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# WHICH COMPANY DO I WORK FOR? ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN THIRD PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

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WHICH COMPANY DO I WORK FOR? ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION IN  
THIRD PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

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of

DePaul University

by

Angela R. Dawson

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of

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## ABSTRACT

Organizational communication influences organizational culture and identity, as well as employee identification with an organization. Even though extant literature on organizational culture, identity, and identification explains how these topics occur and relate within organizations, we know less about how employees develop identification to the culture specifically from the third party companies. The purpose of this study is to explore how a third party organization, “One Corporation,” communicates its organizational culture and identity to its employees and how the messages communicated by “One Corporation” influence employee identification. The researcher utilizes thematic analysis of organizational documents, face-to-face interviews, and participant observation for collection of data in this study. Findings indicate that organizational documents communicate One Corporation’s culture and identity utilizing the following themes: communication tools such as language and artifacts, and organizational development, which refers to the development of One Corporation as a business. These findings were found to influence employee identification with One Corporation through the creation of shared meanings and values, as well as creating a values dilemma between One Corporation and contracting organizations and a socialization dilemma among the different locations. Suggestions for resolving these dilemmas are discussed. Limitations of this research and directions for future research are discussed.

*Keywords:* organizational culture, organizational identity, organizational identification, third party organization

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In different businesses today, it has become an increasingly common practice to utilize third party companies to achieve business goals. Third party companies are employed to process payroll for a variety of companies. There are service companies that provide food preparation and sales for universities, hospitals, and cultural institutions. Retail companies operate retail sales locations within cultural attractions, hospitals, universities, and hotel chains. Financial institutions and business corporations employ auditors and accountants; many different types of businesses employ housekeeping staff or grounds keeping staff. Telemarketing firm employees represent many different organizations and provide customer service as well as sales functions for these organizations. Third party companies also work with different health care institutions when providing services such as in home care or medical testing. There are many advantages when utilizing third party companies. Some of these advantages include a reduced strain on organizational finances (pay roll, health insurance, benefits such as vacation or personal time) and the opportunity to provide expert services for organizational clientele or employees.

Today, contracted employees have become a valuable resource for organizations. During a typical visit to a zoo, one might encounter employees of four organizations. For example, as you enter the gates, the admission personnel is employed by the zoo, however, the restaurants are operated by a concessionaire, the retail locations are operated by a retail organization, and the housekeeping personnel (those who clean the park daily) are employed by yet another organization. A clientele based organization, such as a telephone company, might contract a telemarketing firm to resolve customer service calls. Construction companies contract organizations that specialize in services in order to complete projects for clients. Many firms

might employ accounting firms and human resource firms to assist in operations. These are examples of how third party or contracted organizations operate in today's business world.

Contracted employees or organizations impact the companies that employ them in ways that are beyond the services they provide. The contracted employees must represent not only the organization that employs them but the organization for which they are providing a service. For example, let us consider more closely a zoo. Within a zoo, a housekeeping employee spends considerable time among the zoo patrons. Not only is the employee required to fulfill the contractual duties of his or her position, but they also represent the zoo. They might need to provide directions to exhibits, or be asked questions about animals or the zoo mission. They will need to include recycling and sustainable materials in their housekeeping services. A restaurant employee would need to be able to provide the culinary needs of the zoo, as well as be able to direct zoo patrons and answer questions. The zoo might require the food service provider to use recycled materials for plate ware and to provide fresh, organic selections that align with the zoo's mission. A retailer would also be required to direct zoo patrons and answer any inquiries regarding exhibits and the zoo's mission. They might be required to follow the zoo's recycling standards and be asked to carry merchandise that furthers a conservation message that the zoo supports or, they might be asked to donate merchandise to fundraising events.

The employees of each company wear a zoo uniform and are expected to follow their company's guidelines, goals, and missions while entrenched within the walls of a different company, the zoo, and also be expected to carry out the goals, missions, and guidelines of the zoo. A contracted employee or organization that fails to represent the zoo in their actions can harm the reputation of the zoo or create a disparity between espoused values and practiced values among other zoo employees or contracted employees. As a publicly funded organization,

ramifications of misconduct might have serious consequences for the zoo. The example of the zoo is only one facet of third party organizations, and serves to demonstrate potential challenges that third party organizations are faced with, as well as challenges that the contracting organization might experience.

Because third party organizations have become more common in recent years, they have become a unique resource for communication scholars. These types of organizations might provide revealing data regarding organizational culture and identification, and how each is influenced by communication. Organizational culture has been defined as being both a communication process and a product of communication among organizational members (Bantz & Pepper, 1993). Exploring organizational culture within a company that operates within the walls of distinctive, separate organizations may provide more revealing insight as to how organizational members co-create their culture. In addition, organizational culture is one aspect of an organization that draws potential and current employees to an organization. Organizational culture creates an organizational identity for the employees and the organization's external audience. Many organizational members seek an organization that represents similar values and this process is known as organizational identification. Organizational identification is explained by Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley (2008) as how one individual defines his or her own identity in terms of the organization's identity. They state that identification "roots the individual in the organization" and that when an employee defines him or herself "in terms of the identity of the relevant collective or role, one becomes a microcosm of the collective or role, read, and willing to enact its identity and act in its best interests even at the expense of oneself (p. 359)."

Third party organizational employees work for an organization with its own distinct culture and identity, but spend their work hours submerged in a separate, contracted company's

work environment, with a unique culture and identity of its own; they are communicating on a regular basis with the contracted company's employees and customers. Because of these work conditions, communication from the leadership of the organization as well as among organizational members has a strong influence on both the development of organizational culture and organizational identification. As employees in a third party organization receive messages from the host organization that employs them, they will also receive communicated messages from the contracting organization and its employees as well. These messages might be complimentary to each other or dissimilar in nature; however, they will influence the formation of organizational culture and employee identification with the host organization.

This study focuses on developing an understanding of how the third-party company One Corporation communicates its company culture and values to its employees that are dispersed throughout the U.S. and are located as a retailer within many different non-profit organizations. Additionally, this study focuses on discerning how the communicated culture and values of One Corporation influence the experiences and identification of the team members. The goal of this study is to contribute to existing research on organizational culture and identification, thus providing communication scholars and organizational leaders a deeper understanding of these topics.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature focuses on the well-researched topics of organizational culture, organizational identity, and organizational identification. First, the review will develop an understanding of organizational culture and will demonstrate how it contributes to the success of an organization. It will further discuss how organizational culture is displayed primarily through organizational values, and how those values influence an organization. Second, following the subject of organizational culture, this review will explore the research on organizational identity and organizational identification and how each is influenced by the messages communicated by organizations. It will develop the understanding of organizational identity, person-organization fit (P-O fit), and will continue to discuss organizational identification. Finally, this review will explicate how organizational identification contributes to organizational success, as well as other benefits that organizations experience from organizational identification, such as decreased turnover, employee decision making, and organizational commitment.

### **Organizational Culture**

In order to develop a working understanding of organizational culture, it is important to develop a general definition of culture. Schein (1985) discusses that culture is found in all implicit and explicit organizational communication. For example, culture is in organizational philosophy statements, organizational leadership coaching and teaching, and the physical work spaces of the organization, such as office locations or sizes of different employees. Culture has been defined by Hofstede (2001) as the “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes from the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 11). Schein (1985) defines culture as, “a pattern of basic assumptions-invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration-that

has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 9). Keyton (2005) states that culture is created by organizational members’ interactions; culture includes artifacts, values, and assumptions that are results of these interactions. In this definition, organizational culture is created in a dynamic process, and becomes an evolving aspect of the organization in which each member is able to actively participate. Bantz and Pepper (1993) suggest that organizational culture can be both a product of communication and an ongoing process that is enacted by organizational members. As it is both a product and process, culture is constantly in flux. Organizational culture can be influenced by all team members at any time and is also influenced as there are changes in staffing within an organization.

Many factors influence organizational processes and success today, including organizational culture. Organizational culture is a topic of interest for management and executives as a means to improve productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency (Keyton, 2005). First, however, it grew as a concept among scholars that attempted to “define, refine, and apply a cultural perspective” (Kunda, 2006, p. 8) to organizational phenomena. Particularly, interest developed in understanding shared meanings, values, and assumptions that influence organizational members’ behaviors, including communication. As it has grown as a topic of interest among communication scholars, it has grown as a topic that is touted by managerial literature as impacting the profitability of organizations (Kunda, 2006). Kunda defines organizational culture as “the shared rules, governing cognitive and affective aspects of membership in an organization, and the means whereby they are shaped and expressed” (Kunda, 2006, p. 8). This definition of culture implies the integral role that communication plays in the

formation of organizational culture. In order for organizational members to enact culture, it must be communicated among them.

Healthy organizational culture can also lead to increased collaboration, collegiality, and organizational effectiveness. The different levels of culture, such as artifacts and creations, values, and the underlying basic assumptions held by organizational members create characteristics of organizational culture that might provide organizations a strategic advantage to attract potential employees and to build a positive reputation with its external audience (Kaarst-Brown, Nicholson, von Dran, & Stanton, 2004). Organizational culture is important to both organizations and their employees for several reasons; it distinguishes organizations from competitors and offers advantages for recruitment for organizations. For example, an organization that describes itself as ‘market-based’ might draw candidates that thrive in a more competitive and results driven corporation. Alternatively, in a ‘family’ organization, one might recruit employees who thrive in a supportive environment, where the employees care about each other and are in a warm environment. If an organization has a reputation for certain characteristics, it will likely draw candidates that are interested in those characteristics and might accept a position with one company over another offer based on whether they feel the corporate culture is a better match for their employment needs.

Culture in organizations can also lead to enhanced performance and efficiency. For employees, it can foster feelings of pride in their work and organization, as well as a sense of belongingness with their co-workers who have also chosen the same work culture as they did. As a result, employees might develop a higher sense of fulfillment in their work roles, higher job satisfaction levels, and less stress while at work (Neagu & Nicula, 2012).

Schein (1985) stated that there are three levels of organizational culture. The first level is artifacts, which is the most visible manifestation of the culture. The second level of culture is values, which are beliefs that one feels 'should' be instead of what actually is. Finally, the third level of culture consists of basic assumptions, which are taken for granted so often by the group members that there is very little difference among member behaviors (Schein, 1985). According to Keyton (2005), there are five important characteristics of culture. Organizational culture is inextricably linked to organizational members, meaning that they are the creators of culture and its meaning. Culture is dynamic and not static; it is in a constant state of movement. There are competing assumptions and values in organizational culture, as the members have different roles, work patterns, or subcultures. Culture is emotionally charged; the artifacts, values, and assumptions carry emotional meaning that all employees experience and express within their work environments. Lastly, organizational culture is the foreground and background for how members make sense of their interactions; the organizational employees make sense of their current interactions with other organizational members and stakeholders based on their understandings or interpretations of the existing organizational culture (Keyton, 2005).

In addition to being created by organizational members, culture also influences organizational performance in several ways. Internal performance is one possibility of the influence of culture on organizational performance. Internal performance includes productivity, human resources, cost structures, technology, and innovation. Customer satisfaction and economic performance are other ways to evaluate the influence of culture on an organization (Neagu & Nicula, 2012). In addition to evaluating the influence of culture on organizational performance, organizational culture and values are thought to be valuable resources to be managed in a similar way that other resources are managed (Kaarst-Brown et. al, 2004). If

organizational culture supports the business objectives of the company, is widely shared by and internalized by its members, and is consistent with the organizational strategies, it can enhance performance (Neagu & Nicula, 2012). As Altaf (2011) suggested, people are an organization's main source for achievement of goals, and the organizational culture created by members can be an asset or a hindrance for obtaining organizational strategic objectives.

