community, unit, work group, or department allows us to see that culture “can be understood as a set of solutions devised by a group of people to meet specific problems posed by the situations they face in common” (Ting-Toomey, 1985, p. 74). These solutions, or “the way we do things in this group around here,” occur in every small group. Group activities, ranging from break time to regularly scheduled meetings to levels of cooperation, represent highly symbolic behaviors. Because groups develop their own cultural identities, there can be three types of subcultures. An *enhancing culture*

embraces the dominant cultures’ values, a *counterculture* challenges the values, and an *orthogonal culture* accepts the values of the dominant culture as well as its own (Duncan, 1989). The excellent companies represent the first type of culture where employees begin to see themselves as stakeholders who wish to help the organization succeed because they feel enculturated. The companies view the stakeholders as assets to be protected and developed.

Countercultures evolve for a variety of reasons. For example, a *mutually exploitative* setting might occur where alienated employees resist control and unfair wages and “give as little labor as possible for as high a wage as possible” (Anderson & Englehart, 2001, p. 12). Parts of an organization may become isolated or feel neglected creating a bond between the alienated group members.

Subcultures created through certain professional ties or interests can develop. Nurses and doctors present excellent examples of orthogonal cultures since their professional affiliations and standards provide specific group-based norms within the context of a particular medical setting. Diversity of the organization’s members, based on the various divisions already discussed, provides numerous additional examples of the potential discontinuities between a group’s values and the organization’s (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1993; Harris, 1997; Zemke, Raines, &

Filipczak, 2000). The various cultural levels in any organization can create divisions (Deetz, Tracy, & Simpson, 2000). Organization-specific examples include different departments or job functions (e.g., shipping, sales, production), locations (e.g., plant, headquarters, region), and subgroup membership (e.g., union, management, exempt, nonexempt, new, fully acculturated) can create these three types of subcultures. Inevitably, leaders are called on to coordinate interpersonal and group activities and leaders also rely on symbolic behavior.

Leadership

Proposition 6: Leadership requires effective symbolic behavior. We have already linked leadership to symbols and cultures earlier in this chapter. A useful distinction can be drawn between management—as the process of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling—and leadership (Wind & Main, 1998). In order to provide legitimacy to the practice of management, quantifiable approaches, based on careful planning, often are used. However, “few people doubt that managers traffic in images and more often act as evangelists or psychologists than accountants or engineers” (Duncan, 1989, p. 229). Effective leaders know how to use symbolic behavior and act as facilitators. At the highest level, “executive behavior is mostly talk. It is more symbol intensive than labor intensive, requiring the creation of meaning for those doing the direct work” (Jonas, Fry, & Srivastara, 1989, p. 205). We have

devoted an entire chapter later in this text to the numerous issues regarding leadership in organizations. For now, we concentrate on symbolic leadership.

Two attributes underlie symbolic leadership. First, symbolic leadership is the vital link between organizational needs and employees’ understanding. Second, the organizational culture explains to the leader how the role is to be enacted. Accepting that leadership requires excellent management skills, successful leaders have symbolic, as well as rational, political, and human resource impact. Wise leaders utilize symbolic behaviors. “All business is show business. All leadership is show business. All management is show business. That doesn’t mean tap dancing; it means shaping values, symbolizing attention—and it is the opposite of ‘administration’ and especially, ‘professional management’” (Peters & Austin, 1985, p. 265).

Actions speak louder than words in many cases. “Visible management attention, rather than management exhortation, gets things done. Action may start with the words, but it has to be backed by symbolic behavior that makes those words come alive” (Waterman, 1987, p. 11). This reminds us that those leaders using empty symbolic messages will be discredited quickly. Waterman (1987) continues, “most managers rely too heavily on language and not enough on the great wealth of other symbols available to them” (p. 265).

Symbolic management concentrates on manipulating and developing values, beliefs, and commitments in order to maintain or change organizational cultures (Kotter, 1988). Leaders, then, influence the culture by paying attention to certain behaviors, attributes, and outcomes (Schein, 1985). National consultants hammer away at the premise: What a leader rewards through symbolic attention is what the leader gets (Kerr & Slocum, 1987; Peters, 1989). Managers, vice presidents, or presidents who visit the hot or unpleasant parts of a plant in the middle of summer, drop by training sessions, or spend time inquiring about particularly difficult jobs are operating on the principle that physical presence is more effective than lip service. Leaders walk the talk by symbolically demonstrating their meanings (Keyton, 2005). When leaders, managers, and employees attempt to use the advice provided by cultural messages, they are confronted with the complexities of the world of work.

Managing incongruences

Proposition 7: *Incongruences and paradoxes are managed through acculturation.* We face the irony that in order to enjoy our freedom, we must surrender some of it to earn a living. If we want to advance, we quickly learn the value of ascribing to the cultural expectations. For most of us, this is a relatively easy dilemma to negotiate because rules, roles, and requirements have been placed on us throughout our lives. Although uncertainty requires continual organizing, and working requires surrendering some

freedoms, incongruences and paradoxes require some action. Paradoxes, dilemmas, and contradictions are part of organizational life. The most successful companies can hold paradoxical views including being conservative at the core but progressive toward the community and employees or pursue high quality at the lowest possible cost (Collins & Porras, 1994).

Symbols can reduce ambiguity and tension by providing shared values. Does trying to develop a consistent culture result in certainty? When asked, “Do you agree that your company has a widely embraced and understood corporate culture?” 44% answered yes, 19% responded no, and 37% were not sure (Yang & Gonzalez, 2005).

The issue becomes even clearer when we examine mergers and acquisitions. These often fail because of the clash between the organizations’ cultures (Pepper & Larson, 2006). About 50% of these mergers and acquisitions fail to meet their financial projections and “as much as 85% of that failure is attributable to the failure to manage the practical challenges of cultural integration (Pepper & Larson, 2006, p. 49). Returning to our point, uncertainty and incongruences are important organizational issues.

A closer examination of managers, employees, and ethics underscores the importance of a symbolic lifeboat.

Managers/leaders

Managers are faced with conflicting demands regarding how they should act. After examining the current literature on leadership, a manager could conclude that appropriate behavior includes being enthusiastic but calm, very friendly and approachable but always keeping a distance, candid but a very quiet and deep thinker, firm but flexible, tough but compassionate, and very serious while having a great sense of humor. As if these expectations were not difficult enough to reconcile, organizations pursuing a path of renewal and growth expect managers to spearhead teamwork and entrepreneurship, which are processes requiring more of a hands-off approach. How can managers fulfill these apparently contradictory behaviors? The answer, for many, is by accepting the symbolic norms of the job, department, and organization. In some cases, the norms call for control over collaboration (e.g., bureaucracies). In others, anarchy over discipline (e.g., highly creative firms) prevails. Excellent organizations have discovered that harmony can be produced through healthy conflict, managers can manage best by learning from frontline employees, listening—not talking—is power, deviance can be a productive norm, strength can be drawn from vulnerability, change can be facilitated through stability, and work can be fun. Managers can draw on the myths, stories, and organizational history to form rough guidelines for their behavior. Because leaders can be expected to be evangelists or psychologists, as well as organizers of work, trafficking in images as a means for resolving paradoxes is a

viable, and much used, response (Duncan 1989, p. 229). Telling stories to help make sense for organizational members is one leadership tool. Gardner (1995) argues that “a key—perhaps the key—to leadership...is the effective communication of a story” (p. 62). He concludes that stories are a “fundamental part of the leader’s vocation” (p. 43).

In certain situations, leaders can overwhelm subordinates. For example, in the intense atmosphere of operating rooms (ORs), surgeons “are the captains of the ship, treated with deference because of their unique skills. As a result, nurses, prep technicians, and other aides can be afraid to speak up if they spot a problem” (Landro, 2005, p. D1). Because “doing a better job of preventing errors in critical areas of hospital care” (Landro, 2005, p. D4), is perceived as most important, other important issues can receive less attention. “There is mounting evidence that poor communication between hospital staff and surgeons is the leading cause of avoidable surgical errors” (Landro, 2005, p. D1). Is this important? “In the OR, studies show that serious complications can arise from communication problems—such as nurses failing to notify a surgeon of a change in the patient’s color or respiration. Earlier this year, VHA surveyed staff at 20 hospitals and found that as many as 60% of OR staffers agreed with the statement: “In the ORs here, it is difficult to speak up if I perceive a problem with patient care” (Landro, 2005, p. D4). Note that the responsibilities placed on the surgeon may force choices between task orientation and control over developing a team atmosphere that encourages

more open communication. As we have noted earlier in this text, many medical facilities are moving toward team-building and team care (Appleby & Davis, 2001; Carroll, 2002).

Employees

For organizational members the entire organizing process is filled with paradoxes (Poole & Van De Ven, 1989). Organizational cultures direct individuals toward the solution. Most people do not ponder and are not privy to the organization's plan of action. Instead they are guided by the symbolic messages sent by the culture, manager, or work group. There are situations where a generalized response would be inappropriate. *Strategic ambiguity* allows for multiple interpretations by individuals in an organization of the prevailing culture (Eisenberg, 1984). For example, service can be an overriding goal, but the individual can determine the means for fulfilling this mandate. Many hospitals have rigid structures and hierarchies with clear job functions outlined and a top down control orientation designed to control costs. At the same time, everyone is called on to perform excellent, individualized patient care. Depending on the quality of the symbolic messages, which is critically tied to the ongoing reinforcement, hospital employees may be able to negotiate this difficult dilemma. Strategic ambiguity does not suggest that misleading or lying are useful strategies. Instead, not providing clarification might offer employees sufficient

maneuverability with various issues to make their conflicting demands negotiable.

Concepts such as "less is more" when it comes to writing a memo or revising a report, or K.I.S.S. (Keep it Simple, Stupid) when giving instructions or training a new associate, seem paradoxical unless the cultural messages consistently are reinforcing the expected behavior. Our earlier discussion of whistle-blowing or glorifying the announcing of mistakes demonstrates how organizational members' attempt to resolve conflicting demands can be helped or hindered. Whistle-blowing, in particular, brings us to our third area of interest.

Ethics

The organizational culture can assist us in resolving uncertainty regarding ethics. Ethics are our standards of moral conduct or judgments about whether our actions, values, or decisions are right or wrong (Gabriel, Fineman, & Sims, 2000; Johannesen, 1996). The world of work is filled with ethical decision-making moments ranging from using the company phone or e-mail for personal business to discrimination to allowing potentially dangerous products to be sold. To resolve apparently paradoxical issues, such as make a profit but do not sell any product that could be dangerous, organizations must have a proactive culture. Barbara Toffler, head of Arthur Andersen's Ethics & Responsible Business practices group, concluded:

A company with a culture where leadership is serious about ethics, where employees feel fairly treated, and where the culture values and rewards ethical behavior, is far less likely to encounter ethics/compliance problems than a company whose culture demands unthinking obedience to authority, focuses solely on punishing bad behavior, and whose leadership gives only lip service to ethics. (“Beware,” p. 5).

Many organizations and business people are highly ethical whereas others seem to provide lip service. Regardless, members can be faced with serious ethical dilemmas. Examples abound. Not reporting health and safety violations or hoping a warranty will run out before an identifiable problem becomes too severe are tempting routes for some business people. Ford Motor Company and Bridgestone/Firestone tires were forced to reveal prior knowledge of serious tire defects that caused Ford Explorers to go out of control and, in some cases, rollovers resulting in more than 100 deaths (Healey & Nathan, 2000). Companies, such as Union Carbide and USX, have underreported injuries to avoid Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspections. Information based equipment, such as computer terminals, may be causing serious ergonomic problems for the operators. The E. F. Hutton Group received a \$7 million fine for check kiting, which is the practice of issuing checks in excess of the signer’s bank balance with the expectation of making deposits in time to cover the checks. General Electric was fined \$1.04

million for defrauding the Air Force of \$800,000 (Dresang, 1986). “Eastman Chemical and Archer Daniels Midland Co. recently admitted that they engaged in price fixing—colluding with other companies in order to keep prices above competitive levels” (McShane & Von Glinow, 2000, p. 14).

Racial- and gender-based discrimination has denied equal access to service in public accommodations where famous names like Shoney’s and Denny’s became synonymous with racism (Faircloth, 1998; Harris, 1997). Corporations restricted access and mobility to women and minorities (Labich, 1999; Moor-head & Griffin, 1998). Texaco became infamous as the embodiment of racism where taped conversations of executives included racist language and talk of destroying key evidence resulting in a \$175 million settlement (Labich, 1999; Roberts, 1998). The Center for Women’s Policy Studies found that “women of color in corporate America doubt their employers’ commitment to diversity, according to a survey of more than 1,500 women of color at 16 Fortune 500 companies” (“Women of,” 1999, p. 5). Whereas the three previous corporate examples were based on reported activities, this survey reports the perceptions of this critical group who must respond to the daily issues.

Making a profit, remaining in business, or dodging a potentially serious legal issue can provide convenient rationalizations for questionable ethics such as not reporting violations. “Four in 10

workers say they know of ethical or legal violations at their company in the past 2 years” according to a survey by Walker Information (Carey & Jerding, 1998, p. B1). These included sexual harassment (19%); lying on reports/records (16%); conflict of interest (15%); stealing/lying (15%); lying to supervisor (15%); bias —race, age, and so on (15%); and drug/alcohol abuse (12%). A fourth of workers responding to a 1999 Yankelovich survey reported that they have been asked to do something against their ethical standards and 41% complied (Hall & Tian, 1999). In the same survey, 40% said they would try to resolve the ethical dilemma without losing their job. If the ethical guidelines appear to be in place merely to protect management from blame, they breed cynicism and actually promote unethical behavior according to Anderson’s survey of more than 2,800 employees in six large U.S. companies with ethics/compliance programs in place (“Beware,” 1999).

