


COMMUNICATING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE
THROUGH WRITING


by

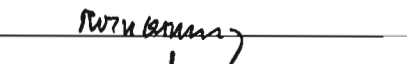
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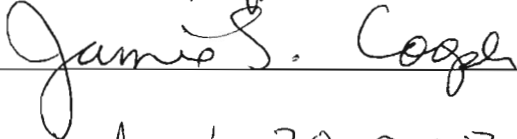


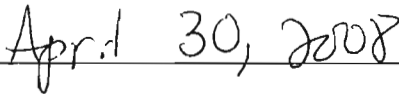
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Communicating Organizational Culture in the Workplace through Writing

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents, for their constant encouragement.

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I would like to thank Douglas Eyman for volunteering to navigate the rapids of thesis writing with me. I would also like to thank Susan Lawrence and Roger Lathbury for agreeing to be readers and giving me invaluable insight. I would like to thank my wonderful coworkers for their willingness to participate as interviewees and support of the project. Finally, I would like to thank my work-place and mentor Laura Chamberlain.

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNICATING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE THROUGH WRITING

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Organizational culture is vital to business success in everything from mergers to attracting high-quality personnel. This article explores how writing influences organizational culture. This study examines the professional writing practices and artifacts of a medium-sized technology company through several theoretical lenses from the discipline of professional writing. Genre, articulation, and structuration theories provide a framework for studying the company's writing practices in a way unexplored by previous research. Combining this analysis with employee interviews, the study catalogues tactics and strategies within the firm that have meaningful consequences for the company's organizational culture and, consequently, its business success. The results indicate that the study and management of writing practices within an organization are vital to creating a strong organizational culture. The analysis also suggests several strategies to that end.

Introduction

THE IMPORTANCE OF A WELL-COMMUNICATED ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture is increasingly vital to business success. A review of the literature on the subject reveals a number of benefits derived from a strong, well-communicated organizational culture. Foremost among the benefits is low employee turn-over rates (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001, p. 761). Another benefit for companies with a strong shared culture is improved financial and merger success (Schweiger & Denisi, 1991; Balmer & Dinnie, 1999). Bing Ran and P. Robert Duimering (2007) list cooperation, employees' self-concept, commitment, and identification with the organization as facets of a positive organizational identity. New employees are more quickly and more effectively assimilated into a company with a well-communicated organizational culture (Miller, 1996; Miller & Jablin, 1991). Organizational culture is related to corporate culture (organizational cultures of the business world) and corporate identity (public perception of corporations) and is subsequently informed by studies in those areas. T.C. Melewar and Elif Karaosmanoglu (2006) contend that “organizations have realized that a strong identity can help them align with the marketplace, attract investment, motivate employees, and serve as a means to differentiate their products and services” (p. 846).

Companies constantly seek ways to motivate and engage their employees, and organizational culture is the crucial element through which modern American workforces can feel a part of a unique and meaningful work environment. John Swales and Priscilla Rogers (1995) highlight the necessity of a strong corporate culture when they quote John Kenneth Galbraith – “identification has succeeded financial reward, which in turn replaced compulsion and fear, as the primary motivational force in the modern corporation” (p. 227-228). As America continues to transition to an information economy, outcomes such as retaining qualified personnel, motivating employees, and helping them to feel part of an organization will provide the key to marketplace success.

Companies need a way to keep people connected who lack face-to-face interaction. If all the employees of a company were located at a single, physical location, face-to-face interaction would quickly and effectively transmit organizational culture, but many companies have dispersed work forces, where employees are co-located with personnel from other organizations and subject to the influence of conflicting organizational cultures. Eisenberg and Riley (2001) write that “it will make sense to worry less about 'organizations' and more about organizing and structuring of communicative relationships and our discursively produced environments” (p. 319). If defining an organization becomes difficult considering the myriad influences on any culture (e.g., counter cultures), it makes more sense to study communication relationships. A discursively produced environment also has the benefit of being able to transcend geographic boundaries. Byrne and LeMay (2006) promote the strength of written communications for connecting a dispersed workforce in their study of media,

and if written communication encourages employees to participate in face-to-face interaction opportunities, so much the better. However, new employees don't like to ask direct questions upon entry into an organization (Miller, 1996; Jablin, 2001); employees will instead go to great lengths to find out information in discreet ways. This behavior underscores the importance of creating texts that new employees can access without revealing their lack of understanding to coworkers. Beyond newcomers, motivating writing that connects employees at any level to the organizational culture is crucial. As Christine Kelly and Michele Zak (1999) argue in their analysis of narrativity in professional communication, "rhetorical skill – the ability to persuade – is essential to successful management of business and professional careers" (p. 297).

THE IMPETUS FOR THIS STUDY

Cutting Edge Technologies, Inc. (CETI)¹, a mid-sized technology services contractor for the federal government, faces the challenges of a rapidly expanding workforce that is becoming ever more geographically dispersed. In its 17th year, the firm has a few well-established branch offices and is quickly entering new geographical areas including the west coast of the United States and Florida. As the company wins new contracts with the government, they are hiring entire teams at a time. Executives at the firm, although always conscious of fostering a strong company culture, realize the traditional means of culture communication through face-to-face interaction need to adapt to a more dispersed work force. As a writer in the company's corporate office, I saw an

¹ All names in this article are pseudonyms.

opportunity for professional writing to meet a need faced by many companies that are undergoing similar organizational and structural changes – the communication of organizational culture. Between December of 2007 and May of 2008, I observed the creation of texts within the firm and interviewed employees to explore how writing is currently used to communicate the organizational culture. I cataloged interviews, processes, and texts. I also noted which practices are most effective in nurturing organizational culture among employees based on interview comments and observation of the use of organizational culture messages. By studying the observations, I hoped that enhanced practices would recommend themselves and improve the company's ability to build a strong organizational culture among its constituents through writing.

Studying how writing impacts organizational culture also led me to consider component questions. How does writing communicate the gap between an envisioned culture and an organization's current state? Who is writing about the organizational culture within an organization and what are the implications of authorship? How does writing shape organizational behavior and how does that behavior influence writing? How can writing help internalize culture concepts among organizational members? Lastly, how can executives who craft corporate strategy use writing to manage organizational culture?