Organizational cultures are displayed primarily through organizational values (Johnson & Jackson, 2009). An organization's core values will differentiate it from other organizations. These values are communicated to employees when they are socialized into an organization, and continue to shape the communication patterns of employees as they perform their job responsibilities throughout their tenure with the organization. This socialization process is also the primary way in which employees learn what their jobs and organizational roles are, as well as how to perform them (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994). In addition to learning about organizational roles and responsibilities, organizational values are standards to which employee behavior may be measured and evaluated to determine success (Johnson & Jackson, 2009). Many organizations may utilize their value set as a performance metric for achieving goals and/or performance evaluations. Values might serve as a guide for what is appropriate behavior within the organization, as well as what specific philosophies and strategies the organization will implement to achieve its financial goals. In addition to guiding the behavior of organizational members, values might also benefit organizations. For example, they may provide an organization with a competitive advantage for employee recruitment (Johnson & Jackson, 2009). Fitzgerald and Desjardins (2004) also state that in order for values to become firmly entrenched within an organization, organizational leaders must incorporate them into every organizational activity, such as hiring methods, performance and promotion metrics, and

employee rewards. Employees should be reminded constantly of values and organizations should continually promote them to employees to aid in internalization (Fitzgerald & Desjardins, 2004).

Many people prefer to work in an organization with which they would be proud to be associated. For example, if an organization values honesty and integrity, and markets itself to potential employees with specific examples of how its practices articulate that value, it might have a competitive advantage to recruit talented employees. Another benefit of organizational values that are shared among a work group is an experience of increased group effectiveness and cohesiveness (Russo, 1998). When the organizational values are shared among team members, they will be more likely to work together and to volunteer to help each other on projects, there might be less conflict, which enhances the group's efficiency, and they might hold each other accountable for performance accuracy, which will better the team and organization.

Organizational culture and values are important in the development of organizational identity and employee identification. Communicated organizational values and culture messages assist organizational members in the process of identifying with one's organization (Cheney, 1983).

### **Organizational Identity and Organizational Identification**

Organizations are comprised of members and stakeholders who communicate in an ordered way with each other and throughout the organizational structures in order to achieve a shared goal (Keyton, 2005). As these employees work toward a shared goal, the organization develops a culture that is unique to its members, which creates identity that will set it apart from other organizations. Organizations communicate with their outside environment to gain information, maintain themselves, and to confirm their own identities (Cheney & Christensen,

2001). When organizations communicate with employees, external stakeholders, competitors, and the general public, they establish their identity as an organization and in the process, demonstrate the differences between their organization and others. Therefore, organizations communicate their identities to both an internal and external audience. External messages impact organizations' public identities while internal messages influence the identification of the organizational members and create the organizational identity simultaneously (Albert & Whetton, 1985).

### **Organizational Identity**

Dutton and Dukerich (1985) define organizational identity to be what “organizational members believe to be its central, enduring, and distinctive character” (p.520); focusing on descriptives that are unique to an organization. They state that there are three main aspects of organizational identity: central character, claimed distinctiveness among other organizations, and claimed temporal continuity. Central character refers to primary elements that are inherent to the organization, while claimed distinctiveness refers to aspects of the organization that distinguishes it from other organizations or products. Temporal continuity asserts that organizations maintain a long lasting and unchanging public identity over time, despite minor changes that may be made to the identity to meet market and staffing demands (Albert & Whetton, 1985).

The importance of communication in organizational procedures has been underestimated by past research (Aust, 2004). Organizational culture and identity is created within an organization via the internal and external communication of organizational procedures and the communication among organizational employees. Organizational identity is established through the communication of the organizational values. Organizational members adopt the

organization's identity via the organizational values that are communicated both internally and externally by the organization (Vaughn, 1997). Additionally, communication from organizations creates an organizational identity that might shape how organizational members define themselves as organizational members and how they identify with the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Organizational messages provide employees information about accomplishing tasks and how to behave within the organization, including specific role behaviors (Stohl, 1986). Organizational messages might be found within artifacts and rituals. Artifacts are the most visible elements of culture; they include physical and social constructs such as web sites, technology, art, and documents (Schein, 1985). Rituals are activities that take place within an organization that follow that organization's guide for behavior (Kunda, 2006). According to Kunda (2006), rituals are "occasions where participants, speaking as agents for the corporate interest, use familiar symbols-presentational devices, stylized forms of expression, company slogans and artifacts-to articulate, illustrate, and exemplify what members in good standing are to think, feel, and do" (p. 92). Artifacts and rituals can work to enhance an organization's identity to both internal and external stakeholders.

One possible definition of perceived organizational identity is offered by Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) as an organizational member's "beliefs about the distinctive, central, and enduring attributes of the organization" (p. 244). This perception of an organization can be a "powerful image influencing the degree to which the member identifies with the organization" (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994, p. 244). Individual and organizational identity may also be defined in terms of 'becoming' rather than 'being' (Ashforth, 1998). This definition implies that organizational identity is more of a fluid construct that can be shaped by daily interactions between organizational members. In the same view, organizational identity

also shapes the interactions between employees. This definition implies that organizational identity, then, potentially evolves over time and is influenced by organizational members as they enter and exit the organization. Much like organizational culture is a dynamic process, organizational identity may also evolve as organizations and their employees evolve and interact over time.

Organizational identity may be perceived in different ways by different employees within the same organization. Senior level managers more often view the organization in more conceptual and abstract ways (Sveningsson & Alverson, 2003). They are partly removed from the large parts of daily or operational work that is done in an organization. On the other hand, many entry level associates may not view the organization in a holistic manner or under broader definitions as their organizational experiences are typically much more defined by the technical and operational aspects of their positions (Sveningsson & Alverson, 2003).

The use of effective identity communication strategies might influence the types of people an organization employs as well as how satisfied they might feel in their jobs. Both of those factors are important for organizations achieving their goals (Vaughn, 1997). In fact, Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) argue that if a person perceives organizational identity as different from what the organization intends it to be, there can be differences in how they enact their identities within the organization.

Differences in perception may also result in poor person-organization (P-O) fit. P-O fit is broadly defined as the compatibility between individuals and organizations. Organizations consider their culture, organizational climate, values, goals, and norms, while individuals consider values, goals, personality, and attitudes when determining whether there is P-O fit (Kristof, 1996). A good P-O fit is important to organizations because it will lead to employees

who adopt their philosophies and values. They will have employees who will contribute to the desired organizational climate, work to achieve the organizational goals, and will adopt the organizational norms. Having a good P-O fit is important for an employee because they will feel like they are surrounded by fellow employees who share their values. They will also feel as though the organization is aligned with their goals, philosophies, and abilities. An organization's espoused values and identity may give them a competitive advantage when they are in the recruiting process; however, if the P-O fit is not accurate, the employee may never fully adopt or enact the organizational values (Johnson & Jackson, 2009). If the employees do not fully adopt the organizational values, there will likely be increased turnover, conflict, a loss of productivity, less engagement, and failures to reach strategic objectives.

Good P-O fit is likely a result of effectively communicated organizational values and culture. An organization communicates its values in many ways- for example, corporate communication, employee resource programs, reward programs, newsletters, and printed mission and values. Effectively communicating the organizational values can create shared values among organizational employees (McDonald & Gantz, 1992), which can lead to better P-O fit. Additionally, Fitzgerald and Desjardins (2004) found that when an organization clearly communicated and defined organizational values to its employees and encouraged involvement, the employees were more likely to be involved in organizational processes such as participatory decision making. Employee involvement thus increases the possibility of P-O fit.

### **Organizational Identification**

In addition to culture, organizational identification also influences organizational processes. When an employee identifies with an organization, it is likely that he or she is identifying with the organizational culture. Research conducted by Schrodt (2002) indicates that

organizational culture has a positive relationship with organizational identification.

Organizational identification can be defined as how an individual perceives himself or herself as one with his or her organization. Another possible definition of organizational identification is that it “involves defining oneself in terms of the organization’s identity,” (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008, p. 333). Organizational identification has been thoroughly researched and is also a topic of interest within organizational management. This interest influences communication studies as organizational members that identify with an organization are identifying with aspects of an organization that have been communicated to them by the organization. A study completed by McDonald and Gantz (1992) supported claims that clear organizational value sets can be foundational to organizational success. In order for the value sets to assist organizational success, they must first be communicated to the organizational members. Organizational managers want to increase organizational efficiency, loyalty, employee engagement and commitment, motivation, and collaboration among their teams; successfully increasing the above can positively impact overall organizational performance, as well as result in less employee turnover and a positive work climate for the employees. Research has indicated that when employees identify with an organization, their work actions will help advance the organization to its strategic objectives (Russo, 1998). In order to advance organizational success, leaders of today’s organizations are interested in building cohesive teams with team members that are invested in the success of their organization. They place importance on organizational culture, specifically values, as they believe that shared values can unify employees (McDonald & Gantz, 1992). Unified employees that share common organizational values might identify with each other and to the organization which has been correlated to organizational performance.

Organizational identification is a way of describing an individual's connection to an organization (Cheney & Tomkins, 1984). Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) define organizational identification as the extent to which an employee defines himself or herself with the same attributes as he or she believes define the organization. They also state that a person is strongly identified to his or her organization when his or her identity as an organizational member is stronger than other identities and when his or her self-concept has many similar characteristics to the organization. When considering employee identification, one may examine, for example, if employees identify with an organization's culture and values. Cheney (1983) states that identification can assist employees' sense making of their experiences. He also asserts that employee identification aids the employee when establishing himself or herself into the organizational environment. Research conducted by Schrodtt (2002) indicates that dimensions of organizational culture, such as teamwork, information flow, morale, supervision, meetings, or involvement may lead to organizational identification. Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994) also state that when organizational members are strongly identified with an organization, the organization might benefit from desirable outcomes such as intra-organizational cooperation and citizenship behaviors. A study by Wilson, Keyton, Johnson, Geiger, and Clark (1993) found that a church that had been more successful in congregation growth when compared to several other similar churches had several factors that lead to identification. These factors included the leadership's recognition of the congregational members, face to face contact time among the congregational members, and participative decision making. Although members of a church congregation are voluntary workers, there is a correlation between the findings of this research with paid employees. When an employee is paid to perform their job duties, they might do exactly what is asked of them; however, a more

identified employee might be more likely to go above and beyond their paid duties, such as agree to accept extra work or projects, or volunteer to participate in work functions. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that similarly to volunteers, employees that are directly involved in organizational processes, as they are when engaged in team work, meetings, or when they are included in the flow of information, are more likely to identify with an organization.

Employees also relate to organizational values. As explained in a previous section, organizational values are strategies, goals, principles or qualities that are considered ideal standards that create guidelines for organizational members' behavior; they are a component of organizational culture that is visible through the communication enacted by members daily (Keyton, 2005). When organizational members communicate these values to each other on a daily basis, they are actively creating their connections to the organization. According to Sveningsson and Alverson (2003), identity is central to issues of meaning and motivation, commitment, loyalty, employee action and decision making, stability and change, leadership, group relations, and collaborations within an organization. Considering the above listed issues of identity, they are all connected to organizational culture and values.

Employee identity and identification may be a strong factor in organizational success. In a study completed by Johnson and Jackson (2009), it is indicated that employee identity is a discerning factor in whether or not they adopt organizational values. Even if the organization has clear values, these values should emphasize employee social interests and employees must be receptive to the espoused or practiced values. Another study completed by Russo (1998) that examined employee identification suggested that when highly identified employees make their daily decisions and fulfill daily work routines based on the organizational decision making process, this may expedite the organizational movement to strategic objectives such as fiscal

growth, expansion, customer satisfaction, and lowering costs of business. When employees are highly identified with an organization, they choose to perform their job duties in a manner that supports the company. This supports the statements by Cheney and Christensen (2001) that organizations have begun to consider employees as internal customers to be satisfied and that they are ambassadors to the outside world that may impact the organizational identity. In addition, Sveningsson and Alverson (2003) suggested that managerial identity is influenced by organizational discourses and the material arrangements of the organizational roles. They also suggested that managerial identities and organizational discourses mutually define each other. This implies that communication plays an integral role in the creation of the identity of management personnel. Senior management can influence the identity work of organizational actors, as they are primarily responsible for socializing new employees in an organization.