Employees face ethical decisions when deciding whether to accept gifts from vendors, pad expense accounts, surf the Net, or make personal phone calls at work. Some critics argue that business ethics is an oxymoron because winning is always rewarded and winning is defined as making a profit. When organizational members have to decide between the ethical and the profit-able, clear symbolic messages supported by a rich cultural heritage can provide help (Peters & Austin, 1985).

Thematics, “the organizational descriptions and stories members

tell themselves in order to make sense of what they do,” offer guidelines for how to behave (Anderson & Englehardt, 2001, p. 151). For example, customer service individuals can be faced with a set of mixed messages including do everything you can to please the customer and keep your costs down, or give attention to each individual but keep moving from customer to customer so no one waits. Excellent customer service organizations make it clear that customer satisfaction should be the paramount concern (Albrecht, 1988). Too often, organizations call for excellent customer service from the frontline employees and managers, but people evaluating the performance of a work unit focus on cost control measures (Cone, 1989).

On important ethical issues, stories can offer guides to the “right ways of thinking in a particular arena of action. They are, therefore, not just interesting stories, but stories that have consequences, that tell us right from wrong” (Andersen & Englehardt, 2001, p. 154). When we do not know what to do, these guidelines to successful solutions in the past outline culturally accepted responses. Of course, these stories can also “conceal, disguise, and gloss over” critical issues because highlighting certain issues means they do not highlight other critical issues (Andersen & Englehardt, 2001, p. 155). Shoney’s, Denny’s, and Texaco have changed their corporate cultures to embrace equality (Faircloth, 1998; Labich, 1999). Make no mistake, the issues have not disappeared but an emphasis by corporate leaders on symbolic

behaviors is one key to guiding ethical decisions by organizational members (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1998). These seven propositions provide a backdrop for understanding symbolic behavior. We now examine the means used to carry out symbolic activities. We are providing a brushstroke approach because many of the functions of symbolic behavior have been examined repeatedly in our earlier discussions.

Tools of symbolic behavior

Anything that provides symbolic meaning to people can be considered a tool. Not only is this consistent with our perspective and definition of organizational communication, it also explains why the manipulation of symbols can be difficult. Examples of the use of symbolic tools have been peppered throughout the first six chapters. Let us return to verbal and nonverbal communication. Specifically, we examine stories, titles, slogans, attention, dress standards, and priorities.

Verbal and nonverbal communications provide symbolic meaning. The values of the culture are underscored by the vocabulary because what is talked about receives attention. As Deetz (1982) put it, “The conceptual distinctions in an organization are inscribed in the system of speaking and writing” (p. 135). A partial list of verbal behaviors includes stories, myths, rituals, fantasies, ceremonies, titles, and jokes (e.g., see chap. 4). Nonverbal

behavior and objects create an additional set of symbolic actions through events, activities, and surroundings.

We already pointed to the power of stories when we discussed ethical considerations. As you read the following discussion of stories, note the high-lighted uses and values. Stories allow the organization to coordinate action at a distance. As they are told and retold, people are reminded of key values. Not only is a common thread provided, but during the sharing process general guidelines develop and are reinforced allowing organizational members to customize diagnoses and solutions to local problems. According to Weick (1988), “Stories are important, not just because they coordinate, but also because they register, summarize, and allow *reconstruction of scenarios that are too complex for logical linear summaries to preserve* [italics added]” (p. 31).

Stories provide guidance to individuals in all organizations. In addition to setting the rules, they can serve “as metaphors for the bureaucracy-busting essential to vitalization of a decentralized company. Bill Hewlett, cofounder of Hewlett Packard, visited a plant on Saturday and discovered a lab stock area locked. He wanted scientists to have access to labs when they wanted. So, he went to maintenance, grabbed a bolt cutter, and cut the padlock off the lab stock door. He left a note asking them never to bolt the door again signed ‘Thanks, Bill’” (Waterman, 1987, p.

267). The story, as it is told and retold, pro-motes action underscoring changes in the culture, supports innovation, and deals with employees in a personal manner.

Numerous organizations pay attention to the symbolic importance of *titles*. In moving from a traditional bank to a merchant bank, Bankers Trust renamed front senior vice presidents partners and loan officers associates. Accord-ing to Waterman (1987), “ ... paying attention to the messages embedded in titles and rewards (communicates) to everyone that there were ... significant changes in ‘the way we do things around here’” (p. 268). Other companies refer to employees as partners, customer service representatives, technicians, or associates.

Slogans and brute attention focus employee interest. Waterman (1987) suggested, “Use symbols to strengthen what you communicate verbally about your priorities. There’s nothing like a well-placed slogan or an unexpected bit of adventure to kick off a new priority. It’s amazing how much T-shirts and coffee mugs can do to help focus attention that ‘something’s changed around here’” (p. 255).

Dress standards are another pervasive example. Traditionally, upper management dressed up more than lower level employees. Remland (2000) reminds us that “clothing communicates culture” (p. 123). Trends including uniforms for everyone from

management on down to casual dress diminish these differences. In other professions—for example, UPS deliverymen, nurses, priests, airline pilots, or firefighters—crisp, professional uniforms provide assurance to the wearers and observers of competence. Earlier, in our discussion of non-verbal communication, we provided an extensive analysis of dress standards.

Finally, the *priorities* placed on daily activities in organizations carry enormous symbolic impact. The top officers at FedEx spend an inordinate amount of time on minor personnel grievances as symbolic proof of their people orientation. The senior vice president of personnel at FedEx observed: “The president and chairman are dead serious about making sure employees are treated fairly. So they spend time on it. If they spend 3 or 4 hours a week on grievances, it is a good symbol” (Levering et al., 1985, pp. 110–111). Many managers would respond, “Where can I find the time?” FedEx managers underscore the point that time ultimately is saved when people identify with the organization.

These examples might lead you to believe that strong organizations and effective leadership should be centered on symbolic behavior. As we have emphasized throughout this text, rarely can we focus on a single strategy. The complexity of the organizational communication world requires an understanding of a variety of approaches. In addition, there are significant drawbacks.

Limitations of symbolic behavior

Earlier in this text, we demonstrated how human relations were overused following the Hawthorne Studies. Likewise, an over-reliance on symbolic activities can lead to significant problems. These include unethical manipulation, empty or meaningless actions, omnipresence, divisions, and unexpected interpretations. We begin by underscoring the point that using symbolic activities to achieve goals is more difficult than it might appear.

Easier said than done

Excellent and socially responsible social missions, enlightened leadership, and progressive practices are clearly the paths organizations should follow. The advice is widely forthcoming with organizational investigators arguing for more democracy, increased empowerment, and greater profit sharing. Philosophically, there can be little question but that given the power of the modern corporation, these goals should be pursued.

Sound simple? It isn't. Robert Hass became the leader of Levi Strauss & Co. in 1996. He was well known for his enlightened management practices that included doing more than "dressing the world in riveted denim; he was intent on showing that a company driven by social values could outperform a company hostage to profits alone" (Munk, 1999, p. 83). He argued that

"Levi's wasn't just a garment company committed to social responsibility. It was a politically correct organization that happened to be in the garment business" (Munk, 1999, p. 86). It was an outstanding position for any organization but the mission never translated into action. Instead of uniting everyone under this banner, people split between holding onto the old way of doing things and following Hass. Innovation stagnated. Employees were faced with incongruences that were not resolved by mission statements alone. In 1998, Levi changed its mission statement from "To sustain responsible commercial success" to "To be the casual apparel authority." From a symbolic perspective, we should applaud the initial goals and question why the implementation was unsuccessful. In the end, the words were not enough.

Do not misunderstand—Levi's goals were outstanding. But the implementation created confusion, disorientation, and threatened the future of the organization. Without the requisite skills, simply calling for change is not enough. There are five additional problems with symbolic actions.

Unethical manipulation

Second, it can be unethical. Symbolic actions are a means to an end. The judgment regarding ethics lies in the motives of users as well as the ends produced. As Waterman (1987) put it, "Because symbolism is such a potent source of influence, it can be used to

manipulate people. We all know of the ways it has been put to use in the past” (p. 271). False promises, pie-in-the-sky approaches, and dangerous work assignments are good examples. Skipping over the abuses by some evangelists and used car dealers, employees and man-agers can be misled. The use of gimmickry, using superficial pleasantness to cover up dishonest activities or intentions, providing misleading or incorrect advice regarding safety, or providing untrue explanations for behaviors are means used by unethical organizations, managers, or coworkers in order to obtain some advantage.

Full sound of fury, signifying nothing

Third, symbolic behavior can be used in place of substance.

Waterman (1987) explains that on the organizational level.

“Symbolic behavior can be a substitute for doing what you are supposed to do. It can convincingly give the appearance that you are going along with written or unwritten rules and norms, while all along you are undercutting them” (p. 271).

The U.S. Navy, when they began the Polaris submarine project in the 1950s, used a management center, weekly meetings, and the PERT (Performance, Evaluation, and Review Technique) to demonstrate to observers the care being taken in making decisions. In fact, these three factors, although providing an excellent facade, were not very influential in the outcome. PERT,

for example, provided an excellent image. As Deal and Kennedy (1982) explained, “PERT’s real value was in convincing the outside world that this project was important” (p. 70).

Organizations invest large amounts of time and money to develop team-work, yet they may not know what the end product should look like and often assume that a lack of “unsportsmanlike conduct” means teamwork is occurring. Therefore the efforts can be misspent. In 210 BC, Pertonius Arbiter observed: “We trained hard, but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form into teams, we would be reorganized. I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing, and what a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency, and demoralization.”

Individuals also can be co-opted by symbolism over substance. Leaders can develop a vested interest in preserving the corporate mythologies. As Zaleznik (1989) put it, “Leadership believes in and passes on and acculturates new groups in ... these myths, thereby creating a loss of leadership. People at the top become ill-prepared to lead in the direction of change” (p. 14). Although myths are important, leaders must be careful not to be pulled into a fantasy. Zaleznik continues, leaders “must remain highly objective and have the capacity to look at the world as it is” (p. 14). If leaders are crippled or blinded by an outdated mythology or supported by an incorrect ethnocentrism, they will misunderstand

the real nature of the world in which they live (Dalziel & Schoonover, 1988). Myths are helpful in dealing with paradoxes, but they can be counterproductive when responses to a changing environment are required. People actually may believe the myths and forget the allegorical nature of the stories and heroes.

Finally, symbolic behavior can replace accomplishment. Without meaning to, we can get caught up in the *activity trap*, where style gets substituted for substance (Robbins, 1980). Diversity efforts are criticized for focusing more on comparative statistics generated by sporadic efforts and less on the nature of the issues and clearly thought-out strategic solutions (Harris, 1997). In some organizations, the pressure to be productive can be so overbearing that individuals make certain they look busy even when there is nothing to do. Adding to the problem is the tendency toward *chronic externalitis*. This is the term given to the obsession some managers have in creating a successful image of themselves in the minds of others (Strasser & Loeb, 1985).

Omnipresence

The symbolic messages can prevent effective change or realistic responses to environmental demands. Hackman and Johnson (2000) observe: "Change is difficult because cultures are organized around deeply rooted assumptions and values that affect every aspect of organizational life" (p. 239). *Esprit de corps*, for example,

also create *trained incapacities* leading to a discounting of external information or influence (Folger & Poole, 1984). Texaco, group-think, and collective perceptions regarding diversity are examples we have already analyzed. Because cultures create identification and unity (Tompkins & Cheney, 1983), these trained incapacities can occur when values are strong or the culture's influence is too pervasive. Specifically, obsolescence, resistance to change, and inconsistency are the three risks posed by strong values (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). It is not difficult to find examples. In the 1980s, American auto manufacturers operated as if Japanese competition was unimportant. Retailing giants disregarded the impact of discount stores such as Wal-Mart.

Sears and Roebuck provides a familiar example encompassing all three problems. For years a leader in selling to Middle American customers, Sears failed to recognize the changing expectations of its clientele (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Kelly, 1990). Faced with lagging sales, Sears tried to go upscale with its product line. This shift left the original consumers behind. More fundamentally, Sears employees—who sold highly functional if not very glamorous merchandise for years—were poorly trained to sell Macy's type products. In an attempt to overcome this malady, Sears reversed itself and slashed prices to appeal to the K-Mart (a.k.a. Big K) and Wal-Mart loyalists (Diamond, 1991). The results from these maneuvers demonstrate the potential problems with strong values. The original Sears organization was stale and riddled with

obsolescent, albeit strong, values. When the organization was recast, employees were resistant to change and customers were not interested in a new Sears (Kelly, 1990). More recently, Sears has revamped its reward system for managers moving away from an entitlement mentality where salaries were guaranteed to a performance-based salary (Chandler, 1998). Twenty percent of a manager's salary is based on customer and subordinate satisfaction. Unless these changes are well communicated and clearly followed, the overriding cultural values will prevail over any changes.

Strong cultures dictate roles and performances meaning individuals can be co-opted by the culture and its messages (Conrad, 1985). Although strict adherence to cultural expectations can be vital, such as in the military during combat, there are numerous examples where this can create tunnel vision. Gabriel et al. (2000) conclude: "Rules can become the opium of bureaucratic officials" (p. 31). A culture that is bound by an overriding tradition can stifle.