WRITING IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE HAS NOT BEEN EXTENSIVELY STUDIED

This study arises from a lack of research aimed at leveraging writing to better transmit organizational culture. A study of existing resources for ways to use writing reveals a gap that is informed, but not answered, by several disciplines:

- Business management
- Communications
- Organizational behavior
- Marketing
- Workplace research

I found that while I was learning about conducting research in the workplace, about the importance of organizational culture, about clarifying what organizational culture is – I was not finding any research that specifically examines writing practices that can be applied to improve organizational culture within a company. Some texts would devote a few paragraphs to the use of newsletters (Jablin, 2001; Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004) and some would focus on just the mission statement of a firm (Swales & Rogers, 1995; Ran & Duimering, 2007), but none looked at the full arsenal of written media available to companies or the practice of writing about organizational culture within a firm as means of improving organizational culture. Where the research is weak is the role of professional writing in communicating culture and how it might be used to improve the transmission of culture to new employees – helping in their assimilation and success within a work environment.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: A DEFINITION

Research on organizational culture can be confusing given the number of terms people use to refer to similar ideas. A coworker may give you a blank stare if you ask her

about organizational culture, but she may recognize a term such as corporate culture. However, if you were to ask three coworkers for the definition of corporate culture, you would likely receive three different answers. In a study on corporate identity by T.C. Melewar and Elif Karaosmanoglu (2006), interviewees all agreed that corporate identity is vital to a firm's success but no two gave the same definition of what makes up corporate identity. In the academic literature, these terms and definitions each represent nuances in thinking. For instance, corporate identity is referenced as “a term used to identify the essence of what the firm is” while corporate image is “the collective perception that the stakeholders have of corporate identity” (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu, 2006, p. 848). For the purposes of this study, I will use the term “organizational culture.” Edgar Schein (1992) formally defines organizational culture as a “pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved 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. 12). As the definition suggests, organizational culture focuses on members of a group rather than the perceptions of those outside the organization. Using this definition concentrates the study on writing habits and artifacts that enhance employees’ identification with their organization. It does not include writing directed at outside audiences except where that writing has an impact on how employees perceive themselves and the company.

ABOUT CETI: THE RESEARCH SITE

As a writer employed by CETI, I am afforded the unique opportunity of working as a rhetorician in the trenches of practical application. I manage the writing of the annual report and am heavily involved in drafting, soliciting, and editing content for a number of other texts. As an employee in the corporate headquarters, I interact with people throughout the firm, and I have an existing rapport with many of the interviewees and easy access to participants in this study. In fact, the corporate support group I work for is commissioned with improving communication in the firm.

In early 2008, I observed writing in the firm and interviewed 24 employees about the company's organizational culture. The study was fully embraced by the company's executive team, and they encouraged me to use my findings to produce a text focused on the company's organizational culture that could be given to new employees.

The people interviewed were chosen to represent a diverse mix across three criteria: primary work location, level of seniority in the firm, and number of years with the firm. A table outlining the mix can be found in the appendices. I have also indicated if people have worked in more than one location within the company.

Types of Questions Asked:

- Pervasive characteristics of the company's culture
 - Gaps between perceived culture and communicated culture
 - Re-communicating the culture to others
- Ways of coming to understand that perception
 - Effect of primary work location
 - Particularly helpful assimilation methods (formal and informal)
 - Most important information for new hires
- Identifying ways of filling gaps in understanding
 - questions about culture
 - contents of a possible culture text and its usefulness

All names in this article are fictitious. CETI is a 300-person firm. All of the private company's stock options are held by employees. The president maintains a controlling share. The firm is headquartered 20 miles west of Washington, D.C. The headquarters hosts most of the executive team, corporate support, and a few projects. There are usually about 50 people in the office. An office of similar size is located in Arlington, VA. This office holds a few support staff, but is mostly made up of operations personnel who are able to work away from their client sites. The company's third largest office consists of 25 people in New Jersey who are located at an Army base where they support the client with various technology services. The remaining offices contain 10 people or less. Locations include California, Florida, Wisconsin, and Maryland. Additionally, many employees are co-located with other contractors and or clients at client sites. As a government contractor, CETI must work where required by the client. Much of the time this is at a government facility.

The company's line personnel, individuals who charge their time directly to a government contract, are divided into two groups. These groups are further divided into five practices. Each group is managed by a Group Lead and each practice by a Practice Lead. The Group Leads report to a Chief Operations Officer (COO). The divisions are defined by types of customers and services. These two groups are supported by corporate personnel (e.g. accounting, contracts, and human resources).

The executive team is made up of 8 people. The President, who also fulfills the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) duties, the COO, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), the

Senior Vice President of Corporate Development, the Senior Vice President of Business Development, the two Group Leads, and the Vice President of Business Relations.

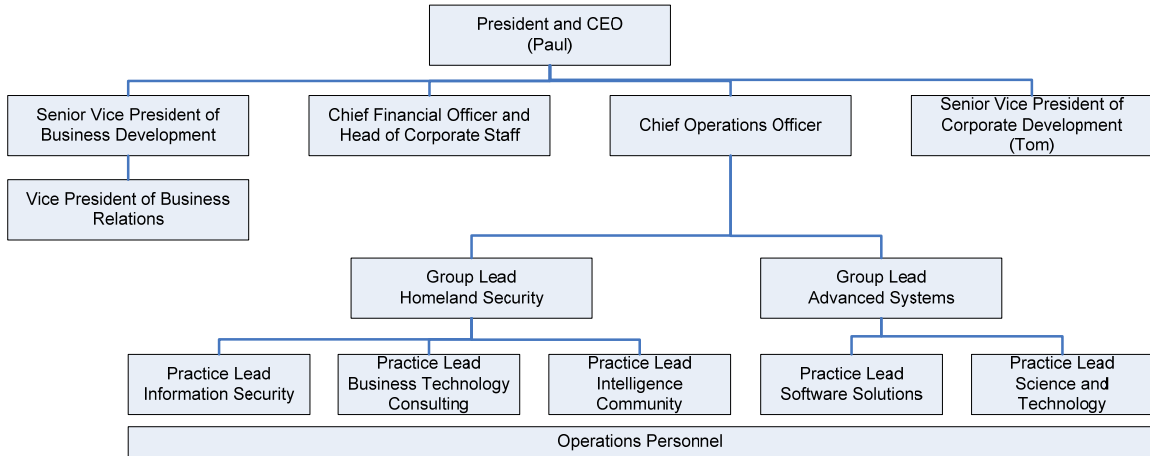


Figure 1: Ceti Organization Chart (executive level)

I am one of two writers in Corporate Development, a small group within the company that focuses on corporate-wide initiatives and assists in communication tasks.

- Tom, the Senior Vice President of Corporate Development, has been with the firm 10 years.
- Jane, a senior technical communicator and my direct manager has her doctorate in English, has been in the firm 6 years. She started as a client-based technical writer before joining the corporate team in 2004.
- I am the more junior technical communicator, joining Ceti shortly after graduating with an undergraduate degree in marketing and English. I have been with the company 5 years and have always been located at the corporate headquarters.