Keyton (2005) explains that organizations are open social systems. She claims that individual interactions co-create the organizational levels of interpretations that are passed to others, and that organizational level interpretations are more likely to reflect the views of the upper organizational managers. This explanation demonstrates the ways in which organizational identities are constructed socially by organizational members, particularly members of upper management. Other research conducted by Kleinnijenhuis, van den Hoof, Utz, Vermeulen, and Huysman (2009) has shown that employees in formal management within an organization might have less social influence on employees, and those that are part of the employees' networks of communication and daily practices or those who demonstrate their knowledge and skill within the company might in fact have more social influence on the employee experiences in organizations. Additionally, because organizational identity is constructed socially, two different departments within the same organization could possibly have two very different enactments of

the same corporate values, which can lead to both a culture and identity problem. If there are differing interpretations of the same cultural values, an organization might begin to develop communication breakdowns. Differing interpretations might create different expectations for results or different business agenda and goals. This could result in missed goals, lost resources, employee turnover, and damaged reputation.

An organization may also experience identity issues if its internal audience- its employees- do not accept the messages it sends to them (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). Even if the messages are communicated to employees, if they do not accept the messages, they will likely not enact the prescribed values or ascribe to the organizational culture that is established. This might occur when the espoused values or culture do not represent the enacted culture and values. Another situation that can result in an employee rejecting organizational messages might occur when the organization communicates different or conflicting messages to its external audience. Additionally, when new organizational members are socialized they might not communicate the organizational messages that explicate values, norms, and expectations. For example, in her study, Stohl (1986) found that one person reported that their boss requested her to tell others what the boss said he or she was doing, not what he or she actually did on a daily basis. This is an example of an organizational member who is not being socialized into the organization with the communicated organizational norms and values, but is instead learning from other organizational members who are not accepting of the communicated values and identity. Identities are formed through communication practices within an organization, according to Kitzinger and Mandelbaum (2013), and how speakers interact with one another or select their spoken words will determine how the identities form and how they are managed based on the terms they utilize themselves as well as the terms used by those around them. This

study provides support that coworkers and immediate supervisors shape an employee's work experience and influence how they are socialized into an organization. Hess (1993) discussed that an individual identity is largely malleable due to its communicative nature. Therefore, as employees interact with other employees and immediate supervisors, they will learn what other organizational members interpret or accept as organizational norms and values, which will influence how that employee identifies himself or herself with the organization.

Organizational identification can lead to other opportunities for organizations. One benefit could be lower turnover rates of employees (Scott & Stephens, 2009). Turnover in organizations can be very costly. Companies invest resources in recruitment, interviewing, and training processes for newly hired employees. When an employee is newly hired, existing organizational employees communicate messages that may be memorable to them. These messages provide information regarding norms for behavior, organizational values, expectations for their job roles, and cultural information for the organization (Stohl, 1986). Employees that remain with an organization for some time will develop more detailed and extensive organizational knowledge, which is a valuable resource. Employee turnover results in the loss of the trained, knowledgeable employee and the need to extend more resources for a replacement with less organizational knowledge. Turnover is very costly for organizations as the need to rehire and retrain new employees that will not have extensive organizational knowledge might hinder organizational processes. Employee turnover is a concept that can be linked to the idea of employee commitment. Jablin (1987) asserted that there are several communication-related variables that precede attitudes of employee commitment and satisfaction. These communication-related variables include organization-wide communication, co-worker communication relationships, and supervisor communication. Employee intentions to leave

work and employee turnover can be predicted from the above communication-related variables (Jablin, 1987). Communication from the supervisors and existing co-workers can also have an influence on employee turnover. Employees that communicate more frequently and directly with their co-workers are less likely to leave their positions (Feeley, 2000).

Feeley (2000) also suggested that to retain employees within their organization, management should focus on integrating them in to the social networks of the organization. One method he suggests is through socialization processes when employees enter the workforce. Organizational socialization refers to the process in which “an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen, & Schein, 1979, p. 3). By focusing on establishing communication with a network of co-workers, organizational leaders might prevent turnover and build a team of more committed and satisfied employees (Feeley, 2000). Stohl (1986) found that most memorable messages occur in the first two months of employment and that they are culturing; they offer information for norms, values, and expectations within the organization.

In addition to employee retention, another benefit of organizational identification is employee decision making. When an employee is highly identified with an organization, he or she will make his or her decisions based on the organization’s needs, which may continue the company progress toward its goals (Russo, 1998; Sveningsson & Alverson, 2003). Organizations benefit from highly identified employees making decisions that are in line with the company’s objectives. For example, a highly identified manager of an organization may work extra hours to accomplish tasks, whereas a less identified manager would not be as willing to do so.

Organizational identification is also associated with organizational commitment.

Employee identification is demonstrated through their commitment to the organization (Cheney & Tompkins, 1987). Commitment might be demonstrated when employees work late hours, pick up extra tasks or assignments that are beyond the scope of their daily duties, and participate in various corporate activities such as company events or trainings. Van Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006) found that organizational identification and commitment are distinct concepts that are strongly related to each other. Commitment of organizational employees is a valuable resource for companies. Employee commitment implies that employees will be loyal to the organization, will have a strong performance, and will lead others by example. Committed employees are also viewed as more stable, productive, and more likely to accomplish organizational goals (Larkey & Morrill, 1995). It has been found that organizational members that identify with an organization will agree to take on an increased workload or greater number of responsibilities (Anton, 2009). Altaf (2011) discusses that employees feel more valued and part of an organization when there is more socialization among team members of different levels and teamwork. His explication that when employees feel more valued, they feel as though they 'own' a piece of the organization, and will work harder to achieve organizational goals, which become their own goals is an example of organizational commitment.

Knippenberg and Sleebos (2006) suggested that identification and commitment may be better understood in terms of communication. Additionally, Wilson et al., (1993) found that commitment is enhanced when organizational members are more involved in face to face and subgroup based communication. Sass and Canary (1991) found that identification and commitment are related concepts that correlate with job satisfaction and career commitment. Within organizations, symbolic environments are also important as shared symbols likely

ingratiate employees into the corporate interests. When employees are identified with an organization, they enact their identification through their commitment to the organization. Their commitment is demonstrated in their communication with other organizational members and stakeholders.

This review of literature focused on the well-researched topics of organizational culture, organizational identity, and organizational identification along with introducing and explicating relevant related topics such as P-O fit, commitment, values, organizational performance, and organizational socialization. First, it worked to develop an understanding of organizational culture and demonstrated how organizational culture contributes to the success of an organization. It continued to discuss how it is displayed primarily through organizational values, and how those values influence an organization. Following the subject of organizational culture, this review explored the research on organizational identity and organizational identification. It worked to develop the understanding of organizational identity, person-organization fit (P-O fit), and continued to discuss organizational identification. It explicated how organizational identification contributes to organizational success, as well as other benefits that organizations experience from organizational identification, such as decreased turnover, employee decision making, and organizational commitment.

As stated above, organizational culture and identity are created within an organization via the internal and external communication of organizational procedures and communication among employees. Organizational identity is established through the communication of organizational values; organizational members adopt the organization's identity via the organizational values that are communicated both internally and externally by the organization (Vaughn, 1997). Therefore, the three seemingly independent concepts are interrelated. Organizational identity is

closely related to an established organizational culture, and communication is necessary to relate both the organizational culture and identity to its employees, as well as for employees to identify with the organization and their fellow employees.

The established research on the topics of organizational culture, identity, and identification are comprehensive and enlightening for scholars and professionals today. Extending upon the existing field of knowledge in these matters is necessary for several reasons. Firstly, continuing to develop knowledge about how organizational culture and identity impact organizations as well as organizational members will allow companies to better understand how communication impacts daily processes and organizational success, as well as further clarify the needs and behaviors of organizational employees. Secondly, while the field of knowledge regarding the concepts of organizational culture, identity, and identification is expansive, it is not all encompassing. There is existing research available for departments within organizations, for decentralized organizations, for large retail organizations, and for globalized organizations; however, there is a need for research within third party service companies that work with other companies on a contractual basis, which is a common occurrence within today's economy. Such companies are faced with unique cultural environments. Third party organizational employees work for an organization with its own distinct culture and identity, but spend their work hours submerged in a separate, contracted company's work environment, and communicate on a regular basis with the contracted company's employees and customers.

Researching organizational culture, identity, and identification in third party companies can provide insight for scholars regarding the influence that an organization's communication of culture has on the identification of its employees. Even though extant literature on organizational culture, identity, and identification explains how these topics occur within

organizations, we know less about how employees in third party companies develop identification to the culture specific from the third party companies. Therefore, this study will explore the kinds of culture and identity messages a third party retail company communicates to its employees and how the employees of such an organization are influenced by organizational messages. The organization I chose to conduct my study at is One Corporation. This retail company is largely decentralized, with almost all locations being sole operators in their cities, and is also a third party company that works with other companies on a contractual basis.

In order to explore how organizational messages influence the identification of organizational members, the following research questions are asked. 1) How does “One Corporation” communicate its organizational culture and identity to its employees? 2) How do the messages communicated by “One Corporation” influence employee identification?

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

### **Methodological Overview**

In order to explore the research questions, data were collected via multiple methods, including organizational documents, interviews, personal experience, and field observations. A thematic analysis was performed to analyze organizational documents in order to determine whether “One Corporation” communicates its culture and values to its employees, and how it does so. Following the thematic analysis, interviews were completed to determine what influence the communicated values and culture might have had on the employees. Grounded theory method was utilized to generate themes based on data that were collected from interviews and thematic analysis of organizational documents. In addition to collecting organizational documents and interview data gathered utilizing the grounded theory method, field/participant observations were also included in the data analysis and interpretation process to develop a well-rounded understanding of the questions being explored. 1.) How does “One Corporation” communicate its organizational culture and identity to its employees? 2) How do the messages communicated by “One Corporation” influence employee identification?

### **Participants**

#### **Participant Demographics**

In order to collect data from employees of OC, the researcher conducted the interviews with five female participants and four male participants. Interviewees ranged in age from 23-59 years, and their job tenures with OC averaged from two years to 11 years. In order to develop a wider understanding of different experiences within the company, participants were selected from varying location sizes and assigned pseudonyms, including two people from a small location (four to six employees, revenue stream \$250,000-\$1,000,000 annual sales), three people

from a middle sized location (12-30 employees, revenue stream of \$1,500,000-\$3,000,000 annual sales), three people from larger locations (30+ employees, revenue stream of \$5,000,000-\$8,000,000 annual sales), and one person from the home office support team. Five of the participants are full time employees and four are part time associates.

### **Research Context**

“One Corporation” (OC) is a mid-size company with approximately 1,400 employees. It is a 20 year old retail organization that works contractually with other organizations that provide a retail experience for their clientele, with approximately 75 locations across the United States. There is a main office located on the western coast of the United States and the retail locations are dispersed throughout the United States and Canada. It is a unique retail organization as each location is different in sales volume, annual attendance, venue type, staff size, and so on. The locations are divided by region and business units, and there is only one home office for the company. The home office contains the executive team, the purchasing team, accounting, human resources, graphics and design team, IT team, and marketing team. The organization is largely decentralized, and has experienced significant growth in recent years; it has more than doubled in size in less than ten years, with many of its store locations operating as the sole location in its city.

### **Procedures**

#### **Data Collection Methods**

Data for this research were collected utilizing various methods. Organizational documents were accessed by the researcher, followed by interviews with organizational members of “One Corporation”.

#### ***Organizational Documents***

The samples of data that were selected to be analyzed include the following: a team member training packet, a manager training packet, a training module for business relations, a training module for the company values, three monthly newsletters, three weekly newsletter emails, one marketing package, appraisal forms for each store level position, and job descriptions for store level positions. The sample of data was drawn from organizational documents provided by “One Corporation”. These documents are for employees’ use and are readily available on the company intranet site and in corporate communications.