The power of an organization's culture often emerges during a crisis. For example, after the American Red Cross admitted mishandling contributions after the September 11 attacks, it promised to reform its operating procedures. However, the Red Cross' Hurricane Katrina response was equally inadequate even though internal documents show the leadership was warned that

internal disputes could result in a repeat of the 9/11 failures. Senator Charles Grassley, who as Finance Committee chairman who oversees charitable organizations concluded: "This type of culture, a culture that discourages people from coming forward, management that does not want to hear the bad news, and are more concerned about good press than good results, is a theme I am hearing too often" (Associated Press, 2005, p. 3A). Although the American Red Cross' goals are worthwhile, the prevailing culture has limited needed reforms.

We already discussed ethics. Police psychologists argue the alienation between many law enforcement officers and the public is the result of a sick police subculture determined to maintain the "thin blue line" between their own subculture and the outside (Meredith, 1984). Other researchers argue that police must react effectively in life and death situations, control their emotional reactions to potentially bizarre, disturbing, and stressful situations while presenting a front to the surrounding community that broadcasts safety, authority, and control (Waldron & Krone, 1991). They develop an internalized identity that allows them to deal with their group membership. Regardless of the explanation, the officers' subculture demands a we-they, good guys-bad guys perspective that can prevent good judgment. In the process of "learning the ropes" idealistic young officers begin to mimic the posture and activities, buttressed by the cultural messages contained in police policies, procedures, and actions, and soon

respond to issues of law and order based on actions sanctioned by the subculture.

One consequence of this tradition is that police forces have remained predominately male. Only 12% of the police officers in the United States are female and of “the nation’s 17,000 police departments, only 123 have women chiefs (Johnson, 1998). By and large, this culture designed to negotiate police pressures in this “tough” men’s work has placed barriers meaning the “nation’s policewomen are facing a bullet-proof glass ceiling” (Johnson, 1998, p. 1A).

The strong police subculture, supported by the very real life-threatening situations, emotional strain, and pressure from the public, creates a single-mindedness that can be counterproductive. We can begin a list of professions where assumptions are made regarding who can and cannot handle the work or would present the wrong image. Would you expect to see a male or female in the following occupations: Auto repair, clerical support, bank teller, grade school teacher, or fireman (you get the point)?

Earlier, we pointed to cultures as effective means for directing individuals during paradoxical situations. Clearly, this direction can lead to errors in organizational and individual behavior.

Fosters divisions

The schism between police officers and the public supports the fourth problem with symbols. Symbols can create great divisions in an organization. Culture provides both division and unity, and the symbols used to reinforce the organization can create powerful alienation between individuals and groups. Sub-cultures develop between managers and workers, blue and white collars, or factory and sales creating the potential for a “them versus us” environment.

These divisions inevitably enable or privilege some while restraining or subjugating others. Titles and rank, as indications of advancement and accomplishment, also reinforce differences between individuals and provide a potential for we–they thinking and acting. The impact of parking spaces, time clocks, and numerous other nonverbal artifacts on the organization’s members was discussed earlier. When problems occur, *scapegoating* the other group becomes all too tempting. The stronger the symbolic division, the greater the likelihood that the blame will be placed externally (Gabriel et al., 2000). Competition between divisions, shifts, or members of management within an organization are classic examples. Mistakes are the fault of the technical people or accounting or lazy sales forces or poor supervision. Often a stereotypical negative label such as “traitor,” “trouble-makers,” “over-the-hill,” or “just don’t care” allows this division to become

generalized from an event to a group.

Unexpected interpretations

Finally, symbolism can be unpredictable. Because individuals respond to symbolic behavior through their own frame of reference, attempts to use symbolism can have unintended results. As Waterman (1987) observed, “When Ford Motor wanted to emphasize quality back in 1979, it put a bunch of Japanese cars in the plant to show employees what you could do if you really put your mind to quality. The result was that employees went out and bought Japanese cars” (p. 270). Rather than accept quality as a goal, Ford employees accepted Japanese cars as better cars.

In other cases, when there is a powerful “management versus employee” climate, employees go to great effort to never be labeled a “company man or woman.” The bizarre behaviors of true believers, often misguided by their own interpretations of strong symbolic messages, have occurred throughout history. Placed in the context of an organization trying to establish a common theme, our conclusion must be that a judicious use of symbols is necessary or the wrong action based on the right intent can occur. A powerful sense of organizational pride can lead to dysfunctional responses by employees and managers.

This is not to suggest that unethical manipulation, empty or meaningless actions, omnipresence, divisions, and unexpected interpretations are the only troublesome outcomes from symbolic actions. As a means of highlighting the possible problems, these five issues are instructive. We now consider the logistics of presenting symbolic messages.

Performances

The stage or drama metaphor provides a useful means for understanding how symbolic behavior is carried out through individual role performance and rituals. A dramatic perspective views individuals as actors “who creatively play, improvise, interpret, and re-present roles and scripts” (Conquer-good, 1991, p. 187). We can test the performance premise by examining our own consumer behaviors. For example, why is the experience involved with drinking a cup of latte in the entertaining environment of a local Starbucks or other coffee dispensing eatery worth four dollars? Because the set of intangible activities that support the actual service itself provide a satisfying experience or a performance worth an increased financial burden (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). A steak is, fundamentally, a steak. But the culinary experience is surrounded by a series of events that are staged to engage us in some manner. A well-performed drama replete with accomplished performers including the waiters, ambiance, and supporting cast will determine how we judge the time we have

spent. If poorly performed the event will be discredited.

Role performance

Learning to act out appropriate roles is a fundamental aspect of human development and important to our organizational success. In a *theatrical* sense, role performance means portraying someone else. The dramatic perspective refers, instead, to an individual's behavior in society. As we learn to recognize and define social situations, we develop appropriate roles for others and ourselves. In a play, we are expected to learn and deliver specific lines. In organizational performances, we must be situationally relevant and vary our communication to the surrounding events. Therefore, roles are co-constructed dialogues rather than monologues (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). The enactments occurring provide us with important information regarding the social situation and mold our own performances. Roles involve doing the work that can range from specific assigned tasks to practices that are carried out because they fill the needed requirements of the job as expected by the culture. There is more to an effective role performance.

They are *historically constrained*. Our behaviors in an organization, if they are to be assigned credibility, are not impromptu events. As a UPS driver, you cannot simply choose not to wear the famous brown uniform nor change in any dramatic manner how a package

is delivered (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). At Disney, the cast members, as all employees are called, are required to perform in very specific ways. The various theme parks are master examples of a set of roles presented to create a positive experience.

Roles are not counterfeit acts, but behaviors that maintain social stability by facilitating predictability in human interaction (Faules & Alexander, 1978). Roles constitute those behaviors necessary to be accepted by others as a colleague, boss, manager, leader, or organizational member. The better the presentation, the higher the credibility assigned, leading to the bestowing of status, position, office, or acceptance. Finally, roles facilitate the creation, maintenance, and transformation of the organizational meaning. Southwest Airlines, for example, encourages its flight attendants and gate attendants to use one-liners. When employees tell the one-liners, they are furthering the corporate driven culture. So, these acts are not neutral but are, instead, politically driven—there are motives behind the acts (Deetz, 1995; Mumby, 1988). By supporting the culture through enacted performances, the actors come together to further support the organization's culture. In the same manner, acts conducted to subvert the culture through insurgencies, rule violations, or malcontents are politically driven.

Three elements in a presentation are an appropriate front, dramatic realization, and mystification (Goffman, 1959). We make choices about how we want to present our role, which constitutes role

enactment.

Appropriate front

Putting on an appropriate front (e.g., choice of clothes, language, facial expressions, excellent customer service) provides messages to support the role. Returning to the nonverbal chapter, a plethora of other artifacts and actions also comprise our front. In theory, we decide to engage in a drama to an audience, which can be a consumer, a manager, or a colleague. As Goffman (1974) put it, “Indeed, it seems that we spend most of our time not engaged in giving information, but in giving shows” (p. 508).

Some individuals seem more adept at saying and doing the right thing at the right time, thereby avoiding malapropisms with some regularity. Individual and group role abilities often determine the acceptability of the act (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). According to Boulding (1961), “If the role is occupied by individuals who do not have the requisite skills, the image of the role is profoundly modified by all those with whom they come in contact” (p. 105).

We are assisted by the numerous cues offered by “the culture of the organization (that) provides the background in which specific situations arise. It establishes broad parameters for acting” (Conrad, 1985, p. 201). We learn to establish credibility

through making the appropriate choices. Normative criteria, based on relative, situational data allow us to understand the role expectations. It must be remembered that role performance is episodic, co-created, and often improvised, so acting a role is not always easy.

Dramatic realization

Using verbal and nonverbal symbols to fulfill the requirements of the role leads to dramatic realization. The term performance brings with it several important concepts. We have already indicated that performances are contextual, and are based on immediacy and the cultural fit. Customer service provides an example. If we are partaking of a relationship-oriented service (e.g., relationship developed over time), we expect the provider to act quite differently from one-time interactions or encounter-oriented services (Gutek, 1995). We have high expectations for the importance of the relationship developed over time and expect that the co-created history will impact on how we are treated. An encounter-oriented situation (e.g., drive-through restaurant) carries little or no long-term impact, so the moment is just a moment.

So it goes with any presentation. Employees being corrected for poor performance should seem contrite and a hospital should not lose medical records. Partaking in scripts to reaffirm the culture occurs in almost all settings. For example, although most surgeons

would agree that germs are destroyed in about 30 seconds, they scrub down for about 7 minutes before an operation (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Why the extra 6 minutes? Surgeons are schooled to scrub 7 minutes so to scrub less would be to violate cultural expectations, make one appear ill-prepared for the operation, and risk informal censure for not being conscientious. Appropriateness to the culture's rules or scripts is the measuring rod for the appropriate front and achieving dramatic realization.

Image presentation and impression management are popular concepts for these efforts (Lord & Maher, 1991). Although there may be legitimate concerns regarding unethical impression management, it is a useful tool "to secure leadership positions and to achieve...goals" (Hackman & Johnson, 2000, p. 24). Ingratiation, "an attempt by individuals to increase their attractiveness in the eyes of others" (Liden & Mitchell, 1988, p. 573), is a part of impression management that occurs when the actor feels the audience controls significant rewards. Much of the emphasis on image presentation can be seen as the realization that some roles require skills that might not be developed fully, and using the stage metaphor draws attention to the role of the audience.

Mystification

To this point, we have focused on fitting in. In addition, a certain

amount of mystification is required to put distance between the actor and the audience. You can draw on the verbal and nonverbal chapters for examples of mystification ranging from the outfitting of an office to the language used by certain professions. An interesting case in point is provided by the tests frequently administered during pre-employment and advancement sessions. Personality tests represent a desire for scientific rigor/and underscore American expectations for rationality in making decisions (Trice & Beyer, 1985). This science of selection is questionable "because many studies reveal that devices such as selection interviews and personality tests have modest to poor reliability and validity, or predictive value" (Gabriel et al., 2000, p. 13). Many organizations put applicants through numerous interviews, difficult questioning, and a waiting period. Microsoft is famous, or infamous, for how it interviews (Gimein, 2001). One question inevitably asked is "Why are manhole covers round?" Another is "How many piano tuners are there in the world?" The answers are not a matter of technical ability, but simply reasoning under pressure. The covers are round because any other shape would fall in. There are as many piano tuners as there are (1) pianos to be tuned where the (2) owners can afford to purchase the service.

Because the results of the evaluation procedures or the insiders' actions are rarely shared with the test-taker, there is mystification in the hiring or promotion process. Imagine the difference between

being hired immediately—you'll do as a “warm body,” versus having to wait for 2 weeks to know if you have the job after a rigorous written examination and interview schedule. Subaru-Isuzu is willing to take as long as 6 months to hire and the “fastest hire took 9 weeks” (Pfeffer, 2000, p. 499).

Not all companies are interested in hiring the best and the brightest. Enterprise Rent-A-Car is the largest rental company in the United States and it has expanded at a rate of 25–30% a year for over a decade. Almost all Enterprise's people are college graduates who are hired for their sales skills and personality. The chief operating officer, Dennis Ross, commented: “We hire from the half of the college class that makes the upper half possible. ...We want athletes, fraternity types” (Pfeffer, 2000, p. 497). Enterprise wants individuals who can work with customers. Amazon.com tells the temp agencies to “send us your freaks” (Hof, 1998, p. 108). Because the employees work in warehouses filling orders, looks and dress are less important than a willingness to work.

Rituals

Once roles become systematized, they are regarded as rituals. Rituals are acted out by the performances and encompass all repeated activities. Acting correctly, scrubbing down, and being professional are examples of individual rituals. Rituals provide for

organizational reality. For our purposes, it is helpful to focus on the rituals of arrival, belonging, and exclusion (Wood, 2004).

Rituals of arrival

At some point everyone is a newcomer. The rituals of arrival include those processes that explain what we must learn in order to be a bonafide member of the organization. For starters, neophytes rarely are afforded full privileges to use equipment, park close, leave their station, arrange their lunch time, pick their desks, and so on. Even gaining entry to parts of the organization can be difficult.

Socialization is the process of indoctrinating new employees to a company's policies. New members find that “taken-for-granted ways no longer fit; the familiar customs and practices of the previous job or role are inappropriate” (Gabriel et al., 2000, p. 16). Strong cultures make the salient expectations clear. Disney puts all employees, now called actors, through their scripted training program. Southwest Airlines uses orientation and training to both teach cul-ture and let new employees know how fortunate they are to have been hired (Pfeffer, 2000). We can learn what is expected of us from a more formalized, organizationally sponsored socialization process (e.g., orientation). In many cases, we learn informally through the people we meet and with whom we work. If policies regarding breaks, lunch, use of the computer, or personal

calls are not explained by the organization, we quickly learn from others. Not knowing is not an option for most individuals.