The three of us share a wide mix of duties including client satisfaction, marketing materials, the internal and external websites, organizational culture, supporting

competitive proposals for new work, and applying for industry awards. Although the group will sometimes assist on operations-level projects, we are primarily a support group on overhead budget.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS STUDY

In interviewing coworkers about organizational culture, it was fascinating to see certain topics appear over and over despite work location or level within the firm. While many of these topics can be addressed in several ways, this study will focus on the role of professional writing in enhancing the transmission of culture in the areas cited by multiple employees. I have organized my findings to show results through three theoretical lenses which also align with how written communication is used in the firm.

- 1) **Genre theory** explores what media the company uses in communicating organizational culture
- 2) **Articulation theory** analyzes those genres in the hands of users within the company
- 3) **Structuration theory** explores the interplay between organization and individual – the intent of the writing balanced by actual use

Genre

Genre theory reveals that writing about organizational culture is recursive; writing influences actions and those actions influence future writing. This process is seen again and again in CETI's most successful genres. Writers can quickly improve a genre's effectiveness by studying audience response, reinforcing writing that is acted upon by employees, and eliminating text that is met with indifference. During the recursive process, writing *and* writers evolve. This phenomenon can be harnessed to improve culture by asking employees to write about organizational culture. The interactive socialization of culture ideas imbeds concepts. In writing for a particular audience, the authoring process can serve as a catalyst for necessary organizational culture dialogue. Preparing a genre for public consumption forces organizational members to discuss and settle on culture precepts. These precepts can then be communicated in writing. For instance, word choice, especially titles, can be dictated by executives – effectively manipulating communicated concepts. Even simple data points can be arranged and crafted to form the desired impression. Writing on organizational culture elements such as employee accomplishments improves culture by recognizing employees and exhibiting practical illustrations to outside audiences.

THE GENRE THEORY LENS

Genre theory provides us with an illustrative lens to view writing and how it affects organizational culture. Carolyn Miller (1984) defines genres as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations.” In other words, as CETI encounters certain situations time and again, it has developed particular genres to meet the persuasive needs of those situations. She further allows for genres to be an open class built around “situated actions” (1984, p. 155). Using this approach, the media within the company that communicate organizational culture take on a very particular rhetorical action in response to the recurrent situation of acclimating employees to the organizational culture. Many of CETI’s genres have “evolved over time in reciprocal interaction between institutionalized practices and individual human actions” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p. 299). The genres have been adapted to better align with the expectations and reception of audiences. As a result of their ability to change, I am taking into consideration Yates and Orlikowski's assertion that “genres can be viewed as social institutions that both shape and are shaped by individual's communicative actions” (1992, p.300). This recursive action is particularly visible in the way employees at CETI apply genres. Analyzing the use of CETI’s genres demonstrates writing behaviors that improve organizational culture.

ANNUAL REPORT

CETI’s annual report is a key element in communicating the firm’s culture. Not only is the report’s content developed to convey the organizational culture, its writing requires interactions among writers and iterations of concepts that shape the

organizational culture. Also, writers make rhetorical decisions on what content to include – further shaping the organizational culture by including some facts and not others. The writing process behind the genre demonstrates where authorial power resides within the company, how authors’ seniority affects the organizational culture, and how effectively those authors communicate culture.

The annual report genre at CETI has evolved from the standard genre to meet rhetorical situations. While annual reports are ubiquitous in corporate America, they don’t necessarily fulfill the same role at each company. Usually the document is a legally required document full of balance sheets, revenue reports, and company statistics written for an audience of share holders. In the case of CETI, the annual report is created for two audiences: current employees and potential employees. Because the company is a privately held firm, the federal regulations that guide the content of a publicly held company’s annual report do not apply. The CETI document is designed to convey organizational culture rather than to attract venture capital. The culture it portrays is meant to bolster the morale of current employees and lure new ones. Because it is updated annually, leadership is able to expound on the most current understanding of the company’s mission, goals, and organizational culture without the constraints that may shape a piece that is intended to last for several years. Because it is never more than a few months out of date, the annual report genre becomes ideal as a piece of recruiting literature. The annual report is distributed during college recruiting, and many of the content choices are driven by this use.

In some ways, the CETI publication has more similarities to a yearbook than to an annual report; pictures of smiling employees adorn most pages, company and employee accomplishments are prominently displayed, and the various sections are written to foster esprit de corps. The annual report is fairly short at only 16 pages including the front and back cover. The CETI annual report adopts a more conversational tone than might be expected in the usually formal and constrained genre. This approach is meant to make the report more accessible to employees and potential new hires. As a private company, all of the firm’s shareholders are employees. Although the CETI annual report is a variant on the classical annual report, it maintains enough similarities that “our stock of knowledge” can be “brought to bear upon new experience: the new is made familiar through the recognition of relevant similarities” (Miller, 1984, p. 156).The contents include:

Table 1: Annual Report Content

Section	Description
Vision statement	A paragraph description of the company’s working environment – a discussion of the characteristics of CETI employees and customers
At a Glance	Bullet list of company facts (e.g., number of employees and year founded)
Company Awards	List of industry awards received during the calendar year
The core values	List and description of company’s five core values
The president’s letter	A one page letter written in a conversational tone that touches on major accomplishments, business direction, and thanking employees
Finances	A single page of narrative and charts showing the firm’s financial performance and industry trends
About CETI	A single page listing the technical focus areas and corporate capabilities
Group and Practice cameos	Two pages of cameos for the company’s 2 groups and their 5 component practices comprising 7 divisions that each receive one paragraph to explain what they do. These descriptions often resemble division-specific vision statements.
Success stories	Two pages of stories written in a Scenario-Solution schema. Complex technical accomplishments of the firm are crafted to explain a problem in a quickly comprehensible manner and how elaborate how CETI uses technology to address the problem. These stories are written in basic terms that can be grasped by an audience with no technical background.

Culture	A page dedicated to the company's organizational culture. Headings (e.g., Communication, Activities, Social Events, and Community Outreach) are followed by bullet lists of examples.
Awards	A recognition page for individuals. The company holds an annual awards banquet and winners of things like Employee of the Year are featured on this page. Individual recipients of industry awards are also recognized (e.g., CFO of the Year).
Quotes	Call out quotes from current employees describing cultural elements such as the Awards Banquet Video team, sports teams, or open communication

When considered as a genre, the CETI annual report runs the risk of not aligning with the “stock of knowledge” a person may bring to the annual report genre. However, targeted readers will most likely be college students unfamiliar with the annual report genre or established CETI employees who have adapted their expectations to the company's approach. Because the document is meant to be a cultural text directed toward recruiting rather than attracting investors, most of its authors reside outside of the financial department. Each section of the report has its own role, and, consequently, the report is not created as one piece, but is instead drafted and edited in its component parts before being assembled just before printing.