The unit of analysis for this research is how “One Corporation” communicates its organizational culture and values to its employees via written communication. The codes of analysis include the responses of the interview candidates, which were analyzed line by line.

### ***Interviews***

In addition to document analysis, the researcher interviewed nine employees of “One Corporation” to determine employees’ interpretations of the written and verbal communication from “One Corporation” and how these interpretations influenced the employees’ impressions and experiences at work, as well as their levels of identification to the organization. Interviews were conducted via telephone or face to face meetings and lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour, and were conducted in a semi-structured manner (see Appendix A for sample questions). All interviews were conducted away from the workplace in order to allow interviewees privacy and pseudonyms were utilized to ensure anonymity in participation.

### ***Participant Recruitment***

All participants were recruited electronically. Informational emails were sent to location managers based on store sales volume and location in order to allow a more accurate representation of the organizational locations and members. In each location, the store manager

was contacted first and asked to participate. After the store manager agreed to participate, they disseminated the project information to their staff members to allow them to contact the researcher directly, voluntarily, and confidentially. The project was then explained verbally to each participant as they contacted the researcher via telephone when they were not at work to discuss their interest in participating during which time verbal consent to participate was given. All participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

### ***Participant Observation***

As a current employee of OC, the researcher also utilized participant observations of OC employees. These observations were recorded following shifts worked at OC and discussed in conversations with fellow employees, conference calls, and written or spoken interactions with other location employees, as well as postings on the company intranet site, email contacts, and conference call agendas. As an active participant in the organization, the researcher was better able to observe the communications that occur within the organization on a daily basis, and compare this data with the findings from the documents' analysis and interviews.

### ***Personal Experience***

The researcher has been employed by "One Corporation" for over seven years, and has been employed at a medium sized venue with annual revenue of \$2.5 million and is now a member of management at a location with sales volume of \$7.5 million in annual sales. In addition to working at two venues, the researcher has also worked at several other locations across the company to assist and has had a wide range of experiences to inform the research. At this time, the researcher would like to acknowledge her subjective position and possible bias in perception of the organization as a current employee of One Corporation.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

### *Thematic Analysis*

A thematic analysis, according to Boyatzis (1998), is a process that is used in conjunction with other qualitative research methods. Boyatzis (1998) defined themes as a “pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon (p. vii).” It allows researchers to utilize a wider variety of information in order to increase understanding and interpretation of collected data about people and organizations. Themes are ranges “of interpretation that are used to conceptualize and constitute relationships” (Owen, 1984, p. 274). Boyatzis (1998) also stated that thematic analysis is a process used for encoding information and qualitative data. When performing a thematic analysis, the researcher might focus on a few key themes in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the data being studied, not for producing generalizing material that may be applied beyond the case study (Creswell, 2007). Developing themes and a code for the data requires several elements (Boyatzis, 1998). Firstly, each thematic code requires a label, or a name, following with a clear definition of what the theme is. Third, a thematic code contains an explanation to recognize when a theme occurs, followed by a description of any “qualifications or exclusions to the identification of the theme” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 31). Finally, positive and negative examples are necessary to prevent confusion when identifying the theme (Boyatzis, 1998).

Boyatzis (1998) described three stages in thematic analysis. The first stage occurs when the researcher selects sampling methods and designs. Secondly, the researcher develops themes and a code for the data. Themes are present in data when there is recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness within the data (Owen, 1984). Boyatzis (1998) also stated that themes may be directly observed and identified or that themes might be deduced through research or inductively

reasoned through the data. The researcher must do the analysis reliably; he or she must recognize the codable moment and encode it consistently.

During the third stage of thematic analysis, the researcher validates and utilizes the codes for the data (Boyatzis, 1998). The codes developed can provide information or unexpected information that the researcher might expect in his or her study, it could collect information that is interesting to fellow researchers and audiences. The generated data offers large amounts of data and insights, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to correctly identify and utilized them well in research. In addition to the three stages of analyses, the researcher must interpret the information and themes in the context of theoretical or conceptual framework and to contribute to knowledge development (Boyatzis, 1998).

For this research process, thematic analysis was chosen as a method to complement interviews conducted with team members of One Corporation. There are several arguments to support this method. Firstly, in order to determine One Corporation's culture and values, it would be most reliable to utilize written documents that are accessed by most of the company's employees to determine what possible demonstrations of organizational values and culture exist within the documents. Secondly, analyzing documents that exist within the company will provide explicit data from the company itself, not an interpretation of the data from an organizational employee's perspective. By utilizing documents that are accessible to all employees, the researcher is able to access the language and tone that is established by the leadership of the company.

Additionally, performing a thematic analysis on documents that are utilized for training new and existing staff, operations, and human resource functions might provide insight into the espoused organizational values. By accessing both training and operational documents, the

researcher might be able to discern whether the espoused organizational values are present in each type of document that is utilized as well as determine continuity between the different documents. Finally, by accessing organizational documents and performing a thematic analysis to determine how they establish organizational values, the researcher was better prepared for interview sessions with OC's employees. The researcher was also better equipped to interpret the data that were generated from the interviews.

The thematic analysis was completed in three stages, as recommended by Boyatzis (1998). Stage one included deciding on the sampling size and documents, as well as the units of analysis and coding. Stage two involved developing the themes and a code for the data, while stage three focused on validating and using the code on the data.

### ***Grounded Theory***

In order to analyze the data collected from interviews, the researcher implemented a grounded theory study, with open, axial, and selective coding. Grounded theory study method is commonly utilized in qualitative research as an application of a methodology for “purpose of building theory from data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.1). Another definition of grounded theory is “the generation of a theory of actions, interactions, or processes through interrelating categories of information based on data collected from individuals (Creswell, 2007, p. 63). Developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, this research design was created in order to collect data that is “grounded” in the research field, such as through the actions or social interactions of people (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In grounded theory study, several coding processes can be utilized to analyze data that has been generated by the research process. These types of coding are open, axial, and selective. In the open coding process, data is compared for similarities and differences, and are grouped

together by concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This coding method focuses on breaking data apart in order for concepts to be compared to each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Axial coding processes continues to develop the categories of data, and categories are related to subcategories. The researcher compares the data to the categories and subcategories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Corbin and Strauss (2008) state that axial coding focuses on “relating concepts/categories to each other”, (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 198). The final coding process, selective coding, is typically utilized during the later phases of a study. This process involves combining categories around one central category, as well as filling details in categories that need additional description (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Throughout the coding process, the researcher must break apart the data in order to identify concepts, but must bring data back together by relating the concepts that are found in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

For this study, the grounded methodology was employed to analyze data, and the interview data was coded utilizing open, axial, and selective coding. The grounded method was selected in order to allow the researcher the ability to break apart the data generated by interviews and observations into distinct categories that would then be related to one another in order to generate answers for the research questions. This method was appropriate to apply as the interviews were semi-structured, and the grounded methodology worked well with this method of data collection; it allowed the participants to reveal information in a less formal and restricting environment, which in turn allowed for increased data collection. The open and axial coding was utilized in order to allow the researcher to better distinguish the data groups and how each concept relates to another. Selective coding was then performed on the coded data in order to explain how the communicated identity, culture, and values of One Corporation influence the participants’ identification with the company.

Each method of research explained above was utilized by the researcher to answer the following research questions: 1) How does “One Corporation” communicate the organizational culture and identity to its employees? 2) How does this influence employee identification, thus, employee experiences within the organization, to “One Corporation”?

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

One Corporation (OC) is “a values-based company. While many companies have values, we have chosen to live and be guided by ours,” (OC, Training Manual for Core Values, p. 2). The company values as explained in the Training Manual for Core Values are understood utilizing the acronym, ‘Gusto.’ ‘Gusto stands for: Going forward with courage, Uncompromising integrity and trust, Surpassing all expectations, Total commitment to store quality, and Our people partners, and patrons first. This statement is found in the OC Training Modules for newly hired associates and similar phrasing is also found in the Employee Handbook that is distributed to each employee.

A thematic analysis performed on organizational documents and a grounded method of data analysis were applied throughout the data analysis process in order to determine how OC communicates its corporate culture to its employees and how employees’ work experiences are influenced by these ways of communication.

### **Organizational Documents**

Research question one is: How does OC communicate its culture to its employees? In order to answer this question, a thematic analysis was performed on various organizational documents distributed to OC employees. The thematic analysis revealed two overarching themes by which the culture of OC is communicated to its employees. The themes are: the communication tools of language and artifacts, and organizational development, which are broken into the several sub topics of organizational culture and values development, operational and financial development focus, and business partnership development focus.

### **Themes**

This method of thematic analysis was utilized to determine how “One Corporation” communicates its organizational culture and identity to its employees. A total of 19 documents were analyzed, utilizing training documents, performance appraisals, newsletters, job descriptions, and the company’s website. Each document was examined line by line, looking for concepts utilizing Owen’s (1984) technique of repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness to discern themes. For example, the word ‘partner’ could be found in nearly every document (recurrence), and was repeated multiple times in these documents (repetition), as well as the existence of a training guide for developing a strong business partnership with the contracting organization. This training guide deliberately and repeatedly states that the partnership between OC and the contracting organization is one of the company’s number one focuses; it is also the subject of an entirely separate training guide for OC employees (forcefulness). Concepts/phrases such as ‘values’, ‘commitment’, ‘partner’, ‘people’ were narrowed into categories, which became the themes. An example of a category would be ‘operations’ and would include job functions and expectations, action descriptions for how an employee role is enacted within One Corporation. When creating themes, there were several supplemental documents that were negative cases that did not align with the themes, such as a guideline for delivering feedback. These supplemental documents were eliminated from consideration as they were deemed to be a tool or aid offered by One Corporation to assist in job performance and were not documents that were created by the leadership of One Corporation and were instead sourced from alternative resources. Additionally, as documents were examined, any financial or operational based document was retained as the researcher concluded that these documents provided insight to One Corporation’s enacted identity and values. As stated above, this process revealed two themes with which OC communicates its culture to its employees: language, artifacts, and rituals as tools for

communicating culture and organizational development, which includes a focus on organizational culture and values, operational and financial development focus, and a business partnership development focus.

### *Language, Artifacts, and Rituals*

“One Corporation” communicates its culture and identity to employees utilizing two central themes. The first theme found in the data is the use of language and artifacts. This theme refers to the specific terminology and artifacts that the organization utilizes to unite its employees. The language and artifacts used in the written communications presented by leadership of “One Corporation” is the foundation for the company. It is how the company establishes its identity to its employees and as Hofstede (2001) has stated, language is intertwined with the formation of culture. “One Corporation” is “a values-based company...while other companies have values, we have chosen to live and be guided by ours” (“One Corporation” Training Manual for Core Values, p. 2). This statement is made in the section of the company training manual that explains organizational values. In addition to the word ‘values’, partner(s) and partnership, quality, commitment, and integrity are key terminologies and/or concepts that are present in nearly every document surveyed. Including such terminology with a high amount of frequency in written communication unifies newly hired as well as existing employees by offering a corporate language and like-mindedness. As these terms, such as values or partners, are in training documents, they are also found in job description documents and in performance appraisal forms. The performance appraisal forms are constructed utilizing the organization’s values as was seen in the acronym ‘Gusto’, which stands for Going forward with courage, Uncompromising integrity and trust, Surpass all expectations, Total commitment to store quality, and Our people, partners, and patrons first. In

addition to these forms, the organizational values (with the acronym) and ‘partner’ are found on strategic planning worksheets, in the company newsletters, and on the company’s public website. In the new hire training manual, each training topic headline also has an inspirational quote to tie to the topic. While the quotes do not directly refer to values, they indirectly imply that the company is guided by their values and that the leadership of the company has been inspired by historical figures or well-known business leaders as examples of success.