Many organizations have adopted a clear acculturation process to guarantee successful socialization (Harris, 1990). Clear does not necessarily mean easy. “The IBMs and Procter and Gambles of the world present new recruits with a series of specific hurdles to jump —surviving punishing working hours, performing very basic work to remind them of their humble status...sacrificing domestic and leisure time for the company” (Gabriel et al., 2000, p. 17).

Rituals of belonging and exclusion

Once you are part of an organization, there are rituals of belonging and exclusion. *Belonging rituals* are indications that you are being accepted within the organization and/or work group. Being invited by colleagues to certain meetings, out for a meal, or into a project can show belonging. At the same time, some groups make it clear that you are excluded.

For example, in numerous organizations, being promoted to supervisor from the ranks also means losing a large number of contacts. You literally are excluded from the hourly ranks. Knowing how to act in a period of individual advancement can offer a difficult test. In one study of workers being promoted to managers, the individuals were required to alter successfully their body, dress,

and social communication to act managerial although not changing to the point of losing credibility with their co-workers (Caudill, Durden, & Lambert, 1985). This is a tricky issue because failing to change creates a credibility problem with other managers, and being a “company person” will hurt in the process of managing friends and colleagues.

Social dramas occur in every group and reinforce the belonging rituals. The drama is processional and occurs when there is a *breach of the symbolic system*. Dramas are likely to follow four phases: breach, crisis, redressive action, and reintegration or recognition of the schism (Turner, 1980). In a miniform, an employee talking back to a manager in front of other employees is a breach of etiquette, roles, and rules. The turbulence can be handled in a variety of ways, but a crisis has occurred. Perhaps the employee is suspended; or the manager chooses to dress the individual down in front of everyone else; or the traditional “in my office now!” or the employee is asked to explain the point further. If someone must apologize, a redressive action has taken place. The same point would be true if management decided the employee was correct, there was recognition of the schism, and reintegration develops with new guidelines regarding employee feedback. The drama acts as a means for reaffirming, negotiating, and/or transforming the cultural standards. Critically, these breaches or shocks are moments of sense-making that put the taken-for-granted organizational practices into question (Weick, 1995).

This discussion provides the final, essential issue to a dramatic presentation. As the performance unfolds, the audience must remain front stage. Backstage is the region reserved for members of the cast and a correctly staged act does not allow the audience to gain access. If they do, they might discredit the performance. As the show is put on, dramatic realization requires that the audience not get behind the scene, discover flaws in the act or front, and discredit the performance (Harris, 1984).

Goffman (1959) observed, "All roles require a certain degree of skill in the performance of the role as well as an image of the role itself" (p. 216). Impressions are formed based on very little information. A façade, even if it is an organizationally sanctioned one, must be maintained or it invites the loss of credibility. Guarding the backstage is important during the entire presentation process, from interviewing to participating in the rituals of arrival, to the period of belonging. "The struggles, politics, negotiations, anguish, and actual joys of organizing remain, for the most part, invisible to the consumer: they are backstage. When they are revealed, showing how precarious the organization can be, it can come of something of a shock..." (Gabriel et al., 2000, p. 5).

Letting the role take over your entire persona is equally destructive. Although the play is the thing, the trick, it would seem, is never letting the act overcome the person. So, congruency, fulfilling of expectations and coordination among actors (team members) is

required. If the concept of backstage is still unclear, consider our earlier discussion of the hiring process.

Consider a second example: Being a team player and effectively creating a successful team are positive attributes. But, according to Frank and Brown (1989), "no one knows exactly what it means to coordinate work groups. There-fore, rituals or specific procedures are developed in the hope that coordination will result" (p. 216).

The list is almost endless. When you are asked to act like a leader, you seek symbolic manifestations of the correct actions that will make you appear to be a leader with an image of ability and confidence. We coordinate and plan without a clear notion of exactly what these two activities mean. Expected behavior can be tautological when it takes the form of "we know we have good teamwork when everyone is working well together" or "good leaders get things done" or "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

No one should assume that careful hiring practices are incorrect. Nor should teamwork be discounted or leadership underrated. The point is simply that we try to act correctly, based on past and current symbolic reinforcements, for dramatic realization. It may very well be that we also achieve excellent leadership and teamwork and hire the correct people.

Organizational rites are “planned activities that have both practical and expressive consequences. When this definition is applied to corporate life, such diverse activities as personnel testing, organizational development pro-grams, and collective bargaining can be seen as rites that have not only practical consequences but also express important cultural meanings” (Trice & Beyer, 1985, pp. 372–373).

So, presentation, image, consistency, and all the other activities so important to a well-staged performance for individuals and groups, applies to organizations. Performances are a useful place to end our discussion of symbolic behavior. As much as we might like to believe that individuals and organizations can control performances, we also are aware that one cannot not communicate. Regardless of the staging, individuals often can see behind an invalid act and discover flaws.

Conclusion

For many individuals studying organizational communication, symbolic behavior is the obvious focal point. Because we are symbol users, and symbol abusers, this attention is well deserved.

Seven propositions outline the power of symbolic behavior in an organization. The following issues are intertwined with symbolic behavior: complexity, uncertainty, cultural creation and

maintenance, interpersonal reality, group behavior, leadership, and the management of incongruences.

Tools of symbolic behavior can be identified through various types of verbal and nonverbal communication. What we say and do provides significant symbolic messages.

But symbolic behavior also can lead to extremely negative outcomes. These include unethical manipulation, empty or meaningless actions, trained incapacities, divisions, and unexpected interpretations.

Finally, performances highlight the ongoing role of symbolic behavior in organizations. This dramatic perspective also draws attention to the danger of believing that acting is the same as performing a useful, justified role in an organization.

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SECTION 2: DIVERSITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Exploring managerial careers

Dr. Tamara Johnson's role as assistant chancellor for equity, diversity, and inclusion at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire involves supervising and collaborating with various campus entities to ensure their operations continue to support the university's initiatives to foster diversity and equity within the university community. Dr. Johnson oversees the Affirmative Action, Blugold Beginnings (pre-college program), Gender and Sexuality Resource Center, Office of Multicultural Affairs, Ronald E. McNair Program, Services for Students with Disabilities, Student Support Services, University Police, and Upward Bound units and leads campus-wide initiatives to educate and train faculty, students, and staff about cultural awareness, diversity, and institutional equity.

Dr. Johnson's journey to her current role began more than 20 years ago when she worked as a counselor for the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs at the University of Illinois. Her role in this office launched her on a path through university service —Dr. Johnson went on to work as the associate director for



University Career Services at Illinois State University, the director for multicultural student affairs at Northwestern University, and the director for faculty diversity initiatives at the University of Chicago. As faculty at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Argosy University, and Northwestern University, Dr. Johnson taught counseling courses at the undergraduate, master's, and doctorate levels.

Dr. Johnson's work at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire involves developing a program and protocols to ensure all faculty and staff across the institution receive baseline diversity training. In addition, one of her goals is to include criteria related to diversity factors in the evaluations of all faculty/staff. A primary issue that she seeks to address is to increase the awareness of the challenges experienced by underrepresented students. This includes individuals who may come from backgrounds of low income, students of color, first-generation students, and other marginalized groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students.

Dr. Johnson understands the importance of creating initiatives to support individuals in those groups so their specific concerns may be addressed in multiple ways. As you will learn in this chapter, when leaders proactively create an inclusive and supportive climate that values diversity, benefits are produced that result in positive outcomes for organizations.

What is diversity?

Diversity refers to identity-based differences among and between two or more people that affect their lives as applicants, employees, and customers. These identity-based differences include such things as race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age. Groups in society based on these individual differences are referred to as identity groups. These differences are related to discrimination and disparities between groups in areas such as education, housing, healthcare, and employment. The term managing diversity is commonly used to refer to ways in which organizations seek to ensure that members of diverse groups are valued and treated fairly within organizations in all areas including hiring, compensation, performance evaluation, and customer service activities. The term valuing diversity is often used to reflect ways in which organizations show appreciation for diversity among job applicants, employees, and customers. Inclusion, which represents the degree to which employees are accepted and treated fairly by their organization, is one way in which companies demonstrate how they value diversity. In the context of today's rapidly changing organizational environment, it is more important than ever to understand diversity in organizational contexts and make progressive strides toward a more inclusive, equitable, and representative workforce.

Three kinds of diversity exist in the workplace, as shown in the

following table:

Types of diversity	
Surface-level diversity	Diversity in the form of characteristics of individuals that are readily visible including, but not limited to, age, body size, visible disabilities, race or sex.
Deep-level diversity	Diversity in characteristics that are non-observable such as attitudes, values, and beliefs, such as religion.
Hidden diversity	Diversity in characteristics that are deep-level but may be concealed or revealed at discretion by individuals who possess them, such as sexual orientation.

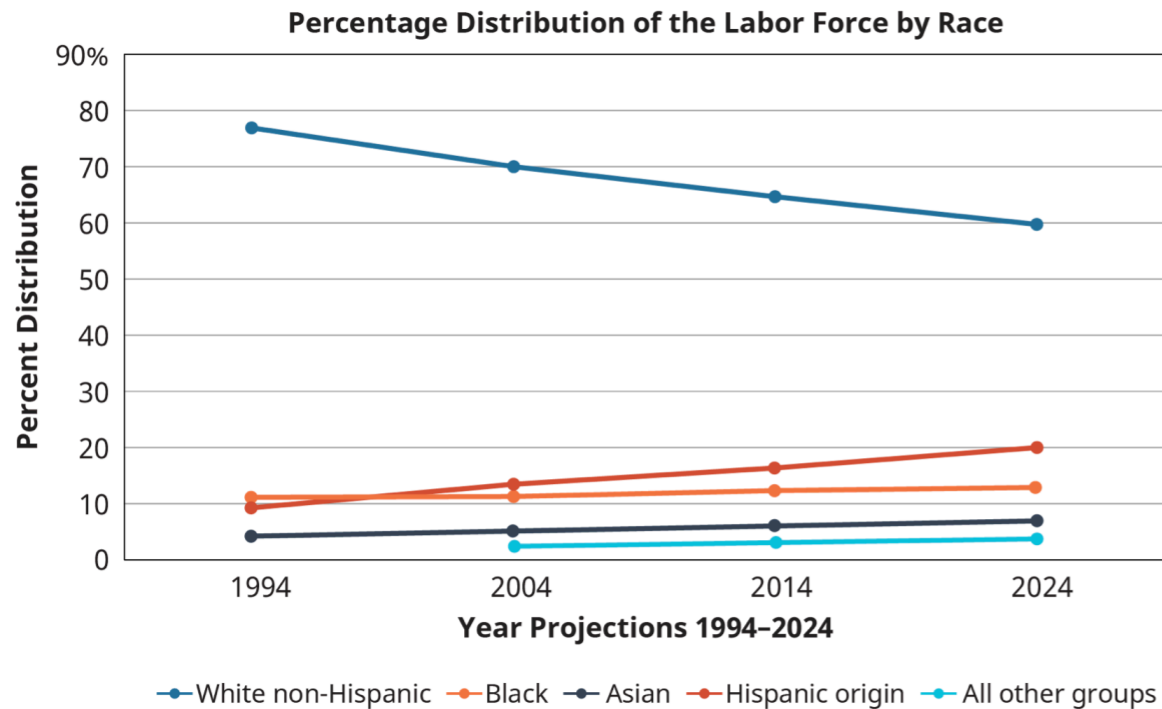
Surface-level diversity represents an individual's visible characteristics, including, but not limited to, age, body size, visible disabilities, race, or sex. A collective of individuals who share these characteristics is known as an identity group. Deep-level diversity includes traits that are non-observable such as attitudes, values, and beliefs. Hidden diversity includes traits that are deep-level but may be concealed or revealed at the discretion of individuals who possess them. These hidden traits are called invisible social identities and may include sexual orientation, a hidden disability

(such as a mental illness or chronic disease), mixed racial heritage, or socioeconomic status. Researchers investigate these different types of diversity in order to understand how diversity may benefit or hinder organizational outcomes.

Diversity presents challenges that may include managing dysfunctional conflict that can arise from inappropriate interactions between individuals from different groups. Diversity also presents advantages such as broader perspectives and viewpoints. Knowledge about how to manage diversity helps managers mitigate some of its challenges and reap some of its benefits.

How diverse is the workforce

In 1997, researchers estimated that by the year 2020, 14% of the workforce would be Latino, 11% Black, and 6% Asian. Because of an increase in the number of racial minorities entering the workforce over the past 20 years, most of those projections have been surpassed as of 2016, with a workforce composition of 17% Hispanic or Latino of any race, followed by 12% Black and 6% Asian, as seen in the figure on the following page. American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Other Pacific Islanders together made up a little over 1% of the labor force, while people of two or more races made up about 2% of the labor force. Women constitute approximately 47% of the workforce compared to approximately 53% for men, and the average age of individuals



participating in the labor force has also increased because more employees retire at a later age. Although Whites still predominantly make up the workforce with a 78% share, the U.S. workforce is becoming increasingly more diverse, a trend that presents both opportunities and challenges. These demographic shifts in the labor market affect the workforce in a number of ways due to an increasing variety of workers who differ by sex, race, age, sexual orientation, disability status, and immigrant status.