The way those component elements are written has changed over the years to better align with the report's audiences. I coordinate the process, edit the report, and contribute draft content for executive review as needed as part of my duties. I draft the vision statement, at a glance, the president's letter, culture, and awards sections. I then pass these sections to Paul, the company's president and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), for review. Because the report is such a definitive document within the firm, Paul takes a personal interest in all of its elements. Except for the president's letter, Paul made very

few changes to the pieces. A few minor edits and additions were all that was needed. In the case of the letter, I searched through newsletters and company-wide emails from the president for the past year, selected strong themes, and pieced together a narrative from the president's own messages. This has not always been the practice. Two years ago, after being asked to create a letter that described the company's organizational culture and direction, Paul asked me to pick out the messages from the past year that were most meaningful to me as an employee and merge them together as a starting point. "You know better than I do what resonates the most," Paul directed. He continued, "Sitting in the president's office, it can be difficult to view my messages from the employees' perspective."

By allowing me, a junior employee, to select the meaningful messages of the past year, Paul accelerated the reciprocal interaction of institutional culture and that lived by individuals in the firm. The idea that a genre may adapt, in this case deliberately, is argued by Yates and Orlikowski (1992) - "Although the processes of structuration generally reproduce genres over time, the processes may also change them. That is, even though genres facilitate and constrain communicative choices, genre rules do not create a binding constraint. Instead, human agents continually enact genres, and during such enactment they have the opportunity to challenge and change these genres" (p. 306). Rather than continue in a tradition of creating the president's letter in isolation, Paul changed the genre to better align with the proclivities of more junior employees.

The 2007 letter illustrates rapid genre shift. For the president's letter, my first draft was only slightly altered by Paul. Paul merely added in a few extra lines on the

vision of the firm. Whereas certain sections of the annual report are written in February and March, the letter was drafted and edited in December of 2007 – not needing to wait on the financial audit for its content. However, just a few days prior to sending the final text for printing in March, Paul reexamined the letter and made significant additions regarding the company’s financial growth and investment strategies for the future. The unexpected edits surprised me, and I had very little time to work with the new text in my role as editor. A third-party designer used by CETI for layout and graphics design had already designed a layout for the letter that did not account for the additional length of the new paragraphs, and the new text relating to financial analysis jarred with the conversational tone of the original letter. Jane, the senior technical communicator, and I were able to take the new paragraphs and weave them into existing content. Fortunately, our edits reduced the word count and accommodated the designer’s layout. The new version was sent back to Paul for approval, and he agreed to the changes. When asked about the late additions, he responded that they resulted from conversations with a number of senior managers within the firm. Those he mentioned by name had been with the company for more than 5 years and built up a sizable financial interest in the firm through employee stock options. They asked that Paul include more discussion of financial strategy. They also commented they felt they already had a firm grasp of the company’s organizational culture.

The organizational culture is not the sole domain of junior employees, and Paul adapted his letter to instill a sense of success in his tenured staff. Paul recognized a rhetorical situation in the company. In 2004, he noted the need to more closely align with

the elements of the organization most important to the junior members of the firm. In 2007, he found that he was not fully addressing the intended exigence of the report.

Other sections of the annual report initiated vital organizational culture dialogue during their creation. The about CETI section, cameos, and success stories of the annual report required many contributors. Because these sections deal with the activities of the company's operational side, the input of the Chief Operations Officer (COO), 2 Group Leads (GLs), and 5 Practice Leads (PLs) was needed. For the about CETI section, I was asked by the president to contact the COO for the notes from an off-site meeting she had conducted with her senior personnel to define a handful of technical competencies that accurately describe the current and future focuses of the company. An off-site is an executive retreat where leaders remove themselves from the office to focus on business strategy. The off-site had only occurred a few months before the writing of the annual report, and although I was able to get a list of competencies, a concise description of each point did not yet exist. Due to the busy schedules of the executives involved, I had a hard time getting timely responses and tried my best to develop some words around each point in isolation. I then sent this to the president for comment. Paul did not like the write up, but the draft did result in Paul directly interacting with the COO to develop the section. My draft, although not the correct wording, acted as a catalyst for my superiors to discuss the text. After meeting with the president, the COO reached out to the 2 GLs, and returned more concrete text to the president. Paul was then able to craft the new content into phrasing that he liked. As a final step, the president went to the Senior Vice President

of Corporate Development for yet more refinement of the message. The final text was then passed back to me for grammatical editing.

Although the section had several contributors, many of them very senior members of the firm, the president maintained final approval. As an armed-services veteran, he included the phrase “men and women who wear the cloth of the nation,” to describe one of the company’s client sets. The phrase did not ring true in the ears of the corporate writing staff or the Senior Vice President of Corporate Development, but after several iterations, the president continuously edited the phrase back into the text. Consequently, the final version retains the president’s wording. Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006) contend that a company's founder is an integral element of its identity. In the case of these sections, that contention is born out in the ultimate acquiescence of writers to Paul's choices where a compromise could not be reached. Here we see the element of hierarchy at work in the genre. There was some content Paul was unwilling adapt or modify.

Sometimes it is the writer, rather than the writing, that adapts to a genre. The cameos were based on writings from the past year’s report. Each PL and GL updated the existing section and then returned their edited content back to me for review. Two years ago, many of the PLs were required to go through several frustrating iterations before their descriptions of their services matched the concepts of the president. The iterations of the past stemmed from PLs listing capabilities rather than communicating meaningful work in a certain sector. This year, in large part due to the iterations of past years, PLs were able to come very close to the final wording on their first edit.

Written to conform to the intent of the president, the cameos serve as division-specific vision statements that align existing and potential capabilities with current challenges faced by a customer set. Thanks to reviews by the GLs and COO, the president found very few problems with the write-ups in 2007. Here, rather than the genre adapting to the writers, the writers have adapted to the genre. Through past experience they had gained a clearer understanding of what was expected in their sections and came much closer to the final text on the first try.

The report even influenced the company's vocabulary. Paul's only major change to the cameos was to extract any mention of "Information Technology (IT)." His review of this section served as the impetus for informing the corporate writers of a change in the company's communication strategy. In order to distance the firm from stereotypes associated with "IT," he wanted to use terms such as "professional services" and "technology industry." He was worried that IT did not capture some of the company's more advanced technical offerings such as high performance computing and computational science. If this edict is viewed in the light of Ran and Duimering's (2007) essay on language use in organizational identity claims, we see that Paul's choice to eliminate IT from CETI's vocabulary is helping to shape the organizational culture. Ran and Duimering (2007) argue that "the language of an organizational identity claim sets up a system of conceptual and social categories, defining the organization in relation to this classification theme" (p. 157). Paul, by editing the language of the firm's primary recruiting text, is no longer hiring people for "IT jobs"; instead, he is hiring for "professions in technology". Separating CETI from the common term is bold, but

dangerous. It works to distance CETI from stereotypes, but runs the risk of confusing audiences who may have better understood CETI's message within the frame of reference provided by a term like IT.