Artifacts, according to Schein (1985), are easily observable as one of the most visible elements of culture within an organization, and are constructed in the social enactments or by physical objects that exist within the organization. “One Corporation” reveals several artifacts within the documents surveyed. Weekly and quarterly newsletters are a very strong artifact for the organization. Each week, on Monday, every store location receives a weekly newsletter that includes operational tasks but also showcases the company values at the end of each publication. Each publication also offers a story of celebration from one of the locations across the company that showcases how one or several of that venue’s employees demonstrated the company’s values in their actions. In doing this, the company is restating its values as well as rewarding and encouraging employees to adopt them and demonstrate the values in their daily actions. Another artifact includes a welcome packet that is offered to each new hire. It is stated in the training manual for newly hired associates and managers that they will receive a welcome package that includes a mug with the acronym of the company’s values, as well as logo merchandise for the company and retail location. Offering these items to new hires gives tangible reminders of the culture and value structure of the company, as well as the location that the employee will be working.

Several organizational rituals also communicate the organizational culture and identity to its employees. When an organization consistently follows a behavior that supports values held by the organization, the company reinforces its own values. Because ‘total commitment to quality’ and ‘surpass all expectations’ are values, having daily/weekly/annual meetings inform the team members of goals and other key information to assist them in their success. Each day, a meeting is held with every staff member at each location to describe to them key information that is needed to be successful throughout the day. Each meeting is guided by a form, and on this form, the company logo and acronym for values (Gusto) is present as a reminder. Weekly conference calls are held with agendas that are sent out to each location across the country and on each agenda are included topics of discussion that include the terminology of commitment, partnership, and support. In addition to meetings, the company established a council of rotating members that upholds the company culture. This council is comprised of subcommittees that focus on motivation, celebration, a newsletter, and interpretation of the culture. The council creates contests for the entire company and sends out written communication to support them; it sends out birthday and anniversary cards to each person on staff in order to celebrate the employees and show appreciation for employee loyalty and longevity. It also sends care packages to the individual retail locations to thank the staff members for hard work, and to celebrate the company’s success. The actions, such as placing people first by sending birthday and anniversary cards, or surpassing expectations by creating contests to motivate teams to perform and drive results, uphold the core values of the company.

The web site is another artifact that reveals One Corporation’s values and external/internal identity. When a One Corporation employee utilizes the employee web site, the log-in page has the logo of every contracting location that they operate, which actively

demonstrates that their business relations, or partnerships, are highly valued by the company: without these business partners, One Corporation would not exist as it does today. After logging in to the site, there is a direct message that changes on a weekly basis from the President of the company, as well as links to messages from other leadership within the company. These messages communicate many topics, such as inspirational articles, congratulatory messages for store and individual accomplishments, and updates on new business opportunities; the messages on this page demonstrate the importance of the people who work for One Corporation-providing thanks, inspiration, and insight to the employees across the company-and show them that they are 'cared for' as people, not just employees. On the public web site, the company shows pictures of employees and the different store locations, depicting well-planned and designed stores that are filled with enticing product as well as happy and devoted employees. The company values are displayed on the public website, its history timeline is also present on the website, as well as a list of every location and quotes or recommendations from satisfied clientele. When looking at the public website, the message sent to the public is that One Corporation is a value-driven retail organization that is successful, is an excellent business partner with a successful history, and employs passionate and driven people.

When considering the artifacts of training documents, newsletters, websites, and the language that is utilized within them, One Corporation has several key values: partnerships, people (employees), and success as an organization or with business partners. Business partnerships and host companies are extremely valuable. Without these business relationships, One Corporation would not exist. Therefore, developing and maintaining strong relationships with those they are contracted by is very important to the organization. Secondly, the people employed at One Corporation are valued. The people that work for One Corporation not only

represent One Corporation, they are also third party employees who represent another organization. Hiring, training, and developing the best talent brings more competitive value to the company, and retaining that talent is also extremely important. The leadership of One Corporation expresses its appreciation and need for the team members they employ. Finally, success is also revealed as a value. The website highlights growth in business and accomplishments. The manuals for training and socialization of new employees, performance appraisals, and job descriptions deliver expectations for driving business revenue and generating success.

The language, artifacts, and rituals that are utilized by “One Corporation” are intentional and provide insight to how the leadership of the company began to build the structure and culture of the organization as they developed the vision of “One Corporation”. By utilizing specific language and incorporating the artifacts to build the culture, the leadership of the company offered a written example of the common organizational language that would unite its employees and begin developing the organizational culture and identity.

### ***Organizational Development***

The second theme found in the organizational documents was organizational development. This theme was further broken down in to development of OC culture and values, operational and financial focus, and business partnership focus. These themes were identified as aspects of developing One Corporation as a business.

### ***Development of Organizational Culture and Values***

Company values are one of the predominant themes demonstrated through various forms of communications. GUSTO, the acronym for the values, is present in some form within nearly every document analyzed. The language and artifacts discussed above perpetuate these values

and provide the employees with a shared meaning, or common ground, which encourages enactment of the company values. There is a training module designed for new hires specifically to learn these concepts and in the first paragraph, it is stated that “One Corporation” is a values-based company. Corporate culture is also described by the employees in testimonials on the company web site and in several training and on-boarding documents. In these descriptions, there are several key words that offer insight to the company’s culture. While these key words are also applicable as language that shapes employee experiences, they are also specifically tied to the company values, such as “Our people, partners, and patrons first.” For example, the word ‘family’ is used by several employees in the testimonials. It is also found in several new hire training documents.

In addition to the word ‘family’, ‘partnership’ is also found in nearly every document, which implies that all employees are invested in a full partnership with their retail locations. Because of the direct relation to the core values of OC, the words ‘family’ and ‘partnership’ are intentional and purposeful in building and maintaining the corporate culture that OC leadership strives to obtain and demonstrate to both internal and external audiences. The marketing material promotes the company’s people as its biggest asset and speaks about the creativity generated in the teams. The company web site and training modules for new hires also promote a committee that is comprised of organizational members and is dedicated to maintaining the company’s culture through company-wide contests, birthday and anniversary acknowledgements, and motivational materials for the different teams. Another representation of the culture is found in the company’s intranet. This site is accessible to each location, and the front page shows a message from the president of the company that is changed weekly. In addition to his message, there is a scrolling message board below that the top members of the

executive and regional team can utilize to post good news about reaching and breaking records, or compliments on a job well done, and the opening or remodeling of stores.

Along with the weekly letter to the company on the intranet site, the president also writes articles for the quarterly newsletters. These weekly and quarterly newsletters are comprised of articles written by the executive team, members of the home office, and team members from the store locations. They focus on celebrating anniversaries of team mates and partnerships, and highlighting different locations to share with the rest of the company what types of special events are happening. There is a section to welcome new members to the “One Corporation” ‘family’. There are articles about health and wellness, as well as recipes sent in from different locations. The newsletter does not focus on specific sales numbers, strategic drivers, or fiscal growth. Instead, it focuses on the people in the organization and the different locations of the organization. Some newsletters feature collages of pictures sent in to showcase activities and employees ‘having fun’ at their location. The newsletters are a physical object that represent the values from the acronym ‘Gusto’ to the “One Corporation” employees, and might also serve as a physical connection to the other locations that not nearby.

#### *Operational and Financial Development Focus*

Organizational culture and identity are also evident within the operational and financial topics found in the documents. Operational topics are found in the training modules that teach daily, weekly, and monthly tasks and responsibilities--they are tasks and responsibilities that hold the store team members accountable for their daily success at each location. They are the physical duties each person does to ensure a smooth running of a retail location and include receiving of merchandise, pricing merchandise, placing merchandise on the sales floor, operating cash registers, and so on. Financial topics are also found in the training modules for new hires

and focus on fiscal responsibility, shrink (missing money or merchandise), data and inventory integrity, payroll, costs of merchandise, and supply expenses. These are concepts that each location manager is held accountable for in running their location, and on their annual performance reviews. These expectations are revealed in the position descriptions and annual appraisal guidelines. They are also found in the marketing material that is presented to potential clients as a benefit to working with “One Corporation”. In the marketing materials, One Corporation promotes a team that is devoted to the success of the host organization. They reveal that the management and employees within each location work to provide a seamless experience for the host locations’ customers, and that the retail teams’ success is a benefit for the host organization. In short, the marketing materials and public company website promote One Corporation as a team of passionate individuals that will work hard to provide the retail services needed by the host organization, and that instead of having to provide the retail experience for their customers, these host organizations benefit from the support of an entire company that is working to ensure operational and financial success.

These operational and financial topics also align with the espoused values of the organization, including ‘total commitment to store quality’ and ‘surpassing all expectations’; the training documents and job descriptions support the values by restating them and phrasing the job functions in language that encourages developing the company culture and values while working to achieve financial and operational success. The words ‘integrity’, ‘commitment’, as well as themes of driving or increasing revenue, achieving potential, and restlessness are found in the training modules.

*Business Partnership Development Focus*

“One Corporation” refers to its business contacts and clientele as ‘partners’. The word ‘partner’ is on every single document that was examined, multiple times on several. It is part of the appraisal guide lines, under the value ‘our people, partners, and patrons first’. It is on the business planning worksheets used for creating goals and initiatives to reach them throughout a fiscal year; at the top of every form, each location is to disclose their ‘partner’s’ mission. In the register training module there are sales functions utilized for the partners. In the new hire training workbooks, the first activity that every single new hire within the company has to do is explained as touring the location and completing a partner orientation-before completing the “One Corporation” orientation. There is even a separate training module for partner relations for retail managers that explains the expectations that “One Corporation” has for all team members, including the first and foremost one, that of building long lasting and successful partnerships.

As “One Corporation” is a third party company that provides retail services for organizations that are outsourcing these services, one might make the assumption that the organizations that have obtained “One Corporation” are important as customers. The language and consistency of verbiage in the words ‘partner’ and ‘partnership’ fosters a sense of team spirit and also communicates the need of each individual store team to work in conjunction with their location. The frequency of the verbiage and the separate training tool provided for ‘partner relations’ denotes that partnership, team work, and building relationships should be a part of each and every activity undertaken by the store teams. They demonstrate OC commitment to the host organizations as they are communicating deliberately to the host organizations as well as OC employees that they are committed as a true business partner. As the partners are the customers of “One Corporation’s” retail business, they are the primary source for revenue: without the partners, there would be no “One Corporation” locations. The use of the word ‘partner’ in every

single document creates the language utilized by all “One Corporation” employees as well as demonstrates the importance that each partnership has to the company.

### **Organizational Documents Summary**

In summary, the data reveals that organizational culture and identity are heavily communicated throughout the different documents and communications such as: newsletters, job descriptions, performance appraisals, the company web site, and training modules for new hires. The references to values appear to be intentional and create a common language for all employees, which can create a shared meaning for employees working at different venue locations. These values are guiding principles that shape the company’s business practices, procedures, and culture. The company culture is referred to in the training modules and in several organizational documents, including performance appraisals that demonstrate employee progress. The company website devotes significant exposure to the building the company’s culture; it offers testimonials from different employees, pictures of employees and venues, and a timeline for the significant successes and events in the company history.

This thematic analysis of organizational documents raises several questions. If the company is effectively communicating its culture and values to its employees, how might this affect employee identification to the organization? How does the management in different company locations utilize the communication and training modules to train, motivate, and create a location that upholds the culture and values expounded in the documents? An additional question might be to ask how the different store locations enact the culture and values in similar or different ways, as well as how the different store location employees identify with the organization. These questions were explored in face-to-face interviews with OC employees.

### **Interviews**

“They really care about us, you know?” Bess, a part time employee claimed this during her interview. “One Corporation is unlike any other company...they really give us the ability to run our own business.” Jane, a full time employee discusses how the corporate culture is passed down to their employees. “It’s really up to us (store managers and full time staff) to set the tone and atmosphere in our locations.”