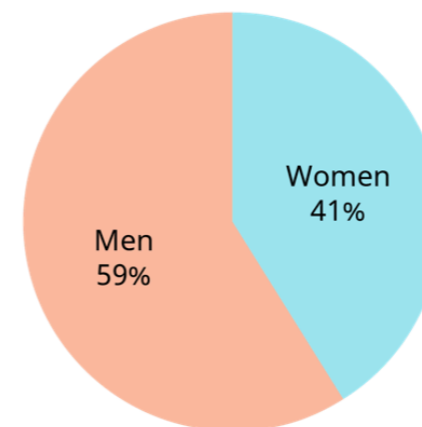
Gender

Increasingly more women are entering the workforce. Compared to 59% in 1977, the labor force participation rate for men is now approximately 53% and is expected to decrease through 2024 to

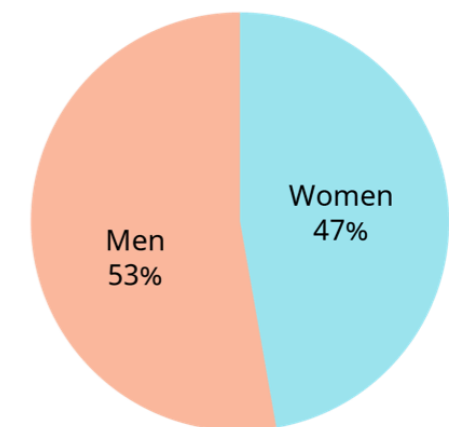
52%. As the labor force participation rate decreases for men, the labor force growth rate for women will be faster. Their percentage of the workforce has steadily risen, as can be seen in the pie charts below, which compare the percentage of the workforce by gender in 1977 to 2017.

Although more women are entering the labor force and earning bachelor's degrees at a higher rate than men, women still face a number of challenges at work. The lack of advancement opportunities awarded to qualified women is an example of a major challenge that women face called the glass ceiling, which is an invisible barrier based on the prejudicial beliefs that underlie organizational decisions that prevent women from moving beyond certain levels within a company. Additionally, in organizations in which the upper-level managers and decision makers are predominantly men, women are less likely to find mentors, which are instrumental for networking and learning about career opportunities.

Percentage of Workforce Employed by Sex 1977



Percentage of Workforce Employed by Sex 2017



Organizations can mitigate this challenge by providing mentors for all new employees. Such a policy would help create a more equal playing field for all employees as they learn to orient themselves and navigate within the organization.

One factor that greatly affects women in organizations is *sexual harassment*. Sexual harassment is illegal, and workers are protected from it by federal legislation. Two forms of sexual harassment that can occur at work are quid pro quo and hostile environment. Quid pro quo harassment refers to the exchange of rewards for sexual favors or punishments for refusal to grant sexual favors. Harassment that creates a hostile environment refers to behaviors that create an abusive work climate. If employees are penalized (for example by being demoted or transferred to another department) for refusing to respond to repeated sexual advances, quid pro quo sexual harassment has taken place. The telling of lewd jokes, the posting of pornographic material at work, or making offensive comments about women in general are examples of actions that are considered to create a hostile work environment. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, sexual harassment is defined as the “unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

Harassment can also include offensive remarks about a person’s sex.” Although both men and women can be sexually harassed, women are sexually harassed at work more often. In addition,

Black and other minority women are especially likely to be subjected to sexual discrimination and harassment.

It is in the organization’s best interest to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. Ways to do this include companies providing ongoing (e.g., annual) training so that employees are able to recognize sexual harassment. Employees should know what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behavior and what channels and protocols are in place for reporting unacceptable behaviors. Managers should understand their role and responsibilities regarding harassment prevention, and a clear and understandable policy should be communicated throughout the organization.

Just as gender-based discrimination is illegal and inappropriate, so is discrimination or mistreatment based on pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. While organizations may have different policies regarding maternity and paternity leave, they must comply with both the Pregnancy Discrimination Act and the Family Medical Leave Act.

Race

Another important demographic shift in workforce diversity is the distribution of race. (Note that we are using categories defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. It uses the term “Black (African

American)” to categorize U.S. residents. In this chapter, we use the term “Black.”)

While the White non-Hispanic share of the workforce continues to shrink, the share of racial and ethnic minority groups will continue to grow. Specifically, Hispanics and Asians will grow at a faster rate than other racial minorities, and Hispanics are projected to make up almost one-fifth of the labor force by 2024. The projected changes in labor force composition between 2014 and 2024 are as follows: White non-Hispanic participation in the labor force will decline by 3%. Other groups’ share of the labor force is expected to increase: Black (10.1%), Hispanic/Latino (28%), Asian (23.2%), and Other groups (i.e., multiracial, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, and Other Pacific Islanders) labor force share is expected to increase by 22.2%. With the workforce changing, managers will need to be mindful of issues employees encounter that are uniquely tied to their experiences based on race and ethnicity, including harassment, discrimination, stereotyping, and differential treatment by coworkers and decision makers in organizations.

Discrimination against Black employees

Race is one of the most frequent grounds for discrimination. Although Blacks do not make up the largest share of the workforce for racial minorities, research studies show they face

discrimination more often than other racial minorities. As a matter of fact, some experts believe that hiring discrimination against Blacks has not declined over the past 25 years while workplace discrimination against other racial minority groups has declined.

Currently, White men have higher participation rates in the workforce than do Black men, and Black women have slightly higher participation rates than White women. Despite growth and gains in both Black education and Black employment, a Black person is considerably more likely to be unemployed than a White person, even when the White person has a lower level of education or a criminal record.

Blacks frequently experience discrimination in the workplace in spite of extensive legislation in place to prohibit such discrimination. Research has shown that stereotypes and prejudices about Blacks can cause them to be denied the opportunity for employment when compared to equally qualified Whites. It is estimated that about 25% of businesses have no minority workers and another 25% have less than 10% minority workers. In terms of employed Blacks, research has shown that, regardless of managers’ race, managers tended to give significantly higher performance ratings to employees who were racially similar to them. Because Whites are much more likely to be managers than Blacks, this similarity effect tends to advantage White employees over Black employees. Blacks are also

significantly more likely to be hired in positions that require low skills, offer little to no room for growth, and pay less. These negative employment experiences affect both the mental and physical health of Black employees.

Hispanic/Latino

Hispanics are the second-fastest-growing minority group in the United States behind Asians, and they make up 17% of the labor force. Despite this and the fact that Hispanics have the highest labor participation rate of all the minority groups, they still face discrimination and harassment in similar ways to other minority groups. (Note that we are again using the categories as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, which predominantly uses the term "Hispanic" to refer to people of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin.)

Hispanics can be of any race. As a matter of fact, increasingly more Hispanics are identifying racially as White. In 2004 almost half of Hispanics identified themselves racially as White, while just under half identified themselves as "some other race." More than 10 years later, approximately 66% of Hispanics now identify themselves racially as White while only 26% identify themselves as "some other race." The remaining Hispanic population, totaling approximately 7%, identify as either Black, American Indian, Asian, Alaskan Native, Pacific Islander, or Native Hawaiian.

Why would a minority identity group identify racially as White? A Pew study found that the longer Hispanic families lived in the United States, the more likely they were to claim White as their race even if they had not done so in the past. This suggests that upward mobility in America may be perceived by some Hispanics to be equated with "Whiteness." Consequently, Hispanics who self-identify racially as White experience higher rates of education and salary, and lower rates of unemployment. Additionally, only 29% of Hispanics polled by the Pew Hispanic Center believe they share a common culture. According to the Pew Research Center, this finding may be due to the fact that the Hispanic ethnic group in the United States is made up of at least 14 Hispanic origin groups (such as Puerto Rican, Cuban, Spanish, Mexican, Dominican, and Guatemalan, among many others). Each of these groups has its own culture with different customs, values, and norms.

These cultural differences among the various Hispanic groups, combined with different self-perceptions of race, may also affect attitudes toward their workplace environment. For example, one study found that the absenteeism rate among Blacks was related to the level of diversity policies and activities visible in the organization, while the absenteeism rate among Hispanics was similar to that of Whites and not related to those diversity cues. Results from this study suggest that managers need to be aware of how diversity impacts their workplace, namely addressing the

relationship between Hispanic job seekers or workers and organizational outcomes concerning diversity policies as it may differ from that of other racial minorities.

Asian and Asian American

Asians are the fastest-growing ethnic group in the United States, growing 72% between 2000 and 2015. Compared to the rest of the U.S. population overall, households headed by Asian Americans earn more money and are more likely to have household members who hold a bachelor's degree. However, there is a wide range of income levels among the Asian population that differs between the more than 19 groups of Asian origin in the United States.

Similar to other racial and ethnic minority groups, Asians are stereotyped and face discrimination at work. Society through media often stereotypes Asian men as having limited English-speaking skills and as being highly educated, affluent, analytical, and good at math and science. Asian women are often portrayed as weak and docile. For Asian women, and other minority women as well, social stereotypes depicting them as exotic contribute to reports of sexual harassment from women minority groups.

The *model minority myth* is a reflection of perceptions targeting Asians and Asian Americans that contrast the stereotypes of

“conformity” and “success” of Asian men with stereotypes of “rebelliousness” and “laziness” of other minority men. It also contrasts the stereotyped “exotic” and “obedient” nature of Asian women against the stereotypical beliefs that White women are “independent” and “pure.” These perceptions are used not only to invalidate injustice that occurs among other racial minorities, but also to create barriers for Asian and Asian Americans seeking leadership opportunities as they are steered toward “behind the scenes” positions that require less engagement with others. These stereotypes also relegate Asian women into submissive roles in organizations, making it challenging for Asian men and women to advance in rank at the same rate as White male employees.

Multiracial

Although the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that approximately 2% of the U.S. population describes themselves as belonging to more than one race, the Pew Research Center estimates that number should be higher, with around 7% of the U.S. population considered multiracial. This is due to the fact that some individuals may claim one race for themselves even though they have parents from different racial backgrounds. To complicate matters even more, when collecting data from multiracial group members, racial identity for individuals in this group may change over time because race is a social construct that is not necessarily based on a shared culture or country of origin in the same way as ethnicity. As a

result, multiracial individuals (and Hispanics) have admitted to changing their racial identity over the course of their life and even based on the situation. Approximately 30% of multiracial individuals polled by the Pew Research Center say that they have varied between viewing themselves as belonging to one race or belonging to multiple races. Within the group polled, the order in which they first racially identified as belonging to one racial group versus belonging to more than one group varied.

Despite the fact that multiracial births have risen tenfold between 1970 and 2013, their participation in the labor force is only around 2%. Additionally, multiracial individuals with a White racial background are still considered a racial minority unless they identify themselves solely as White, and approximately 56% of them on average say they have been subjected to racial jokes and slurs. Discrimination also varies when multiracial groups are broken down further, with Black–American Indians having the highest percentage of individuals reporting discrimination and White–Asians having the lowest percentage.

At work, multiracial employees are sometimes mistaken for races other than their own. If their racial minority background is visible to others, they may experience negative differential treatment. Sometimes they are not identified as having a racial or ethnic minority background and are privy to disparaging comments from unsuspecting coworkers about their own race, which can be

demoralizing and can lead to lower organizational attachment and emotional strain related to concealing their identity.

Other groups

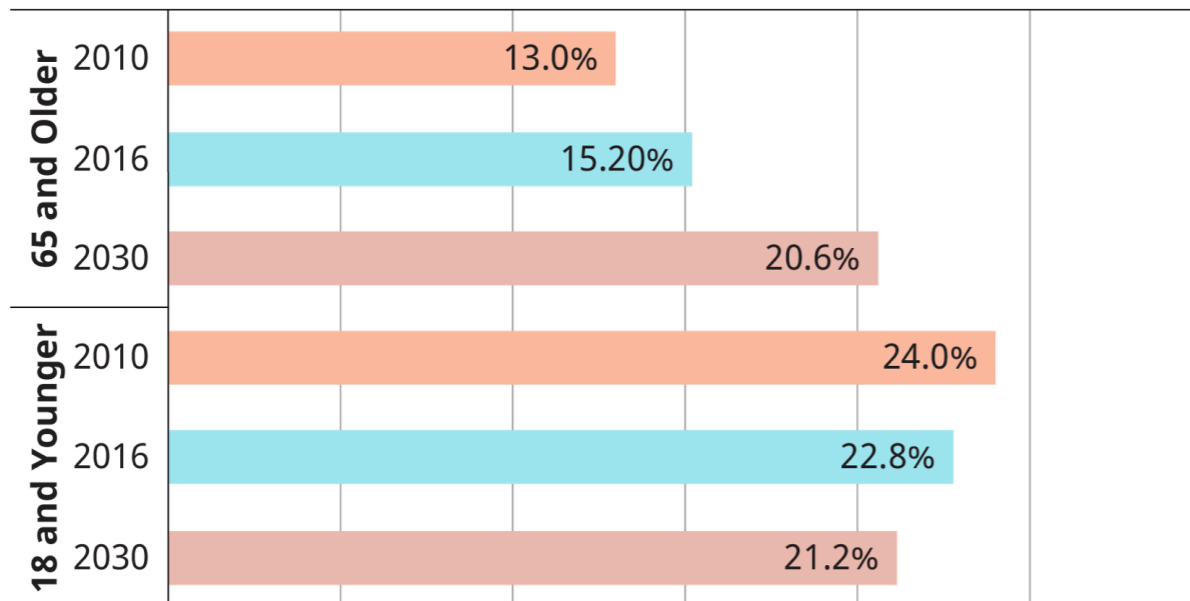
Approximately 1% of the labor force identifies as American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or some other race.