Paul also altered the success story writing to better meet audience expectations. I prompted the president and COO to brainstorm several areas of interest. In year's past, I have relied on Tom's input and conversations with practice leads to develop a list of success stories, only to create a final piece that is rejected by the president because it does not align properly with the image he wants conveyed. I have learned to gain Paul's concept of a section as early as possible in the writing process. In 2007, the success stories moved from describing a particular project in the company to describing a particular capability. This shift was communicated to me in a weekly meeting with Tom, who had met with Paul earlier in the day. The choices in the list were driven by company projects, by current trends in the industry, and by desired solutions voiced by clients. Paul based content decisions for the genre on his understanding of stakeholder expectations.

Writing to meet the expectations of readers can be difficult when writing is performed by a larger group of people with varied understanding of the rhetorical situation. The writing of the success stories relied upon more contributors than any other section. The more writers that become involved in a piece, the greater the chance for miscommunication in writing deadlines and intent. The content for the stories relied on non-executives who were performing the work. The president's initial list was expanded on by the COO, who then passed the list to her GLs, who then divided the topics and passed them to their PLs for story development. The topics were then delegated to project

managers working in the pertinent areas. The final link in the communication chain (PLs to project managers) included direction to reach out to me with any questions and to send me their content. I was not copied on most of these emails, and I lost track of authors. I lost direct control of the writing deadlines and lost a few weeks due to miscommunication. I reasserted control of the writing schedule by drafting the success stories myself. Of the original 6 ideas, one was dropped because the time required for client approval was greater than the time remaining until the annual report needed to be sent to the printer. Another was dropped because the company did not have enough concrete experience to develop a meaningful narrative. Another 2 were combined into a single story to be crafted by a member of the company's Intelligence Community practice. I drafted the remaining 2 based on phone interviews with line personnel. I also crafted a final story, not on the original list, to fulfill a wish of the president to bring attention to the company's investments in employee education.

Table 2: Success Story Evolution

Topics on Original List	Action Taken
Large Scale Networks	I drafted based on interviews and passed it to operations personnel for revision
Working with Academia in Government Labs	I drafted based on interviews
Social Networking	Combined with Visualization
Visualization	Combined with Social Networking
Futures in Computational Science	Dropped for lack of a compelling story
Secure Identification	Dropped due to client approval time – replaced with Education story

The intelligence community story suffered because we were not at liberty to say anything specific given the client's work. A first draft from the project manager (PM) was so abstract that it did not spark any sort of emotion in the reader, and it lacked the detailed content needed for a corporate writer to extract a meaningful story. Calling the PM, I asked him to create a scenario that would be meaningful to a non-technical person, and gave him a few ideas of items that might be interesting to a general audience. The PM's second attempt was much better, and Tom and I were able to craft a meaningful story that did not undermine the confidentiality of the client.

For two other stories concerning the computational science capabilities of the firm, I drafted the initial stories without the input of operations personnel. One I wrote from knowledge gained while editing a proposal to the government focused on the capability. I then edited the story with the help of a project manager in that discipline. Finally, I went through a number of iterations with Tom to develop the proper emotional element. The other story was outside of my experience, and I tried to draft a story based on short conversations with a few executives. I then passed the draft to line personnel within the story's discipline for review. I guided these line-personnel writers via a telephone conversation. I related the need for defining a tangible problem and relating the advanced computing capability in such a way that people outside the field of study could readily comprehend and empathize with the story. The process was impeded by the writing habits of the two contributors who normally write for scientific audiences where narrative and active voice are rare.

In this instance my uninformed drafting of an initial text created difficulties. My scenario, while a possible use of the technology, did not fit with the current applications of the line personnel. The example, which I gleaned from a conversation with an executive outside of the project, was a possible application of the technology, but the writers worked under the assumption they needed to somehow incorporate the example despite the fact they would have been better served starting from a neutral point. The resulting text set up a scenario that was not aligned with the corresponding description of capabilities. Based on guidance from Tom, the original scenario was abandoned and the new text sent by the line personnel reorganized into the scenario/solution schema.

The 4 resulting stories benefited from the critical edits of Tom. He had a definite sense of what he wanted the stories to emote. Rather than simply describe technologically sound solutions, he identified the rhetorical need to illustrate that the solution solved some larger problem pertinent to a general audience. The power of narrative is discussed in depth by Kelly and Zak (1999) who contend that O.J. Simpson won his court case thanks to the use of narrative by his legal team. The shift of authorship and power to the lower levels of the company seems a prudent business decision in light of Kelly and Zak's (1999) thought that "rhetorical success depends on transforming knowledge into a context of meaning, values, and assumptions that includes the target audience" (p. 297). The Corporate Development group, with its commission to improve corporate communications, contains writers who are used to writing for an audience that is more diverse than those encountered by writers among line-personnel or even top-level executives. The company's capabilities were described as protecting soldiers, creating a

superior workplace for employees, protecting against terrorism, and building interesting battlefield technologies. Many of the CETI employees that I interviewed noted meaningful work as one of the company’s organizational characteristics. These success stories were developed with that interpretation in mind – the annual report’s exigence.

Although the development of the culture and awards sections did not involve a lot of editing, the content of those pieces may be significant in understanding the annual report genre at CETI. The culture page includes lists of initiatives sponsored by the company to nurture its organizational culture.

Table 3: Annual Report's Culture Page Content

Section	Example of Content
Activities	Sports teams
Education	Tuition reimbursement
Open Communications	Various means for employee feedback
Events	Social gatherings and special meetings sponsored by the company
Community Outreach	Involvement with universities

The page is introduced with a sentence expanding on the company’s dedication to creating a good working environment for its people. The large number of bullets on the page helps to convey the breadth and depth of the company-sponsored initiatives – communicating a rich organizational culture through sheer number of black dots.

Including employee’s personal accomplishments and view points serves as a powerful technique in lending credibility to organizational culture writing. As one interviewee said, “words don’t mean a lot unless they’re lived.” To this end, the page is

accompanied by call out quotes of employees and several pictures from the social events and sports functions. A few interviewees mentioned recognition as an important element of the company's culture. The company has 6 major awards that it distributes in December of each year. The award recipients get a small write up and their picture on the awards page. The page also lists any individual awards given to employees by outside organizations. For instance, two people were awarded American Business Awards in 2007, and they are given mention on the awards page. The exigence of this section not only rewards current employees with well-deserved recognition, it shows potential employees that the company takes pride in its employees' accomplishments, honors them, and fosters an environment full of successful people.