Following the thematic analysis on organizational documents, the researcher conducted interviews with nine OC employees to answer research question two; which questions how OC’s communicated culture and identity influences employee identification and experiences with OC. These interviews with OC employees discussed organizational members’ expectations and experiences, with a goal of determining how communication from One Corporation influences its employees’ identification with the company. Throughout the analyses of interview data, several key themes were identified. These findings include the use of organizational language and inclusive language, discussions regarding personal values, perceived organizational values and culture, OC communication of culture and values, as well as an ideal company’s organizational values and culture.

### **Organizational Language**

Use of organizational language was one of the first key themes identified in the interview data. All team members utilized the corporate language, utilizing terms for organizational policies and procedures, and terminologies listed in values and training documents such as “gusto”, the acronym utilized by the company to describe its values. Other terms specific to the organization include descriptions for meetings, conference calls, promotional materials, and business associations. All full and part time employees utilized these terms, which included company oriented jargon such as ‘pwp’, ‘huddle’, ‘guests’, ‘SSC’, ‘communities’ and so on. In

addition to utilizing company terminology, the use of inclusive language was highly prevalent among the participants. For example, all full time employees utilized “we” or “our” when discussing the company culture and values. Additionally, all but one part timer utilized inclusive language when discussing their teams at their individual locations but not when discussing OC as a company. This occurred when referring to other employees at their locations as ‘we’, or ‘our’; when referring to what their host locations offer to paying clientele, they utilized this language. Referring to their host organizations with inclusive language demonstrates a strong connection to the companies in which they are working, not necessarily for OC, for which they are employed. For example, Kerry said “Here at (our venue), we have some great exhibits,” and Kristopher also said “We have amazing artifacts here at (our venue), and I always enjoy learning about our collections so that when guests come in to our store, I can talk to them about what they saw.” Kerry and Kristopher are One Corporation employees but when they talk about where they work, they use inclusive language, which suggests a strong connection to the hosting organizations.

### **Personal Values and Organizational Values**

Each employee offered several personal values during the interviews. Every person spoke of honesty, loyalty, and trustworthiness as personal values by which they are guided. Tia, part time, said “I would say honesty, loyalty, and um...trustworthiness. Being respectful of other people is really important.” Jane, a full time employee, values “honesty and loyalty, and just being a good person and being fair.” Bess, part time, also values honesty and trustworthiness. “The bitterest truth is better than the sweetest lie, that’s what I always say” (Bess, part time employee). Similarly, respect, fairness, integrity, kindness or empathy, colleagues/family/friends, and a strong work ethic were also highly valued by OC employees. Part time employee Julie stated that she values “kindness and empathy...if you can’t be kind to

someone or empathize with someone than no one would want to be around you.” Henry, a full time employee, values his “colleagues and friends...friends, family, and close people.”

In addition to discussing personal values, both full time and part time employees revealed how they interpret the organizational values that are held by One Corporation. Three employees recited their customers and customer service as a value, and three employees cited the acronym utilized by the company that describes what the company professes its values to be. In addition to these values, hard work, integrity, and taking risks or trying new things were also listed by the interviewees as company values. When comparing personal values to organizational values, employees unanimously felt that their personal values were aligned with the company values and felt that they were complimentary or the same. Personal values were examined because employees relate to organizational values and they desire to feel proud of the organization for which they are working. Therefore, personal values are important and relevant when examining employee identification with an organization.

### **Perceived Organizational Culture**

“I would say that their culture is very team oriented and people oriented, but I would say that the acronym ‘gusto’ is how they describe their culture.” Kerry, an OC employee, described the culture of OC in her interview. Many of the responses from the employees included a focus on people. Four employees specifically discussed the focus on customers and customer service as a guiding element of the organizational culture. Five responses also included a focus on supporting the different organizations that each retail location is contracted by; referring to these institutions as partners. Other key ideas expressed about the company culture included ‘fun’, ‘team-focused’, ‘unique’, ‘friendly and open’, and ‘support’ among the different venue teams and home office location.

In addition to providing insight on their individual perspectives of the OC culture, employees revealed elements of the culture when discussing how One Corporation differs from other organizations. An emphasis on One Corporation's focus on its people was discussed by nearly every team member. Kerry, one of the full time employees, discussed that while the company is certainly ambitious, its focus on its people is unique-she discussed that unlike most companies, OC employees have the ability to contact the president and have a personal conversation with him. "I think that it's really because of (the president) that we have such a focus on caring about the people and that the people are the most important element...I mean, it's not every company that you can pick up the phone and call the president...and get an answer or call back-and I truly feel that I can do that." Another full time OC employee discussed how the relationships that OC employees develop with other employees across the country as well as with the employees within their individual location is what separates the company from other companies. "Having a great network of people who don't necessarily work in my location but work in the same types of locations as mine can be great connections...and having strong relationships with the people who work at my partner's institution is also a great benefit...it feels like I get the best of both worlds (Kristopher, full time employee)." Part time employees spoke about the unique work environments within the host institutions, as well as being encouraged to have fun while working; each of the part time employees discussed having a strong relationship with their co-workers and management team. It is possible that part time employees identified with OC based on the enacted values of the full time employees. As several full time employees revealed that they felt they were accountable for displaying the company culture to their location employees, it is likely that they enacted their perception of OC culture with their team, thus encouraging employee identification with their part time team members.

## **OC Communication of Organizational Culture and Values**

Having examined the data to determine how employees describe the organizational culture, the researcher focused next on determining how communication from One Corporation influences their organizational experiences. Written and verbal communication, including artifacts, language use, and rituals as tools of communication from the company and socialization messages emerged as having the most significant influence on employee experiences.

### ***Written Communication***

Each full time employee discussed several written forms of communication from the company that shaped their organizational experiences. These written forms of communication include (but are not limited to) a weekly newsletter, a weekly letter from the president of the company, agendas for conference calls, a quarterly newsletter, public celebration announcements on the company intranet, company contest materials, and communication materials from the council of different store managers and home office employees charged with maintaining the company culture.

The weekly newsletter and letter from the president were often referred to as primary sources for cultural awareness by the full time interviewees. In addition to these sources, the company intranet site postings of celebration were also referred to by four full time team members. These postings were described to be ‘fun’ to read, as well as gratifying to see when their location was among those praised. The company contest materials were discussed by every single employee, full and part time. Julie, one of the part time employees, discussed that One Corporation impressed her because it holds contests for the entire company that focus beyond generating revenue, such as monthly wellness contests for employees. “They aren’t only

encouraging people to be good employees, they also encourage them to be healthy and take care of themselves,” Julie stated. Another written communication discussed by full and part time employees was the council material sent to the stores. Each employee referred to company lottery tickets and currency to earn rewards for enacting aspects of the company values as listed in the acronym ‘GUSTO’. Other materials that were referred to from the council included ritual birthday and anniversary cards that are sent to each employee annually, as well as thank you packages that are sent to individual store locations several times a year to celebrate success. These cards also serve as company rituals for OC, which also influence how its employees think or feel (Kunda, 2006), thus influencing employee identification with One Corporation.

Part time employees referred very little to written communication from One Corporation. There were only two part time employees who referred to having access to the company intranet site. Of these two, only one employee, Tia, referred to the site as a tool to better her understanding of the company; Julie, on the other hand, revealed that she only accessed the site for operational needs. Many of the part time employees do not have access to the company intranet, email, or documents. As a result, they are largely dependent upon the full time employees, such as managers and key holders to communicate the information contained within the written materials. Of the four part time participants, the only written communication that they described as being accessible were company contest materials and council materials sent to stores. No part time employee discussed the weekly newsletter or letter from the president. Part time employees reported more verbal communication from One Corporation when discussing how the organizational culture of One Corporation is revealed in communication. Additionally, each employee discussed how verbal communication influences their organizational experiences.

### ***Oral Communication***

Oral communication in both formal and informal interactions also influenced organizational experiences at One Corporation. The primary manner in which participants felt that the organizational culture and values were communicated was via recognition and feedback regarding job performance, or focusing on ‘our people first’, part of the ‘O’ in ‘Gusto’. Each of the part time employees revealed that they felt their management teams at each of their locations were encouraging and open with them, as well as participative with the staff and accomplishing their goals. Bess, a part time associate spoke highly of her management team: “...I have good managers that back me up and are there if I need anything. They’re not managers that shut you out...if you need help or advice they are there for you...they set aside what they are doing and focus on you and listen to you...the managers here care.” Another part time associate, Tia, felt that the leadership of One Corporation, such as regional management, was very open to hearing input from the store staff and is always letting them know that they are doing a great job. She also said that she was excited to be asked to take part in helping set up a new store. “It really made me feel that leadership beyond my store manager thinks I am doing a great job and I was really happy to be included...I felt like they noticed that I work hard and it made me want even more to be a part of the team.”

The full time employees spoke of recognition from the executive team and the president of the company. Kerry, who has worked in the company for over six years, expressed that the president and some of the vice presidents do an excellent job of expressing gratitude for jobs well done as well as motivating the store managers to drive business. In addition to receiving gratitude from the president of the company, Jane spoke of her regional manager expressing to her frequently that she did a great job. She expressed that it is nice to hear that she is doing well and is surpassing goals that have been created for her team. Kristopher, a full time team member

had similar sentiments. “She tells me where I need to grow and get better but she also always remembers to tell me what I am doing well and I think that is important-I like that when I am doing well, it gets noticed and I get encouragement”. He also compared feedback and encouragement from his supervisors to the birthday and anniversary cards given from the company, stating that the oral feedback and encouragement “make me feel like I am good at my job...the cards make me feel like I am appreciated as a person.”

### *Organizational Socialization*

As previously explained, the socialization process is the primary way in which employees learn about their jobs and organizational roles, as well as how to perform them (Chao et al., 1994). Socialization includes any formal training activity within the organization, as well as social encounters between OC employees when they are forming and enacting their job roles. Each employee revealed their training and socialization experiences as newly hired team members. While One Corporation provides many training modules for operational and cultural learning, each training and socialization experience described by the team members was different, and very few members discussed the written tools provided by One Corporation.

Among the full time team members, two revealed that their training process was non-existent. Kerry discussed her first day with the company as “watching... (another manager)...talk on the phone all day.” Her second day with the company involved operating a cash register with minimal training during a heavy business day and having no clear understanding of the procedures as she was alone on a sales floor. Jane also spoke of being self-taught. She revealed that she learned the company intranet site, the operational tasks, and even cultural aspects of the company such as the organizational language and lingo and values expressed in the acronym ‘Gusto.’ Kristopher, on the other hand, revealed that he felt his

training was detailed and efficient. He discussed his first week as very organized and informative. In addition to being given information about One Corporation, its policies and procedures, operations, values, and company history, he was also trained on the specific location that his store would be located, which was a nonprofit organization. After describing his socialization process into the organization, Kristopher also discussed how he trains newly hired associates. “I take them through the exhibits and talk to them about my venue—the different things going on, why I like working here, what I learn on the job,” he added. Socialization occurs mainly in first days of time in org; training time and social interaction with fellow employees are primary ways that employees are socialized into an organization. When full time employees or organizational leaders talk about what they enjoy or their experiences, they help create expectations and frame the experiences for newly hired associates.

Much like the full time team members, the part time associates’ training experiences also varied. Bess, whose tenure with One Corporation is less than one year, stated that her training was not very educational. “The person who trained me wasn’t too sure about what the company was...they told me really to look at the website...I think it would have been better if I had been walked through it a little bit more (Bess, part time team member).” Julie spoke of an emphasis on the location, and being shown different exhibits and venue specific details in her training. She also spoke of her manager leading by actions, and demonstrating expectations through his behavior. Tia’s training emphasized One Corporation’s value system, and that their store represents their location in all of their actions. “They told me that we are an outsourced company but represent the (venue) in all we do. They told me that we value customer service as more important, and that it isn’t always about making the most money, but is also about the people, keeping our store nice, clean, and organized (Tia, part time employee).” Andrew

revealed similar training experiences. His training focused entirely on the attraction that the store operated within. He completed a scavenger hunt and a tour of the location prior to learning about the company values acronym 'Gusto'. His trainer told him that "no one here realizes that we are a different company and we don't want them to...when we are in uniform we represent our venue (Andrew, part time employee)."