Age

The age distribution of an organization's workforce is an important dimension of workplace diversity as the working population gets older. Some primary factors contributing to an older population include the aging of the large Baby Boomer generation (people born between 1946 and 1964), lower birth rates, and longer life expectancies due to advances in medical technology and access to health care. As a result, many individuals work past the traditional age of retirement (65 years old) and work more years than previous generations in order to maintain their cost of living.

The graph on the following page compares the percentage of the population over the age of 65 to those under the age of 18 between 2010 and 2016. The number of older individuals has increased and is projected to reach 20.6% by the year 2030 while the number of younger individuals has steadily decreased within

Change in U.S. Population by Age



that time period. These numbers imply that organizations will increasingly have employees across a wide range of ages, and cross-generational interaction can be difficult manage. Although older workers are viewed as agreeable and comfortable to work with, they are also stereotyped by some employees as incompetent and less interested in learning new tasks at work compared to younger workers. Studies have found support for the proposition that age negatively relates to cognitive functioning. However, if managers offer less opportunity to older workers solely because of declining cognitive functioning, it can be detrimental to organizational performance because older workers outperform younger workers on a number of other job performance measures. Compared to younger workers, older workers are more likely to perform above their job expectations and follow safety protocols.

They are also less likely to be tardy, absent, or abuse drugs or alcohol at work compared to their younger counterparts.

Sexual orientation and gender identity

Sexual orientation diversity is increasing in the workforce. However, only 21 states and Washington D.C. prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. Without federal protection, individuals who do not live in these states could be overlooked for employment or fired for their sexual orientation unless their employer has policies to protect them. Many employers are beginning to understand that being perceived as inclusive will make them more attractive to a larger pool of job applicants. So although the Civil Rights Act does not explicitly provide federal protection to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) employees, more than half of the Fortune 500 companies have corporate policies that protect sexual minorities from discrimination at work and offer domestic-partner benefits.

Unfortunately, the percentage of hate crimes relating to sexual orientation discrimination has increased. Indeed, LGBTQ employees are stigmatized so much that in a recent study, researchers found that straight-identifying participants were more attracted to employers with no job security to offer them compared to gay-friendly employers. In other words, individuals would waive job security to avoid working with sexual minorities. Also,

compared to heterosexuals, sexual minorities have higher education levels but still face hiring and treatment discrimination frequently.

LGBTQ employees are often faced with the decision of whether or not to be truthful about their sexual orientation at work for fear of being stigmatized and treated unfairly. The decision to not disclose is sometimes called passing, and for some it involves a great risk of emotional strain that can affect performance. Individuals who pass may distance themselves from coworkers or clients to avoid disclosure about their personal life. This behavior can also result in decreased networking and mentoring opportunities, which over time can limit advancement opportunities. The decision to be transparent about sexual orientation is sometimes called revealing.

Just like passing, revealing has its own set of risks including being ostracized, stigmatized, and subjected to other forms of discrimination at work. However, compared to passing, the benefits of building relationships at work and using their identity as a catalyst for tolerance and progressive organizational change may outweigh the risks when LGBTQ employees decide to reveal. The decision to "come out" should be made exclusively by the individual; "outing" someone else as any sexual orientation or gender identity is considered highly inappropriate and hurtful, and may have employment-related consequences.

Research shows that when local or state laws are passed to prevent sexual orientation discrimination, incidents of workplace discrimination decrease. This same effect occurs when firms adopt policies that protect the rights of sexual minority employees. By creating a safe and inclusive work environment for LGBTQ employees, companies can create a culture of tolerance for all employees regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Immigrant workers

Every year a new record is set for the time it takes to reach the U.S. cap of H-1B visas granted to employers. H-1B visas are a type of *work visa*, a temporary documented status that authorizes individuals to permanently or temporarily live and work in the United States. As a result of the demand for work visas by employers, the number of immigrant workers in the U.S. workforce has steadily grown within the last decade from 15% in 2005 to 17% in 2016. Compared to those born in the United States, the immigrant population in America is growing significantly faster. This is partly because of the U.S. demand for workers who are proficient in math and science and wish to work in America.

Although a huge demand for immigrant labor exists in the United States, immigrant labor exploitation occurs, with immigrant employees receiving lower wages and working longer hours compared to American workers. Foreign-born job seekers are

attracted to companies that emphasize work visa sponsorship for international employees, yet they are still mindful of their vulnerability to unethical employers who may try to exploit them. For example, Lambert and colleagues found that some of the job-seeking MBA students from the Philippines in their study believed that companies perceived to value international diversity and sponsor H-1B visas signaled a company wishing to exploit workers. Others believed that those types of companies might yield diminishing returns to each Filipino in the company because their token value becomes limited. In news stories, companies have been accused of drastically shortchanging foreign student interns on their weekly wages. In another case, Infosys, a technology consulting company, paid \$34 million to settle allegations of visa fraud due to suspicion of underpaying foreign workers to increase profits.

Other forms of diversity at work

Workers with disabilities are projected to experience a 10% increase in job growth through the year 2022. This means that more public and corporate policies will be revised to allow greater access to training for workers with disabilities and employers. Also, more companies will use technology and emphasize educating employees about physical and mental disabilities as workplace accommodations are used more often.

In the past, the United States has traditionally been a country with citizens who predominantly practice the Christian faith. However, over the past almost 30 years the percentage of Americans who identify as Christian has significantly decreased—by approximately 12%. Over that same time period, affiliation with other religions overall increased by approximately 25%.

The increase in immigrant workers from Asian and Middle Eastern countries means that employers must be prepared to accommodate religious beliefs other than Christianity. Although federal legislation protects employees from discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and disability status, many employers have put in place policies of their own to deal with the variety of diversity that is increasingly entering the workforce.

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CHAPTER 3: ORGANIZATIONS AS SYSTEMS

After reading this chapter, students will be able to do the following:

- Apply the concepts of organizational culture to various organizations.
- Explain the correlation between organizational effectiveness and positive organizational culture.
- Design organizational experiences that lead to improved organizational culture.



Organizational culture

Organizational culture includes the norms that the members of an organization experience and describe as their work settings (Schneider et al., 2013). Such norms shape how members behave and adapt to get results in the organization. Organizational culture is how the members of an organization interact with each other and other stakeholders (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014).

Organizational culture is a set of values, beliefs, and behavior patterns that differentiate one organization from other organizations (Ortega-Parra & Sastre-Castillo, 2013). King (2012) defined organizational cultures as a system of values that subconsciously and silently drives people to make each choice and decision in the organization. Business managers use *organizational culture* and *corporate culture* interchangeably because both terms refer to the same underlying phenomenon (Childress, 2013).

Business managers use an organizational culture to differentiate their company from other companies (Weber & Tarba, 2012).



Apple Inc, the International Business Machines Corporation (IBM), and Hewlett-Packard Corporation (HP) exist on similar technology and same operating environment, but these companies have different organizational cultures (Schein, 2010). The Apple culture includes producing simple, elegant, and innovative products (Toma & Marinescu, 2013). Priorities in HP culture are employees' autonomy and creativity (Childress, 2013). The IBM's cultural focal point is long-term thinking with loyal and highly motivated employees (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011; Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

The difficulty about leadership is the handling of human resources in the organizational culture (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Yirdaw (2014) noted that organizational culture is the glue that combines the hardware (nonhuman resources) to the software (human resources) in the organization to establish teamwork and excellent performance. Organizational culture positively relates to corporate leadership and governance (O'Connor & Byrne, 2015).

Many business managers understand the impact of culture on corporate performance (Unger, Rank, & Gemunden, 2014). Warren Buffet, one of the top three richest businesspersons in the world, confirmed how organizational culture is necessary to organizational success (Childress, 2013). Similarly, the founder of Starbucks Coffee Company, Howard Schultz, explained that organizational culture is a critical factor in the success of Starbucks (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012).

Sources of an organizational culture

Organizational culture may spring from different sources, mainly from the beliefs of the founders (Martínez-Cañas & Ruiz-Palomino, 2014; Schein, 2010). Uddin, Luva, and Hossian (2013) noted that the source of organizational culture also includes the learning experience of group members, as well as the new beliefs and assumptions of new members and managers. Founders have an opportunity to introduce a strategy and direction of the organization at an early stage of the organization. Founders have a significant impact on how the organization operates (Andish, Yousefipour, Shahsavaripour, & Ghorbanipour, 2013).

Founders of the organization are the primary source in establishing a new culture for the new organization (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012). The impact of culture occurs when the founders implement their business strategy and operational assumptions. Toma and Marinescu (2013) indicated that the founders' assumptions might develop because of their personal experience and cultural history.

Founders may impose their personal experience and culture on their employees and partners within the organization (O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, & Doerr, 2014). For example, the founder of Apple, Steve Jobs imposed his personal experiences and assumptions on employees. Steve Jobs's experiences and assumptions contributed to creating an effective and productive culture at the Apple Corporation (Kaliannan & Ponnusamy, 2014).

Toma and Marinescu (2013) confirmed that Steve Jobs successfully imposed assumptions and personal cultures on the Apple company culture. As a result, Jobs built a strong and successful organizational culture. Apple's corporate culture contributed to turning the founder's dreams into realities. Schein (2010) considered Apple as a good example to show how the founder's personal culture and assumptions profoundly influence the organizational culture.

The other source of organizational culture is the learning experience. The learning experience derives from the social trends of the business environment (Nguyen & Aoyama, 2014). Uddin et al. (2013) noted that managers in the organization adapt some attributes from the community and the business climate. Employees of the organization live in the community, and they can impose their culture on the organization culture. Society may impose its culture on the organization through members of the organization because the members of the organization are part of the community (Gibbs, 2012).

History of organizational culture

In 1951, Jaques described an organizational culture in a business context that contained cultural issues in the manufacturing industry (as cited in Childress, 2013). In 1982, Peters and Waterman described the characteristics of higher performer companies' organizational culture. Peters and Waterman also profiled 46

excellent companies in the United States based on their organizational culture. Recently many scholars published various books in the area of organizational culture that makes organizational culture a popular subject in the field of business and leadership.

Schein (1985) explained the importance of organizational culture in organizational performance by dividing organizational culture into three parts: assumptions, artifacts, and values. Assumptions reflect unofficial but important rules in the organization. Artifacts represent the visible elements of organizational culture including work process, the workplace setting, and organizational structures. The values represent the beliefs of the organization members and their business strategy (Childress, 2013). The three elements contribute to maintaining an effective culture in the organization.

Kotter and Heskett (1992) studied more than 200 companies in the United States, and their findings showed the existence of strong relationship between organizational culture and business performance. Schein (2010) acknowledged Kotter and Heskett's study as a landmark study in the area of organizational culture. In addition to the three seminal publications, other similar books and articles contribute to the development of organizational culture theory (Childress, 2013). Flamholtz and Randle provided extensive information in the area of organizational culture and performance with practical examples from various organizations in the United

States, Europe, China, and other countries.

In the early 1980s, organizational culture theory included organizational behavior particularly with social science disciplines like sociology, anthropology, and social psychology (Denison, 1990). Nwibere (2013) confirmed that a lack of theoretical support to advance the manager's knowledge existed in the area of organizational culture effectiveness. Sharma and Good (2013) conducted an empirical investigation to identify the impact of organizational culture on organizational performance and productivity. The study findings showed that organizational culture was an essential ingredient of organizational performance and a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Childress, 2013; Kohtamaki, Thorgren, & Wincent, 2016).

Organizational excellence

Maintaining a healthy working culture in the organization is important to promote a vision of excellence (Fusch & Gillespie, 2012). Bolboli and Reiche (2013) indicated that business excellence is a central feature for the success of any organization. Business excellence and organizational culture share common characteristics. Business excellence mainly includes effective organizational culture because effective organizational culture is a reflection of excellence in the organization (Brown, 2013).

After a thorough investigation of 46 high-performer companies in the United States, Peters and Waterman (1982) shared eight characteristics of excellent cultures in the organization, including quick decision-making and problem-solving, autonomy and entrepreneurship in leadership, and productivity through people (Abusa & Gibson, 2013). An excellent culture also includes a value-driven management and motivated employees.

Peters and Waterman (1982) described attributes that show the difference between higher and lower performer organizations. Business managers use the excellent organizational culture characteristics to increase productivity and profitability (Childress, 2013). These characteristics are important in maintaining business excellence and effective organizational culture in the organization.

Strong and weak organizational culture

In a strong organizational culture, employees have similar views regarding the organization, and they behave consistently with organizational values (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). Business managers display a strong organizational culture to influence employees' work attitude and performance because culture engages and motivates employees (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014). In a strong organizational culture, the members of the organization share the values and goals of the organization, and new employees quickly adopt these values (Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

Denison (1990) explained the impacts of organizational culture on business performance. A quantitative study results indicate a positive relationship between organizational culture and business performance (Han, 2012; Hartnell et al., 2011; Jofreh & Masoumi, 2013). A case study research results also show a strong culture as a driving factor for organizational performance (Pinho, Rodrigues, & Dibb, 2014; Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014).

New and historical literature showed the existence of a positive relationship between organizational culture and performance. For example, Flamholtz and Randle (2012) confirmed that the organizational culture has an impact on organizations process, employee performance, and overall organization productivity. Sharma and Good (2013) suggested that strong organizational culture is an important factor to improve and increase the organization's profitability and financial performance. Nwibere (2013) also indicated that a healthy and strong organizational culture are positive factors to increase organizational performance. Strong organizational culture includes an important role in aligning the organization's current and future direction (Raza et al., 2014). In contrast, management with weak or ineffective organizational culture has the potential to affect profitability and productivity (Shahzad et al., 2012). In a weak organizational culture, employees have a problem to define the organization's values and to determine the right process of conducting business in the organization (Childress, 2013).