The financial page content fulfills the traditional expectations of the annual report genre and still manages to convey facts in a rhetorical manner. This section's role in promoting organizational culture relies mostly in its ability to clearly represent a successful environment. Situated on the second page of the report, this is always the last piece of the report received by Corporate Development writers. The CFO needs to wait for audit results to come in before giving his analysis of the numbers. One rhetorical function of this page is the constant comparison of the company's performance to industry averages. The raw text sent by the CFO usually gives an industry overview followed by a discussion of CETI's situation followed by specific determinants of the company's performance. I took these paragraphs and integrated them so that industry and CETI statistics reside in contiguous sentences, accommodating readers who want the large picture very quickly. Jane and I also used appositives for certain terms to help

accommodate readers. For instance, “operating income” is followed by “profit” in parentheses.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS – THE “BI-WEEKLY GRAM”

The bi-weekly gram emphasizes how the recursive nature of writing about organizational culture can be integrated into a communications strategy. The genre relies on executives adapting messages to align with audience response. This genre is very similar to an editor’s note. The CETI president writes a short message around some timely topic and sends it as an email to the entire company every other week. The topics usually center on something the president read or an event within the company. The tone is conversational – similar to a Roosevelt Fireside Chat. Paul saves all of the letters he sends and keeps track of those that elicit a lot of response. Each letter gets a few responses from the employees, but some get more than others. A recent message on doing what others say is impossible struck a chord and attracted nearly twice the number of responses of any previous communication. “I keep a special folder for those that get the most feedback,” Paul mentioned during our interview. Paul's habit reinforces the presence of structuration theory within the writing habits of CETI. The bi-weekly gram genre changes over time as Paul incorporates the response he gets from each letter.

My own behavior contributes to the recursive nature of organizational culture writing within the firm. I draw on these emails for themes and phrases for use in drafting the annual report. I also mine these communications for pithy, one-line phrases that are used on the company's internal website under “President Messages.” I propagate

messages (influencing those messages in my choice of excerpts) that enter the public consciousness and are communicated back to the source when employees respond to Paul's emails (most likely with some level of adaptation on the part of the responding employees).

The heavy influence of employee feedback on the genre fosters a trustworthy source of organizational culture in that it is reflective of a broad base of contributors. When asked for texts that effectively communicated organizational culture, many of the interviewees brought up the bi-weekly gram. Several interviewees shared that while they recognized some of the pieces as more vision than current state, they really feel that Paul is authentic in his communications and consequently put a lot of trust in the emails.

PRESS RELEASES

Press releases and other marketing material developed for outside audiences affect organizational culture more than might be expected. Several interviewees mentioned that they base their perception of organizational culture partly on press releases and evaluate marketing content against their personal experiences – with the size of the gap between the two further informing their impression of the culture.

Press releases might be assumed to serve primarily as a way of increasing name recognition for the firm and helping to improve image among possible clients and partners. Surprisingly, a number of people in the interviews – particularly those not in the corporate office – pay very close attention to company press releases and form impressions of the firm based on the marketing genre. Press releases are a genre intended

to couch promotional elements in a news story. Usually under 400 words, the piece tries to communicate a “so what?” to a very broad audience very quickly. CETI does not use the press release as extensively as larger corporations. CETI currently releases less than 20 in a year. Because the firm is a service rather than product-focused company, announcements of new products and enhancements do not exist. Instead the announcements are almost exclusively contract awards and industry awards.

As a writer of press releases in the company’s Corporate Development group, I was surprised by the impact they have on my coworkers. Traditionally, I have not had internal audiences in mind when drafting the content. In one instance, a new employee in California was shocked because a press release detailing an award for creating a family friendly workplace jarred with his own experience. Having joined the company to support a new project, his team was required to put in additional hours in the infancy of the contract in order to satisfy the demands of the customer. Having no frame of reference outside of this stressful environment and located on the opposite coast from the corporate headquarters in Virginia, he was surprised that the same company that called upon him to put in long days to meet client demands was being lauded for flexible work schedules. In this instance, the employee’s short experience with the firm resulted in several conditions that led him to rely more on an externally facing piece of writing rather than internal communications for his understanding of culture. As a member of a team made up almost entirely of new hires, he lacked contact with tenured employees. Because the project was one of the company’s first on the west coast, he didn’t have a lot of opportunities to attend social events either. I have observed that employees with

infrequent personal contact with the corporate headquarters will run periodic Internet searches for CETI news releases.

In another instance, a press release was edited to highlight certain facts and omit others to align with the company's image. The executives, and most employees, see the company as doing very high-end work. A recent contract win for a science-centered government agency required quite a bit of support work, some of which does not meet the elite image. However, the press release described the project in such a way that readers will imagine all of the work to be a lot more complex than is the case. The press release was emailed to all employees before public distribution and focused on the most advanced aspects of the contract. Those not on the proposal team cheered the win, but those who knew the details of the work were bemused at what they saw as a gap between the true nature of the work and the tone conveyed by the press release.

Even though writers may not anticipate the role marketing will have on organizational culture – it does have a significant impact. As can be seen in the case of these press releases, a company's approach to its press release content influences its internal organizational culture. David Bernstein (1984) writes that "Corporate communications and marketing are more clearly related than their respective proponents within an organization normally admit" (p. 172). The amount of internal interest in the genre at CETI suggests that managers may need to reevaluate their approach to press releases in regards to the intended rhetorical situation. Rather than a partial representation of a contract win or award announcement, they need to take into consideration that

employees are, in part, building their perception of the firm based on communications intended for outside audiences.

PRESENTATIONS:

CETI's presentations genre balances between the rhetorical need to attract new talent to the company and the rhetorical need to communicate an accurate view of the organizational culture to potential employees. Like many companies in the business world, CETI has presentations for college recruiting, new-hire orientation, partnering meetings, company all-hands, and myriad other circumstances. The slides that the company presents are each designed with specific messages in mind, and the selection of what content to include and exclude is as much a rhetorical decision as word choice. In addition to facts about the company such as size, clients, and benefits, many of these presentations include descriptions of the company's work. These slides highlight the most glamorous aspects of CETI's projects. Many slides are designed in a problem/solution/technologies-used schema. One manager that assists in college recruiting admitted that he may create misunderstandings about the organizational culture by focusing on the most interesting projects going on in the company rather than trying to give a comprehensive picture of the firm's work.