### **Ideal Company Organizational Culture and Values**

Each team member described their ideal company's culture and values. When discussing what their ideal company or workplace would entail, each employee replied with similar qualities. Full and part time employees each desired a workplace that has a fun atmosphere, an upbeat or positive environment, is fast-paced, and has a good work-flow. In an ideal company, they would be appreciated for all of their work and efforts; there would be a strong sense of teamwork, and mutual respect among all employees. They also expressed a need for an open relationship with their peers and superiors, honesty, and a teaching or learning environment that will enhance their growth and success as a team or organization. When asked how One Corporation is similar or different to these descriptions, each agreed that the company was similar to their descriptions of their ideal organization. "They are close to being the perfect company to work for-I mean, they have issues, of course, all companies do, but you know, I think they do a great job, I really do, with that piece of it," Kerry, a full time team member speaks highly of One Corporation as she compares what her ideal organizational culture and values to those of One Corporation. Jane, Henry, and Kerry, full time team members also made an interesting point regarding culture. When asked how One Corporation might be similar to their description of an ideal company's culture, they stated that they felt culture did not come from One Corporation; instead, it comes from the store managers at each location. Each felt that

the culture of One Corporation is communicated by the leadership of the company, but is enacted by the store managers at each individual location.

In addition to culture, employees were asked to describe what values their ideal organization would possess. As with organizational culture, both full and part time employees had similar responses when describing what their ideal organizations would value. Their ideal organizations would value honesty, respect, trust, integrity, and loyalty. Additionally, their ideal organizations would value kindness and openness, positive attitudes, passion from its employees, and the hard work of its employees. After describing these values, each team member once again expressed that they felt that One Corporation's values were similar to their ideal organizations. Tia described how her management team respects the staff, and Bess also discussed the support that her management staff provides for herself and her co-workers. Andrew (part time) also made the statement that he felt One Corporation did align with his description of what an ideal organization would value, but that sometimes, he feels as though there are two sets of rules or values to follow, One Corporation and the venue that they operate within, and they don't always match, so sometimes his team might follow the venue's values instead of One Corporation. The difference, according to Andrew, is that his team is always at the venue and that he has been told that our "partners always come first, (Andrew, part time associate)." Kerry, a full time member, agreed that her description of ideal organizational values and One Corporation's espoused values were the same; that the company's leaders acted with the integrity, honesty, and loyalty that they instilled as corporate values, while working to drive a successful business.

### **Employee Commitment to OC**

The employees were asked to discuss the reasons that they continue to work for One Corporation. Several replied that they felt it was a good company to work for; that it was financially solid and that they had a lot of opportunity to advance within the company. Other responses from part time employees included that it was a fun company to work for, they got to work in unique locations, and that the managers care about their teams. The full time employees discussed opportunities to advance, feeling as though they were an active part of the company's success, and the opportunity to be a part of a unique and successful business enterprise.

Additionally, team members were also asked to disclose how long they intended to remain employed with One Corporation. Among the part time employees, Andrew revealed that he hoped to advance another level at his venue, but intended to work throughout his college years and to move on once he has graduated. Bess and Tia, however, expressed interest in learning more about the company as well as their positions. They stated that they would like to advance within the company and did not envision leaving the organization in the foreseeable future. The full time employees each stated that they would like to remain with One Corporation. Jane replied that she would remain with One Corporation "as long as they'll have me." She also stated that she enjoyed her current position with the company and could not envision pursuing a different role. Kristopher stated that he appreciated the many opportunities that existed within the organization, and anticipated continued growth throughout his career at One Corporation. These responses from the employees demonstrate their commitment, which is a demonstration of employee identification with OC.

Once all of the document analyses and interview transcripts were collected and compiled into themes, the data were then analyzed to determine how communication from One Corporation influenced the work experiences of its employees. This analysis discusses the

development of shared meaning of values among One Corporation employees, a development of a values dilemma between One Corporation values and hosting organizations' values, a socialization dilemma in One Corporation, and employee identification with One Corporation.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

### Shared Meaning and Values

Organizational culture is built through creation of shared meaning, values, and assumptions (Keyton, 2005), which influence organizational actors' behaviors (Kunda, 2006). One Corporation has effectively established a shared meaning and language among its full time employees. The use of specific language within written and verbal communication from organizational leaders has created a common language for all organizational members to utilize despite the fact that each location is located and operated independently of each other. This supports prior research suggesting that a shared organizational culture can provide a sense of belongingness for organizational members (Neagu & Nicula, 2012). The use of inclusive language such as "we" or "our" indicates that there is a strong sense of belongingness among the different full time employees, even with the separation of locations. The use of a shared language as well as inclusive language among the different locations indicates a strong sense of a shared organizational culture among its employees, which in turn, seems to strengthen a connection among its full time team members, even though they are separated by locations, distance, and different 'client organizations'.

In addition to shared language and meaning, One Corporation has also effectively communicated its values, which are primary indicators for organizational culture. The communication of organizational values is a primary way that organizational culture is shown (Johnson & Jackson, 2009), and the team members revealed similar values, including the company acronym for values "Gusto". While all of its part time associates may not be able to recite "Gusto" verbatim, they do all describe elements of these values as being present in their daily work actions and environment. When discussing values with the full time team member

participants, it is evident that the espoused values of One Corporation are very similar to those values that they practice in their locations. The employees from the different locations revealed value sets that were in line to the organization's espoused values; each also discussed values that were similar, even though they operate individually and separately from each other. These similarities in values and expressions of the One Corporation values indicate that the communication from One Corporation influences the experiences and guide employee expectations and behaviors. In addition to similarities between the espoused company values and what One Corporation employees perceive as the practiced values, the employees also revealed that they felt their values were aligned with the company values. This supports prior research that suggests that employees relate to organizational values, and that when organizational members communicate these values to each other on a daily basis, they are actively creating their connections to and within the organization. As research by Svenningsson and Alverson (2003) suggests, One Corporation employees' identities and values directly influence their shared experiences as One Corporation employees.

Personal values and organizational values are closely related to organizational identification. Research has suggested that organizational values that are shared among employees increases group effectiveness and cohesiveness (Russo, 1998). As previously explained, when employees are highly identified with an organization that organization might benefit from positive outcomes such as intra-organizational cooperation and citizenship behaviors (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). Personal values of employees were examined to determine whether the employees of One Corporation held similar values across the company, as well as to determine the similarity of these personal values to the organizational values. The team members were unanimous in stating that their personal values aligned with the

organizational values, which offers explanation for the shared meaning among employees that are operating out of individual locations. As the OC employees identify with the company, their commitment to the organization is also strengthened, as is evident in the employees' statements regarding their intent to remain employed with OC. The low turnover of full time employees and these statements regarding intentions to remain employed with OC demonstrate the commitment that they have for the organization, which also demonstrates their identification with OC.

### **Values Dilemma: One Corporation Values v. Contracting Organization Values**

Shared meanings and organizational values appear to connect the employees of One Corporation across its locations in the United States. In spite of this, there existed some conflicting values between One Corporation and the organizations that employ its retail services. Jane (full time employee) discussed feeling as though some times the host location that her store is located in does not at times follow the same customer service focus that she feels One Corporation possesses. While she did not express any concern regarding differences in values among the two organizations, this statement suggests that perhaps there are differences between One Corporation and its host organizations. Additionally, Andrew (part time employee) expressed that sometimes he felt as though he was being asked to do a task two different ways- one way was the way that One Corporation desires, the other, the way the host organization desires. This is an important revelation that indicates that at times, there is a direct difference between espoused organizational values and enacted organizational values.

These differences among the communicated values of One Corporation and its host organizations also present another interesting dilemma: one of One Corporation's core values is having a strong, productive relationship with their host organizations, or partners in business. As

a result, One Corporation may create competing values for itself. For example, Andrew (part time employee) stated that at times, he felt like he had to follow two sets of rules: those of One Corporation, and the venue location in which he worked. In this case, if these ‘rules’ are contradictory, the employees within Andrew’s location must decide which value is most important: following the One Corporation value or the competing value of the host. Because OC has very strongly communicated the value that it is a business partner and is committed to its host organization as a partner, there can be a value dilemma when enacting this value alongside other values, such as putting OC people or patrons ‘first’.

### **Socialization Dilemma in One Corporation**

As the research above explicated, the primary way that employees learn their job roles and how to perform them is through the socialization process (Chao, et al., 1994). None of the employees revealed consistent socialization, or training, with One Corporation. Because positive employee experiences might be compromised by a lack of effective training, inconsistent socialization of employees competes with One Corporation’s value of putting their employees, or their people, first. Providing inconsistent instructions for job roles or poor socializing opportunities for new hires can create uncertainty and discomfort among newly hired employees, and as a result, does not represent that company value. If that value is not enacted by organizational members, it is possible that newly hired team members also will not enact that value; additionally, they may not enact other company values.

Additionally, if the socialization and/or training process is lacking in consistency, it is likely that turnover rates may be affected, or increase. When One Corporation is represented in the hiring process as following the value set of “Gusto”, and then the socialization (including training time and programs as well as a social interaction with other employees) process conflicts

that description, employees develop cynicism, distrust, and may exit the company. Another potential outcome of inconsistent socialization at One Corporation is that employees might develop incorrect and differing ideas about job roles, and company values or goals. This can be problematic as a third party organization that is contracted by another organization based on the advertised corporate culture and values. If an employee does not ascribe to the espoused values, it is less likely that they will enact these values, which include putting the needs of the business partners first. The contracting organization may be disappointed by the performance of One Corporation, and the business relationship could be terminated. In addition, as a third party organization, inconsistent socialization can result in extreme variations of corporate culture and values. Employees will be less likely to identify with One Corporation and more likely to identify with the contracting organization, which might negatively influence the employee experiences with One Corporation, and can possibly have a negative impact on profitability.

### **Employee Identification at One Corporation**

“They are close to being the perfect company to work for-I mean, they have their issues, of course, all companies do, but you know, I think they do a great job,” Kerry, a full time team member claimed when discussing the culture of One Corporation with her ideal organization’s culture. She, Henry, and Jane, also a full time employee, each stated that they felt that the culture of One Corporation did not come from One Corporation; it is enacted by the leadership located within each location. Each interview candidate spoke highly of the culture and values of One Corporation; in fact, each employee also felt as though One Corporation closely matched their descriptions of their ideal organizations’ culture and values.

It is evident that the employees of One Corporation identify with the organization. Low turnover rates, expressed commitment, camaraderie between employees at different locations,

and use of inclusive language are all indicators of highly identified employees. One Corporation creates a strong culture and value system through its communication to its employees. It creates and utilizes a shared language among all employees, which encourages a shared meaning and connection between them. The values, listed in the acronym of ‘Gusto’, are used in many documents, including performance appraisals, reminding all employees of their significance to One Corporation. Perhaps more important than written communication, however, is the oral communication across the organization.

While the documents, artifacts, and corporate symbols provide a blueprint for the company identity and culture of One Corporation, the interactions among its employees are more influential of the employees’ work experiences, perhaps more so for part time employees who have less access to written communication. These documents first shape the language utilized by all of One Corporation’s employees, however, the meaning that is created and shared by its employees develops within the human interactions and interpretations of the language, artifacts, and symbols. Thus, the creation of One Corporation’s culture and values becomes a process and a product of the communication of employees (Bantz & Pepper, 1993). This is why the part time employees, who have little exposure to the organizational documents, become highly identified with the organization. Each part time associate spoke of their management team and team mates when speaking of One Corporation as a fair, open, caring organization. The verbal communication from the full time employees and the leadership team of One Corporation reinforce and enact the values and elements of culture found in the written documents.