Schein (2010) noted that management with weak organizational culture lacks transparent and consistent communication in the organization. In a weak organizational culture, employees behave in a manner inconsistent with the organization priorities because of insufficient communication and lack of uniform direction from the leadership (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). When the organizational culture is weak, the organization existence is at risk because organization members have different values and beliefs, where they may work against the management's priority (Eaton & Kilby, 2015).

In a strong organizational culture, business managers may develop and maintain a strong cultural foundation in the organization (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014). The foundation work includes establishing the organization members' working culture and developing a set of rules and trends of doing business in the organization (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). Customers and other stakeholders use the organization members' culture and their work trends to identify their organization from other organizations culture (Cian & Cervai, 2014). Customers and other stakeholders may perceive and use the organizational culture as a distinguishing factor in identifying a good organization from a bad organization (Childress, 2013).

Business managers use a strong organizational culture to substitute formal rules and regulations in the organization (Denison, 1990). Schein (2010) noted that establishing a set of standards

and trends in the organization mainly includes creating a well-defined communication channel among employees and managers. Business managers may use the communication channel to develop transparent communication and to encourage a culture of sharing and teamwork among members of the organization (Cao, Huo, Li, & Zhao, 2015).

Transparent communication includes a high level of participation by all members of the organization (Miguel, 2015). High levels of participation and employee involvement in the decision-making process are important to motivate employees. Motivated employees can develop a sense of ownership and responsibility culture in the organization (Engelen, Flatten, Thalmann, & Brettel, 2014). Once employees developed a sense of ownership and responsibility culture, their commitment to the organization significantly improves without close supervision (Nwibere, 2013).

Loyal and engaged employees are important to maintain an effective organizational culture and to improve performance in the organization. For example, Pinho et al. (2014) noted that employees with a sense of ownership might significantly improve performance and productivity in the organization. When employees have a sense of ownership and responsibility, they may fulfill their responsibility without close supervision and control (Denison, 1990). Business managers can use their time to concentrate on other priorities in the organization.

Organizational culture is a motivational instrument in promoting

performance in the organization (Jofreh & Masoumi, 2013). The coordinated effort of managers and employees may contribute to a positive working environment (Miguel, 2015). Schein (2010) noted that employees might motivate and improve their performance when they work in a positive working environment. The study findings showed that loyal and engaged employees promote effective organizational culture to improve performance and productivity in the organization (Fiordelisi & Ricci, 2014).

Business managers with strong organizational culture use transparent and open communication to motivate employees and to improve performance and productivity in the organization (Kohtamaki et al., 2016; Senaji et al., 2014). Transparent communication in the organization includes employees' participation and involvement in organizational activities. When organization members engage in open communication, they may easily share relevant information throughout the organization (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014).

Employees may develop a sense of ownership and responsibility when involved in the organizational decision-making process (Engelen et al., 2014). In a strong organizational culture, business managers encourage their employees to participate in a key decision-making process. The employees' involvement in the organizational decision-making process is important to improve performance and productivity (Miguel, 2015).

In a strong organizational culture, employees and business managers have an

excellent professional quality that contributes to performance improvement in the organization (Pinho et al., 2014). Professional quality contains (a) respect and dignity between employees and managers, (b) high commitment to customer services, and (c) motivation and moral engagement to achieve organizational priorities (Busse, 2014).

When employees and business managers develop respect and dignity between them, they can help each other and may integrate their knowledge and experience to improve performance in the organization (Miguel, 2015).

Strong organizational culture is important to motivate employees in the organization. Motivated employees are primary drivers to improve performance in organizations (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014). Schein (2010) indicated that highly motivated employees might perform in the organization better than unmotivated employees.

Flamholtz and Randle (2011) also noted that motivated employees use their time efficiently in performing their daily tasks. Fiordelisi and Ricci (2014) found motivated employees as important factor to improve performance and achieve organizational goals.

Positive organizational culture

Business managers may develop and maintain a positive organizational culture to improve organizational performance and productivity in the organization (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). Study findings in the area of organizational culture showed that a positive organizational culture as a functional culture in improving performance and productivity in the organization (Childress, 2013). Inabinett and Ballaro (2014) found the existence of a positive relationship between positive organizational culture and performance. Many business managers confirmed that a positive organizational culture as a primary factor in the success of their businesses (Childress, 2013; Melo, 2012). For example, the founders from Walmart and Southwest Airlines confirmed that their organizational culture is a primary factor in their business success (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). The founders of Google and Apple also identified their positive organizational culture as the ultimate source of sustainable competitive advantage (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014).

Business managers with a positive organizational culture may develop a high level of trust in the leadership (Andish et al., 2013). In a positive organizational culture, business managers use a transparent leadership style to develop and maintain trust in the organization (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014). Transparent leadership includes a consistent decision-making process and transparent communication throughout the organization. When business

business managers show consistent decision-making processes and transparent communication in the organization, employees may develop trust on leadership (Miguel, 2015).

Business managers with a positive organizational culture are responsible for clarifying and communicating organizational goals and objectives to employees and other stakeholders in the organization (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014). In a positive organizational culture, employees may clearly understand their organization goal and values (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012). Childress (2013) noted that when employees share and understand the organization's values, they might engage on value added activities.

Organizational culture effectiveness

The organizational culture literature contains information on how business managers use effective organizational culture to improve performance and productivity (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012; O'Reilly et al., 2014). Business managers believe that effective organizational culture is an asset, and ineffective culture is a liability for organizational success (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). Eaton and Kilby (2015) indicated that business managers use organizational culture to control and moderate the working environment throughout the organization.

Hartnell et al. (2011) noted that business managers use an effective organizational culture (a) to shape employee attitudes, (b)

to improve operational effectiveness, and (c) to increase financial performance in the organization. Operational effectiveness contains information on how management uses an effective organizational culture to introduce and innovate new products and to improve process and service. Financial performance includes information regarding the achievement of profitability, productivity, and growth in the organization.

Effective organizational culture is a combination of strong and positive culture. In a strong culture, the organization members behave in a way consistent with organizational values (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). In a positive organizational culture, employees share the goals and values of the organization (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012). Business managers may establish an effective organizational culture to improve performance and productivity in the organization (Inabinett & Ballaro, 2014). Givens (2012) noted that managers with effective organizational culture promote excellent customer service and an innovative business environment. In an effective organizational culture, business managers show employee-focused leadership, sound interpersonal relationship, and ethical decision-making processes (Engelen et al., 2014).

Business managers use an effective organizational culture to maintain a positive work environment (Pinho et al., 2014). Effective organization culture is a collection of sub-organizational cultures. Such culture includes (a) healthy customer service, (b) employee-

oriented management, (c) strong interpersonal relationship, (d) exemplary leadership, and (e) ethical decision-making process (Childress, 2013). Maintaining an effective organizational culture in the organization is essential to motivate employees (Berg & Wilderom, 2012). Managers with an effective organizational culture may improve performance in the organization (Shahzad et al., 2012).

In an effective organizational culture, employees share the organization's values and beliefs (Schein, 2010). When employees share the organization's value, they can perform better to achieve the organization's objectives (Denison, 1990). Study findings in the area of organizational culture showed that effective organizational culture includes shared values and common purpose to create a sense of teamwork in the organization (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011).

Members of the organization use an effective organizational culture to develop teamwork and knowledge sharing culture (Wiewiora, Murphy, Trigunarsyah, & Brown, 2014). Schein (2010) indicated that managers with an effective organizational culture encourage teamwork to improve performance in the organization. Teamwork is an essential factor to achieve common organizational objectives. In an effective organizational culture, business managers and employees work together to improve performance and productivity in the organization (Childress, 2013). Eaton and Kilby (2015) noted that effective organizational culture is important to motivate and retain competent employees in the organization.

Business managers with effective organizational culture give priority to excellent customer services (Berg & Wilderom, 2012). In most cases, organizational leadership contains outstanding customer service as part of a mission statement (Denison, 1990). Miguel (2015) indicated that leadership must value good customer service as a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Denison (1990) also noted that in an effective organizational culture, employees share the organization's values and beliefs. When employees share the organizational values and beliefs, they motivate themselves to achieve organizational goals by providing caring and comfortable service for customers (Childress, 2013). In an effective organization culture, customer service is an essential responsibility for business managers (Berg & Wilderom, 2012).

In an effective organizational culture, business managers use employee-focused and transformational leadership to improve performance and productivity in the organization. Veisoh, Mohammadi, Pirzadian, and Sharafi (2014) found that the existence of a positive relationship between transformational leadership and organizational culture. Wiewiora et al. (2014) indicated that transformational business managers encourage collaboration and teamwork.

When business managers encourage collaboration and teamwork in the organization, employees may benefit from shared experience and supportive alliance culture (Man & Luvison, 2014). In a supportive and collaborative culture, employees may develop a

friendly environment in the organization (Veiseh et al., 2014). Wiewiora et al. (2014) noted that a friendly working environment is important to motivate employees for better performance.

Quantitative research evidence in the field of organizational culture showed the existence of a positive relationship between high interpersonal relationship and organizational culture (Veiseh et al., 2014). In an effective organizational culture, business managers encourage employee-centered interpersonal relationship in the organization (Engelen et al., 2014). Qualitative study results showed that a strong interpersonal relationship as a significant factor to improve employees' satisfaction in the organization (O'Reilly et al., 2014).

In an effective organizational culture, business managers may address employees' interest. The managers who understand the role of their company culture may respond appropriately to employees' interest (Childress, 2013). Nongo and Ikyanyon (2012) indicated that when strong interpersonal relationships exist in the organization, employees could positively communicate and share their ideas with their managers. When business managers open their doors for employees, they may encourage employees to express their opinions without reservation and hesitation (Veiseh et al., 2014).

Business managers use an open door policy and a strong interpersonal communication with their employees to develop a

high level of trust in leadership (Busse, 2014). When employees are content and have trust in the leadership, they can develop a sense of ownership and responsibility in the organization (Denison, 1990). Denison (1990) also indicated that a sense of ownership and responsibility as an important factor to engage and motivate employees for better performance. Nongo and Ikyanyon (2012) found that employee engagement and better performance as an essential element to improve organizational performance and productivity.

Denison organizational culture model

Denison (1990) identified four elements of organizational culture model (a) involvement, (b) consistency, (c) adaptability, and (d) mission. The four organizational culture model elements are essential in developing and maintaining an effective organizational culture in the organization (Kotrba et al., 2012). Denison indicated that involvement and consistency as *internal* factors in developing an effective organizational culture. Adaptability and mission are *external* factors in maintaining an effective organizational culture.

Mousavi, Hosseini, and Hassanpour (2015) noted involvement as a critical factor for organizational culture effectiveness. Involvement includes transparent communication, employee-focused leadership, and strong interpersonal relationships in the organization (Engelen et al., 2014). In an effective organizational culture, business managers encourage high employee involvement

and participation of members of the organization in major organizational activities (O'Reilly et al., 2014). When employees participate in the organizational decision-making process, they develop a sense of ownership, trust, and loyalty for the organization (Denison, 1990). A sense of ownership and responsibility are part of the effective organizational culture elements. Sense of ownership, trust, and loyalty are important factors to motivating employees in the organization (Kotrba et al., 2012).

When employees participate in the organizational decision-making process, they become more responsible and accountable for their actions (Denison, 1990). The study findings in the area of organizational culture show that the existence of a positive relationship between high employee involvement in decision-making process and performance (Hacker, 2015). However, Givens (2012) argued that a high level of involvement in various activities creates a lack of specialization, where difficulty exists to identify the responsible person for the particular assignment.

High level of employee involvement in the organization decision-making process may contribute to the organizational culture effectiveness (Denison, 1990). However, the degree of organizational culture effectiveness may depend on the geographical location of the organization. For example, Engelen et al. (2014) used 643 participants from several German and Thailand companies to examine the relationship between organizational

culture and business performance from a geographical location perspective. Englen et al. confirmed that the high degree of involvement contributes to the organizational cultures effectiveness in Thailand instead of Germany.

In an effective organizational culture, members of the organization from different backgrounds fairly share the organization's values, beliefs, and symbols in the organization (Mousavi, et al., 2015). Effective organizational culture exists when a group of people comes together from a different background to reach a common purpose (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). When members share the organization's values and beliefs, they understand and coordinate their responsibility consistent with organizational values.

Schein (2010) indicated that when organization members share values and beliefs in the organization, they could maintain effective communication and strong organizational culture.

In an effective organizational culture, business managers establish an effective communication, which is important to coordinate employees' activity and increase involvement in the organizational decision-making process (Givens, 2012). Organizational culture emerges from the collection of organizational members' behaviors. Effective organizational culture never exists without a group of people, shared assumptions, and effective communication (Schein, 2010; Sok, Blommel, & Tromp, 2014).

Research findings in the area of organizational culture show the

existence of consistency in the organization as a reflection of the organizational culture effectiveness (Givens, 2012). Givens (2012) agreed that consistency is one of the primary factors to create a strong organizational culture and improve employees' performance in the organization. However, Nongo and Ikyanyon (2012) argued that a high level of consistency in the organization does not directly affect employees' commitment and performance in the organization.

Adaptability is the ability of business managers in the organization in perceiving and responding to the external environments (Schein, 2010). In an effective organizational culture, managers are passionate and responsive to internal and external factors. In adaptability principle, business managers have the ability to modify the existing organizational culture to accommodate necessary changes. The change includes improving internal elements, modernizing internal departments and products in response to external competitions (Mousavi et al., 2015).