In an attempt to partially alleviate the miscommunication that might arise from the project descriptions, another presentation pulled together by CETI's recruiting department for college visits uses the same project slides, but it ends the presentation with an interesting choice of slides on CETI organizational culture. These slides convey a

remarkably well-balanced message. Even though the slides admit that there will be difficulties, those difficulties are presented as challenges a smart individual can overcome. A genre I had thought was aimed at offering as positive an image as possible for the firm listed elements that mitigated expectations.

Labeled as benefits, the slides are titled Fun Activities, CETI Culture, Life at CETI, Summary, and 10 Years – A Look Ahead. Fun Activities lists social events and open communication channels sponsored by the company. CETI Culture shows pictures of happy employees and has a single quote: “CETI provides a platform for technology oriented entrepreneurs to grow and prosper.” Life at CETI has several bullet points conveying three major themes:

- CETI is a fun place to work but that does not mean chaos
- Employees should actively push ideas and constantly learn
- Every job has its upside and downside – employees should weigh what downsides are there in support of growth (e.g., processes)

The final bullet is notable. It actively seeks to manage the expectations of college hires in a way that actually lists an environment with downsides as a positive thing. However, the 2007 slides left out two slides that were used to mitigate expectations in 2006: “Is CETI Right for You?” and “Desired Skills.” These discarded slides did not present the information in quite the same way. While the current slides communicate challenges in a way that suggests a talented person can overcome them, the old version left little room for the application of a student’s own perception of the situation. Several interviewees mentioned how much truthfulness from management meant to them, and I imagine that phrases such as “Every job has upsides and downsides, recognize which is

creative and which is disciplined,” although admitting the company has room for improvement, enhance the communicated organizational culture.

The theme of managing expectations continues in the Summary and 10 Years – A look Ahead sections. The slides' authors start the bullet list by saying, “CETI is a ‘good’ company trying to work to ‘great,’ so embrace change.” It further outlines the type of motivated, passionate, competent people that make up the firm – a theme reiterated many times in the interviews. The Look Ahead lists several goals including industry recognition, financial success, and employee growth. Harking back to the entrepreneurial quote of the CETI Culture slide, the Look Ahead slide suggests to the potential hire – “yes, you can be a driving force of this vision; you can get in at the ground floor of something great!”

The recruiting department’s adaptation of slides is a clear example of elaboration, defined by Yates and Orlikowski (1992) as “adapting genre rules to reflect new conditions” (p. 306). Faced with poor reception of slides that were exclusionary, recruiters adapted the same information about the organizational culture in inclusive terms. By removing slides with definitive lists of skill sets and personal characteristics (e.g., “you are mature and responsible”), CETI’s genre was better received by its audience when placed into its current phrasing of attractive challenges and became a more effective rhetorical tool.

CORE VALUES:

Widespread use among employees, a holistic approach to media use, and interactive writing practices make the core values one of the most effective elements of CETI's organizational culture strategy. The core values genre at CETI is a simple set of five values along with a single sentence description for each. Although the genre consists of only a few set-piece words, it has taken on a life of its own. Since consolidating the current wording in 2003, the core values have appeared on the back of all business cards, in many employees' email signatures, at the beginning of every presentation for company events, in the template for performance reviews, as a rubric for recruiting interviews, in all annual reports, as banners in corporate offices, as a page on the website, a coaster handed out to employees, a screen saver, and as a recurring theme in the company's monthly newsletter. As Bernstein (1984) urges, "A company needs to take a holistic view of communication because it is communicating all the time (even if it doesn't want to or doesn't realize it), to all of [its] publics" (p. 118). And a holistic, multi-media view is exactly the approach taken by CETI's core values genre.

Table 4: CETI's Core Values

Value	Description
Great Team	We work with bright, driven, and creative people.
Mutual Respect	We respect all members of the team and the value of their contributions.
Career Focus	We invest in our team members' careers as they invest and grow within the firm.
Client Commitment	We make a difference for and through our clients.
Integrity	Our word is our commitment.

Not only are the values well distributed in the firm, writing about them is almost as wide spread. In 2007, executives started taking turns writing articles centered on a particular value and expanding on their understanding of it. These articles appear in the expanded quarterly company newsletter. One Practice Lead requires his project managers to write stories from their experiences where a core value was upheld. Some of these stories are scheduled to appear in the next company-wide newsletter. In leadership training conducted by the president, employees are given a writing assignment as homework before the training session: write a story about a CETI experience where they saw a core value being lived. Again, the company's practice aligns well with research on the topic of socialization through writing. The peculiar aspect of this instance is that people are not only strengthening organizational culture through writing and collaboration, they are writing and collaborating on the subject of organizational culture.

Interactive writing is a crucial element of the core values' success. Rachel Spilka (1990), discussing orality and literacy in the workplace, contends that "using interaction to achieve a corporate consensus concerning documents' purposes, content, and other rhetorical features, the writers helped their corporation fulfill social goals, such as encouraging collaboration and working toward compromise. Simultaneously, these writers also assisted the corporation in developing and sustaining its unique cultural values, conventions, and taboos" (p. 45-46). Though writers are not collaborating in the same room as they draft their stories, they are consciously weighing their discourse against the anticipated reactions of executives and coworkers.

The result of this massive proliferation is that the core values are ingrained. Some employees I interviewed would answer questions about predominant organizational traits by saying “aside from the core values...” as if to suggest the values go without saying. One interviewee who had only been with the company for two weeks was truly surprised by the way employees actually lived the values. He had come from larger organizations where such things were words, not actions. Another said, “you can read the brochures and such, you can read the words, but you won’t believe them until you live them.” Adhering to the core values, or some variant on that theme, was the predominant answer when interviewees were asked to list the pervasive characteristics of CETI.

Some interviewees listed the core values as their reason for joining the firm. In large part, they had a discussion with an interviewer or recruiter where the topic was raised, or they read the values in a piece of literature such as the annual report or on the back of a business card and compared their experiences with interviewees to the listed values.

Not only do perspective hires grade their experience with the firm’s representatives against the values, CETI recruiters use the values to grade perspective candidates. When the president of the company was asked how he communicates organizational culture, nearly all of his responses focused on uses of the core values. He told the story of how the company’s mission shifted focus after his co-founder passed away, but “the culture only really changes if you go away from the core values.” To this end, he makes sure all employees are recruited against the core values. A portion of the interview process uses a method where the interviewees’ responses are analyzed for

certain traits that align with the values. Paul said, “Since using core values as a measure in our recruiting, I would say only about a tenth of a percent of hires end up being bad fits for our organizational culture.”

I later had the opportunity to ask Tom, the Senior Vice President of Corporate Development, about the creation of the values. In 2000, the then president called the senior executives together for a meeting. At the time, the firm was half the size it is today, and the meeting included only five people. Paul and Tom were among the participants. They were directed to list the really important attributes of their working environment, keeping the list to only 4-7 points. The participants were asked “what values would we uphold to the point of bankrupting this firm?” At this point in our interview, Tom chuckled and mentioned the Declaration of Independence – “We hold these truths to be self evident...”