Another influence on the identification of One Corporation employees is the use of artifacts and rituals. Birthday and anniversary cards, lottery cards rewarding positive accomplishments, and the care packages sent to the store locations are physical reminders of the

values that One Corporation has espoused. Kristofer, a full time team member, made a revealing statement when discussing these artifacts. He stated that feedback and encouragement about his job performance “make me feel like I am good at my job,” and the birthday cards and anniversary cards sent from One Corporation “make me feel like I am appreciated as a person.” These physical artifacts enhance the espoused values and encourage all of One Corporation’s team members to enact those values.

## CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

One Corporation effectively communicates its organizational values and culture in its written communication, however, the full time team members, who are managers shape the experiences of those who work part time within One Corporation as they have less access to these materials. Previous research has established that employees' organizational experiences are shaped by their managers because senior management is primarily responsible for socializing new employees in to an organization. The communication of the members of management defines organizational roles for the company employees (Sveningsson & Alverson, 2003). Additionally, these members of management are present and have an active role in recruitment, hiring processes, training, and more when employing a team of people.

Many of the team members revealed the ways in which they communicate and enact the company values and culture; for example, they discussed following and promoting company contests, utilized company language when describing goals, et cetera. While this might be the most common description of employee experiences within the organization, it is not the only description available. The researcher, who is a current employee within One Corporation, has learned of an incident in which a full time member of one contracting location visited another location and publicly declared a lack of participation in the company contests because they felt it brought down morale (as the team was unlikely to win), and that they do not discuss several relevant or current company initiatives with their team members. The other member of management was concerned about the public denouncing of One Corporation activities that are provided for employees at every location, as they felt it might have lessened credibility of One Corporation among their team members. This is a good example of how an OC might be developing identity issues if other location managers exhibit similar behaviors to those

described. When a member of an organization does not accept the messages that the organization sends to them, the organization might experience identity issues (Cheney & Christensen, 2001). The particular location of the manager who denounced the company contest likely does not enact the espoused values, which results in the development of an organizational culture within that location that does not reach its full potential within One Corporation as it is not striving toward the same goals as One Corporation has established.

### **Suggestions for One Corporation**

It is suggested by the researcher that One Corporation examine the communication of organizational values, culture, and identity by its members of leadership. When promoting or hiring members of leadership for the organization, it is suggested that the executive leadership of One Corporation accurately represent the organizational identity, culture, and values. By clearly communicating and explicating these elements of an organization, it is more likely that the newly hired employees will have a clearer understanding of the organization and will also be better able to discern whether the organizational identity and values are in fact values with which they identify. Additionally, it is also suggested that the executive leadership of One Corporation work to ensure that the organizational culture, values, and identity are supported and enacted within each location in order to ensure that the contracting employers are all benefitting from teams that ascribe to the values and culture that One Corporation has presented to its contractors.

If it can be claimed that different departments shape different work experiences for employees of the same company, it is reasonable to question the work experiences of the employees of One Corporation, as well as third party organizations. One Corporation is comprised of different departments; additionally, its retail locations are spread out across the United States and many times, are the only locations in their cities. As a result, each One

Corporation store may develop a variation of the corporate culture that is communicated from the home office and the leadership of the company, which may or may not fully support the goals and values communicated by the company. Additionally, each retail location is located within the host organization. This results in all of One Corporation's employees working within a different company, which could possibly create competing values. For example, working for One Corporation, but always surrounded by the contracting organization, its employees, its policies and procedures, and its communicated culture, values, and identity, might possibly dilute the communication from a 'distant' home office or 'distant' leadership. It might also dilute commitment to One Corporation, and instead, employees might demonstrate more acts of commitment toward the contracting organization as they are actively communicating with and working with these organizations daily.

It is suggested that One Corporation work to develop consistent and strong communication with its employees. Leadership and the home office should utilize written and verbal communication, as well as cultural artifacts to continue to develop and create a shared language and meaning among all employees, both full and part time, to ensure that all employees are represented and have a voice within the organization. Part time employees, who comprise a large portion of company employees, are an especially important audience for this effort in order to develop a common culture among all locations. In addition to maintaining effective communication with all locations and employees, it is suggested that One Corporation develop means to ensure that a consistent message is disseminated to all locations, which will decrease variations of culture from location to location, and may assist with the creation of a common organizational culture that supports One Corporation's values and goals. The communication

from One Corporation via training documents, organizational documents, and oral communication should be consistent in incorporating the company core values.

As Chao et al. (1994) revealed, organizational socialization is the primary method in which an employee learns their job roles as well as how to perform them. The socialization process occurs through communication from the organizational members; additionally, the communicated values continue to influence communication patterns of all employees as they move through their organization. One Corporation's written communication provides a clear sense of organizational values and identity for its employees. Despite these resources, many of One Corporation's employees lack access to these written sources and instead learn about the organization and their organizational roles from their location management or direct supervisors. The responses of the employees revealed a lack of consistency in the socialization processes for all One Corporation employees. This lack of consistency occurs because the written communication is not disseminated to all employees in the same manner or quantity. While full time employees are granted increased access to these written materials, they are not all aware of this access and some instead discussed techniques in which they self-taught the values and identity of One Corporation, as well as its policies and procedures. Part time employees have less access to the written communication and no part time person interviewed discussed any of the written documents utilized for communicating job roles and expectations.

It is suggested that One Corporation align its communication processes in order to properly socialize all employees into the organization. While the written communication and website provide a clear message about organizational culture, identity and values, these forums are not necessarily available to all employees. Most crucially, the full time employees that are responsible for leading the sales teams within the distinct contracted locations should be

provided more effective socialization or assimilation in to the company and their roles within the organization. As the leaders of each location, they will be primarily responsible for interpreting, enacting and communicating One Corporation's values as well as the policies and procedures. While the written documents create a shared language and meaning among the employees, it is necessary that intentional verbal communication and supplemental written communication also be utilized in a training process in order to socialize all newly hired associates in a more consistent manner, thus, communicating One Corporation identity, culture, and values more effectively.

Additionally, it is recommended that a uniform values training for part time and full time employees, including the home office and executive level team. Including the executive level team will help determine and ensure that the perceptions of company culture, values, and identity are consistent throughout the whole organization. The council charged with maintaining the company culture might create a qualitative survey to be administered to all employees that gauges employee understanding of Gusto, company values, and their identification with One Corporation. Providing a comprehensive training and ensuring that the perceptions of the company culture and values are consistent across the company might enhance participation and identification for all employees and give each a voice within the organization, including the part time employees who seemed to identify with their individual locations and teams rather than OC as a whole.

## **Conclusion**

This study focused on developing an understanding of how a third party company One Corporation communicates its company culture and values to its employees that are dispersed throughout the U.S. and are located as a retailer within many different non-profit organizations.

Additionally, this study focused on exploring how the communicated culture and values influence the experiences and identification of the team members. The goal of this study was to contribute to existing research on organizational culture and identification, thus providing communication scholars and organizational leaders a deeper understanding of these topics. In order to achieve this goal, the researcher performed a thematic analysis on organizational documents and conducted interviews with One Corporation employees to determine how communication from these documents influences the employee work experiences.

The findings of this research indicated that the organizational documents utilized by One Corporation communicate One Corporation's culture and identity utilizing themes of language and artifacts as tools of communication and organizational development, with a positive influence on employee identification with One Corporation through the creation of shared meanings and values, as well as a values dilemma between One Corporation and contracting organizations and a socialization dilemma resulting from a lack of consistent training among the different locations. This study supports existing research about organizational culture and identity as well as organizational identification. Additionally, this research explores third party organizations as a unique resource for communication studies. In third party organizations, communication is influential in employee work experiences as they are working for a distant employer within the confines of a contracting organization. The data revealed that third party organizations are a valuable resource for future research on how communication influences organizational culture, identity, and identification.

In addition to having relevance for communication research, this study also provides valuable data for organizational leaders. It provides insight to the some of the potential issues and advantages of organizations working with third party companies. In focusing on the study

conducted at One Corporation, organizational leaders might find insight for how to enhance employee identification within their own firms. Additionally, this study provides insight to the importance and benefit of identification of part time employees. Part time employees are becoming an increasingly significant portion of the work force in businesses today and understanding how to reach part time employees, have them become identified to an organization, and become long term employees. The benefits include lower turnover, reduced hiring and training expenses, increased loyalty and productivity, and increased efficiency.

This study also illuminates several dilemmas that might be found in third party companies as they develop organizational culture, values, and identity. The suggestions made for OC regarding ensuring that all leadership in the locations are enacting the company culture, that the company effectively communicates its culture and values to all team members, including part time employees, and that the company develop more consistent socialization processes for its employees to ensure a more uniform experience and perhaps increased identification are potential areas of study for communication scholars. Additional research regarding the dilemmas discussed for OC might provide more information for other organizational leaders of host organizations or third party companies. Additional research might also provide communication scholars with a deeper understanding of the development of employee identification and how organizational communication influences its development.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **Limitations**

Several limitations exist within this research. The aim of this research was to determine how the organization One Corporation communicates the organizational culture and identity to its employees and how it influences employee identification, thus employee experiences. In utilizing voluntary participants, it is possible that those willing to talk about the organization are those that are more strongly identified to the company and those that work to perpetuate the culture that is conceptualized within the language used in organizational documents. Those that are less willing to participate might be less willing to discuss how their organizational experiences are similar or dissimilar to their interpretation of the organizational culture. A second limitation to this research is the small sample size for the full and part time populations, and for the different location staff sizes and sales volumes. Perhaps talking with a greater number of employees from various location types (staff size, sales volumes, full time staff, and part time staff) would provide additional data with more insight to the experiences that the largest employee population has within OC. Additionally, this research did not disclose all diversity demographics in order to maintain anonymity for interview participants. As a result, true representation or voice may not have been provided to represent all employees of OC. Finally, a fourth limitation to this research is the lack of access to the organizational experiences of the executive team and the home office employees. The employees within the home office location, as well as the executive team, frequently interact with the individual store locations and likely have a different sub-culture within the office and departments. By incorporating ample information and feedback from these employees, a true representation of the organizational culture and identity may be more obtainable.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Third party organizations might provide organizational communication scholars with enlightening data in the studies of organizational identity and culture, as well as organizational identification. Examining how a third party company communicates its organizational culture and identity to employees that are working within the walls of another organization with its own distinctive organizational messages might further demonstrate how communication influences employee identification with their organization. Continuing to explore socialization processes in third party organizations might provide additional insight into how employees form their organizational identities and identify with the organization. Another area of study to explore is the interaction between third party companies and their host organizations. Studying the communication between the companies would show how the companies enact their identities within their communication to each other. Additionally, studying employee identification with the host organization might also demonstrate how daily communication with an organization might influence how organizational culture is created and enacted by organizational members. An additional direction of research might be to explore how third party employees negotiate between conflicting organizational values in daily operations. By examining the experiences of third party company employees, scholars might be able to further develop understandings of how communication from an organization might influence organizational culture and identity, as well as identification process for organizational members.

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## Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

Sample questions; all interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to encourage ease of information flow.

1. What is One Corporation's culture? Describe what you think it is.
2. How does One Corporation show their culture in their communication with their locations?
3. What about One Corporation sets it apart from other companies?
4. What are the company's values?
  - a. How well do you think that your location upholds them?
5. When you were being trained for your job, what did your trainer teach you about the company?
  - a. What did your trainer teach you about the company values?
  - b. How do you think your training showed you what kind of company One Corporation is?
6. How does the leadership of One Corporation demonstrate that you are a valued team member? How about your direct supervisors?
7. What are your personal values?
  - a. How do these values align (or do not align) with those of your organization?
8. What do you think your ideal organization would value?
  - a. How does One Corporation match your description?
  - b. How is One Corporation different?
9. What would your ideal place to work be like?
  - a. How does One Corporation match your description?
  - b. How is One Corporation different?

10. What do you think is important in your work life? What do you value in your work?

11. Describe to me how you answer the question “Do you like your job?”

12. Why do you choose to work for One Corporation?

a. What do you see as your future in this company?

b. How long do you plan to stay with the company?