An effective organizational culture includes a set of fundamental assumptions that the members of the organization have planned, exposed, and developed in dealing with external adaptation problems (Cian & Cervai, 2014). Business managers often modify and adopt new situations in the organization because of various internal and external factors. In the adaptability principle, employees are competent to adapt, restructure, and reinstitute internal processes, behaviors, and attitudes in response to external

forces and demands (Denison, 1990). Adaptability is a critical organizational cultural element in promoting business performance (O'Reilly et al., 2014).

In an effective organizational culture, business managers define the organization mission by providing purpose and meaning to every major part of the organization's mission (Givens, 2012). The mission contains (a) clear direction and vision, (b) strategic decision and intent, and (c) goals and objectives of the organization that members use to guide the activities of the organization (Mousavi et al., 2015). In an effective organizational culture, business managers use the organization's mission and vision to determining the organization short and long-term goals (Nongo & Ikyanyon1, 2012). Business managers use the organization mission to provide appropriate direction to internal and external stakeholders (Raza et al., 2014).

One of the responsibilities of business managers is aligning organizational culture with their business mission (Denison, 1990). Business managers believe that making successful alignment between organizational culture and business mission is a challenging task and an essential responsibility for them to secure the success of the organization (Eaton & Kilby, 2015). In an effective organizational culture, business managers align the organization's mission with organizational priorities to improve performance and to determine future directions of the organization (Raza et al., 2014). Quantitative study findings in the field of

organizational culture show the existence of a positive relationship between mission and business performance (Mousavi, et al., 2015).

Mousavi et al. (2015) found that involvement and adaptability principles directly affect organizational performance. Mousavi et al. also noted that the other two organizational culture principles, consistency, and adaptability indirectly affect organizational performance. Nongo and Ikyanyon (2012) confirmed the existence of a positive relationship between adaptability and commitment in improving organizational performance. Quantitative study results in the field of organizational culture also showed that the existence of a strong relationship between mission and organizational performance (Givens, 2012).

Types of organizational culture

Four types of organizational culture include (a) clan culture, (b) adhocracy culture, (c) hierarchy culture, and (d) market culture (Fiordelisi, 2014; Sok et al., 2014; Wiewiora et al., 2014). Clan or supportive culture contains an employee-oriented leadership, cohesiveness, participation, and teamwork (Han, 2012). Adhocracy or an entrepreneurial culture includes innovative, creative, and adaptable characteristics (Veissh et al., 2014). Sok et al. (2014) defined hierarchy culture as a combination of rules and regulations to control activities in the organization. Market culture

includes competition and organizational goal achievement (Pinho et al., 2014).

The assumption and values of clan culture include human affiliation, collaboration, attachment, trust, loyalty, and support (Fiordelisi, 2014). In a clan culture, managers need to act in a democratic manner to inspire and motivate employees to establish a culture of excellence in the organization (Miguel, 2015). An interpersonal relationship is active in the effective organizational culture. Organization members behave appropriately and develop a sense of ownership when they have trust in, loyalty to, and ownership in the organization (Nongo & Ikyanyon, 2012). Clan culture includes teamwork, participation, employee involvement, and open communication (Pinho et al., 2014). In a clan culture, business managers encourage teamwork and employee empowerment (Yirdaw, 2014). The ultimate goal of clan culture is improving employee performance through commitment, sense of ownership, and responsibility (Han, 2012; Murphy et al., 2013).

Research findings in the area of organizational culture showed how clan culture positively relates to organizational performance (Han, 2012; Man & Luvison, 2014; Murphy et al., 2013). By contrast, Givens (2012) argued that clan culture includes employee relation issues instead of improving efficiency and effectiveness in the organization. Kotrba et al. (2012) compromised both views, supporting the clan culture's indirect role in improving performance and they acknowledge the clan culture's direct

role in improving efficiency and effectiveness. In a clan culture, business managers encourage employee engagement and commitment to the organization because committed employees may perform their task efficiently and deliver their responsibility effectively (Nongo & Ikyanyon, 2012).

In adhocracy or an entrepreneurial culture, organization members may require clarification for their job assignments including the importance and impact of the assignment to achieve organizational goals (Veiseh et al., 2014). The values and assumptions of adhocracy culture include (a) growth, (b) risk taking, (c) creativity, (d) diversity, (e) independence, and (f) adaptability (Hartnell et al., 2011). In adhocracy culture, business managers allocate more resources for research and development, and they encourage employees' involvement in creative and innovative research activities (Sok et al., 2014).

In adhocracy culture, innovation and creativity are important to enhance productivity and to improve services in the organization. The ultimate result of adhocracy culture is innovation and change (Fiordelisi, 2014). Research evidence in the area of organizational culture show the existence of a positive relationship between adhocracy culture and innovative entrepreneurial orientation (Engelen et al., 2014). Other research findings also showed the existence of a positive relationship between adhocracy culture and financial effectiveness in the long-term (Hartnell et al., 2011).

In hierarchy culture, business managers give priority in establishing effective control systems throughout the organization. In hierarchy culture, organization members follow the rules and regulations, and each activity set with pre-defined procedures and rules (Hartnell et al., 2011). Hierarchy culture includes clear communication channels, stability, consistency, and reinforcement (Fiordelisi, 2014). The final goal of hierarchy culture is efficiency and effectiveness. Study findings showed the existence of a negative relationship between hierarchy culture and financial performance (Han, 2012). Other research findings also showed the existence of a negative relationship between hierarchical culture and customer integration (Cao et al., 2015).

In a competition culture, organizational members have clear objectives to increase their reward through market achievement (Han, 2012). Competition culture includes (a) gathering customer and competitor information, (b) appropriate goal setting, planning and decision-making, and (c) task focus leadership. Competition culture also contains market aggressiveness and achievement.

The competition culture includes open communication, competition, competence, and achievement (Miguel, 2015). In competition culture, business managers focus on external effectiveness through market control and secure competitiveness through market achievement. Miguel (2015)

The competition culture includes open communication, competition, competence, and achievement (Miguel, 2015). In competition culture, business managers focus on external effectiveness through market control and secure competitiveness through market achievement. Miguel (2015) noted that business managers must have knowledge of their clients and market priority to survive in the competitive market. In a competition culture, business managers must maintain customer-driven leadership because the priority in competition culture is customers' satisfaction (Han, 2012).

The other priority for business managers in competition culture is to satisfy the owners of the company. The ultimate goal of competition culture is high market share, revenue, high profit, growth, and productivity (Hartnell et al., 2011). In an effective organizational culture, business managers use the organization member's values, priorities, and behaviors to make the company's business journey easy and competitive in the marketplace (Eaton & Kilby, 2015). The proper alignment of fair competition and stakeholders' satisfaction is important for organizational culture effectiveness.

Previous empirical studies in the area of organizational culture showed that the existence of cultural acceptance variation in various geographical locations (Engelen et al., 2014). For example, Shim and Steers (2012) found the existence of more hierarchical and clan cultures in Southern Korean companies than

organizational culture in the United States and Japan. The other study findings also showed that the existence of more collaborative culture in Southern Korean companies than in the United States and Japan. By contrast, Shim and Steers found risk takers, innovative, assertive, and future-oriented business managers in the United States, rather than in Korea companies.

Measuring Organizational Culture Effectiveness

Business managers may consider various methods to evaluate and measure their organizational culture effectiveness. Using the appropriate measurement method is important because management may use some measurement factors that fail to capture the complexity of culture from different types of organizations (O'Reilly et al., 2014). Hartnell et al. (2011) found the existence of a disagreement and lack of universal standardization to measure an organizational culture effectiveness.

O'Reilly et al. (2014) used the six factors method to measure organizational effectiveness and performance. The six factors include (a) adaptability, (b) integrity, (c) collaborative, (d) result oriented, (e) customer oriented, and (f) detail oriented factors. Flamholtz and Randle (2012) also identified three evaluation elements to evaluate the organization culture effectiveness. The three elements include (a) cultural alignment, (b) behavioral consistency, and (c) cultural gaps. The six factors of O'Reilly et al. are more detail and suitable to measure the organizational values,

beliefs, and norms (as cited in Hacker, 2015). The result from the evaluation may identify cultural gaps that show the difference between the desired values and the actual value in practice.

Fusch and Gillespie (2012) introduced a performance analysis model to determine the gap between the desired performance and the actual results in the organization. Fusch and Gillespie's performance analysis model showed how business managers identify performance gaps by comparing the actual organizational performance to the desired performance. A desired organizational performance includes a detailed analysis of the organization's vision, mission, strategy, and desired results. The actual performance analysis contains a brief discussion of internal and external factors including economic, market, and customer relations. Fusch and Gillespie noted that the importance of identifying performance gaps as a primary approach to deploying effective performance interventions method. Fusch and Gillespie used a work-life approach as a performance intervention to create a positive impact on organizational culture and performance.

Flamholtz and Randle (2012) identified an organizational culture evaluation method, which includes five key dimensions of organizational culture. The five key aspects contain (a) customer orientation, (b) employee orientation, (c) performance standards, (d) commitment to change, and (e) company process orientation. Customer orientation includes how the organization's managers understand their clients and how employees serve their

customers. Business organizational managers must have identified values to guide employee interaction with customers (O'Reilly et al., 2014). The value contributes to the organizational culture effectiveness by maintaining a high level of customer satisfaction in the organization (Hartnell et al., 2011).

The second important dimension for organizational effectiveness is employee orientation (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012). Flamholtz and Randle (2012) defined employee orientation as the process of motivating employees in the organization. Employee orientation includes how people behave while performing their jobs in the organization. Business managers use employee orientation to maintain a strong organizational culture in the organization.

Every organization has a group of people with different cultures and backgrounds. Organizational culture is important to combining the organization members' different backgrounds and personal culture into a commonly accepted organizational culture (Green, 2012). Low employee turnover and high employee satisfaction contribute to the organizational culture effectiveness (Hartnell et al., 2011). The effective organizational culture characteristics contains employee satisfaction and empowerment in the organization, which are key to motivate and retain competent and trustworthy employees.

The third organizational culture dimension includes an input that how performance and accountability standards collaborate in the

organization (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012). Performance and accountability standards contain a standard that shows when and how employees receive evaluations, benchmark standards, rewards, and accountability for their performance. O'Reilly et al. (2014) noted that performance and accountability standards have a profound impact on employees' work performance and behavior. The performance and accountability measure contributes to the organizational goal achievement and the organizational culture effectiveness (Green, 2012).

The fourth essential dimension for the organizational culture effectiveness is innovation and commitment to change (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012). Commitment to change and innovation includes how the company community views, commits and reacts to change and innovation. Flamholtz and Randle (2012) indicated that commitment to change and innovation included the managers' readiness to lead unexpected changes and preparation to improve products and services. Commitment to innovation and readiness for change are important strategic components for the organizational culture effectiveness (Hartnell et al., 2011).

The fifth organizational culture effectiveness dimension is a company process orientation (Flamholtz & Randle, 2012). Company process orientation is the process of how the company system operates including planning, organizing, decision-making, communication, and social responsibility. Organizational culture effectiveness includes economically feasible planning, transparent

decision-making processes, clear communication channels, and socially responsible organizations (O'Reilly et al., 2014).

Effective organizational culture includes highly motivated employees, high level of customer satisfaction, well-established performance standards, openness to change, innovation, and clearly defined company process orientation (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011). Business managers may use company process orientation in evaluating organizational culture effectiveness. The various aspects of organizational culture effectiveness relate to the company performance (Schneider et al., 2013). For example, more innovative organizational culture may contribute to higher sales growth. Bureaucratic organizational culture may increase efficiency. Supportive organizational culture may promote employee satisfaction (O'Reilly et al., 2014). In another empirical evidence, Chatman, Caldwell, O'Reilly, and Doerr (2014) confirmed that a strong consensus culture in the organization affects net income, and a strong adaptability culture affects revenue.

The role of organizational culture on corporate performance

Fusch and Gillespie (2012) indicated that developing a positive workplace culture leads a performance improvement in the organization. Organizational culture is an important determinant factor for organizational performance (O'Reilly et al., 2014). Uddin et al. (2013) confirmed the existence of a strong relationship

between organizational culture and organization performance. Childress (2013) also noted that an organizational culture does affect organizational performance positively or negatively.

Unger et al. (2014) found the existence of a positive relationship between corporate culture and financial performance. In another empirical research, Flamholtz and Randle (2012) found 46% of corporate earnings affect by organizational culture effectiveness. However, Berg and Wilderom (2012) argued that the organizational culture might affect performance, where the change is a longer time interval showing the effects of culture on financial performance.

Business managers use the term *organizational performance* to express an action undertaken in the organization and an outcome to show organizational performance that reflects outputs. When business managers use organizational performance to express action, organizational performance is the ability to execute tasks in the organization by its members (Uddin et al., 2013).

Managers may use action performance to measure with high, medium, or low scales. When business managers use organizational performance to express an outcome, organizational performance is the output or results of an organization including productivity, profitability, and growth (Carter & Greer, 2013). The output may measure against its intended goals and objectives.

Berg and Wilderom (2012) identified five factors to measure the impact of organizational culture on organization performance. The factors include (a) employee empowerment, (b) external emphasis, (c) interdepartmental collaboration, (d) human- resource orientation, and (e) the performance improvement tendency. These factors are important to measure the impact of organizational culture on organizational performance (Unger et al., 2014).

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APPENDIX

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