“If the conversation got to be subjective, we immediately steered away from it. The values were not meant to be all things to all people,” related Tom. “Even now I often need to keep people focused on a narrow understanding of the values. People shouldn’t throw the core values card the instant someone is rude; they are meant to reflect something deeper – respect.” In a way, the core values are like rules in soccer. No one wants a referee who throws red cards for minor infractions. The values aren’t there to hinder, but to create a safe, well-defined environment.

The executive buy-in, employee buy-in, repetition, and ubiquitous nature of the values have created a successful genre for communicating organizational culture, success that is validated by wide spread acceptance and use among all levels of employees. The

company's use of narrative for core values pedagogy harnesses the rhetorical power described by Kelly and Zak (1999) where they credited O.J. Simpson's freedom with well applied narrative. "Is this claiming too much for a few squiggles and a piece of type?" asks Bernstein (1984, p. 156). His question, related to the power of a company's communication program affecting corporate identity, can just as easily be asked of organizational culture; and his answer is just as fitting. "It depends on the quality of the squiggles and, to a far greater extent, the quality of the thinking which has produced them" (1984, p. 156). For CETI's core values genre, it appears the execution and thinking behind the "squiggles" has worked well.

USERS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE WRITING

Crafting sentences helps craft a company's culture. Who crafts those sentences can also shape organizational culture. Studying who is writing about organizational culture and taking responsibility for rhetorical claims reveals the relationship between authorship and rhetorical effectiveness. Considered selection of authors and writing assignments can serve as a useful strategy for executives communicating organizational culture. A symbiotic relationship arises between executives and non-executives; the more authorial power executives give to employees, the more employees reflect the intended culture in their writing. Even if those employees are not in a position to be responsible for culture claims, executives can edit writing to ensure the company does not promise more than it can deliver. New employees expect the writing they have encountered to accurately depict the environment they are entering. Where that is not the case, they expect the gap in envisioned state and actual state to be well communicated. Organizational authors can manage the expectations of new hires by authoring checklists, accessible administrative information, and practical how-to guides. When those authors are selected based on the writing's function, the company benefits. For instance, the company benefits if its president conducts a new employee orientation intended to communicate the over-all organizational culture.

THE ARTICULATION THEORY LENS

Articulation theory reveals that the organizational level of an author impacts how their writing influences the organizational culture. Using the theoretical lens developed by Slack, Miller, and Doak (1993) in “The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority,” I examine how writing at CETI determines the goals and outcomes of its organizational culture. Analyzing where power resides in writing, I determined who in CETI can be considered to be authors.

Slack, *et al.* (1993) propose a spectrum of communication. Pointing out that technical communication does not usually include an author’s name, they explored the role and power of authors in communication. One end of the spectrum places the writer as a mere vessel through which messages pass unaltered; this is the transmission view of communication. In the middle is the translation view, which allows that the author is not merely a “purveyor” but a “mediator of meanings.” The far end of the spectrum empowers the writer as “an author who among others participates in articulating and rearticulating meanings” (p. 14). While Slack *et al.* focus on technical communicators, the role of the writer at CETI extends beyond the Corporate Development group which houses the corporate-level technical communicators.

As employees write to communicate culture, I noticed that a symbiotic relationship was at work. Rather than simply transmitting culture as expressed in the writings of company executives or trying to wrest control of the way the culture is communicated, I saw employees as writers acting as accommodators of organizational culture meaning. The idea of accommodation is used by Jeanne Fahnestock (1986) in her

essay “Accommodating Science” where she outlines the rhetorical choices made by writers as they adapt science facts for a broader audience. I use the term here because CETI employees, as they wrote, took elements of organizational culture, which were given a narrow definition by the leadership team, and adapted them to meet rhetorical situations.

Organizational culture is a powerful force, and the way it is communicated can be a powerful tool in the success of a company (Schein 1992). The use of written organizational culture at CETI by its writers shows that power shifts from executive to employee fairly quickly. Although the core values may be the creation of a small group of executives, and although the president may develop certain messaging in seeming isolation, it is the employees of the company that often write about the culture and are faced with circumstances where they must communicate the organizational culture to others. In the course of writing the organizational culture to fit specific needs, the powerful message was put in the control of non-executive employees. Tasks (rhetorical situations) where employees needed to use written organizational culture fell into three areas: recruiting of new personnel, assimilating new personnel into the organizational culture, and reinforcing the organizational culture among veteran employees. Writing affects organizational culture, and organizational culture impacts business success; therefore, the delegation of writing to non-executive employees is paramount to delegating power in the form of influence over the company’s success. Slack, *et al.* argue that, “Power, like meaning, is something that can be possessed and measured; its measure is to be found in the response of the receiver,” suggesting that the power delegated to

non-executive writers is doubly notable because those non-executive writers most likely have closer interaction with the receivers of the message (1993, p. 16). The power or success of writers at CETI can be seen in the effect their writing has on recruiting quality personnel, quickly assimilating them, and communicating a culture that is widely accepted among employees.

RECRUITING

Jablin (2001) highlights the importance of pre-entry communications: “To a substantial extent, newcomers learn what things mean in the organization by learning the labels that insiders apply to actions, objects, and people” (p. 756). The primary written tools that communicate culture to potential employees at CETI include recruiting presentations, the annual report, and some website content. Measures of the effectiveness of written organizational culture in recruiting uses include the successful hiring of targeted candidates. Among interviewees hired in the past year, the theme that arose most often was how closely the company’s actual culture compares to the culture described in its writing. Several people mentioned a presentation they saw, the annual report, or some bit of marketing they read on the company’s website. Some even mentioned exposure to the company’s core values which are printed on the backs of interviewers’ business cards, emblazoned on the inside front cover of the annual report, and flank the entrance to the corporate headquarters.

With the power that is placed in the hands of the employees writing these genres, responsibility is put onto them to live out what they write. Several of the interviewees mentioned how important honesty is in recruiting. A member of the recruiting staff

remarked, “It doesn't do anyone any good to bring a person in here who is going to quit right away. We need to make sure what they expect is what they get.” As Jablin (2001) points out in his essay on organizational entry, “Discrepancies between expectations and reality increase the surprises newcomers and incumbents experience as the new recruits enter the organization and engage in the organizational assimilation process” (p. 755).

Tailoring presentations empowers employees with authorship. Of the written recruiting tools listed, the presentation places the most power with the non-executive employee. CETI uses operations personnel in the college recruiting process.

Accompanied by a member of recruiting, employees go to a few designated colleges and take part in career fairs and interviews. When they visit a campus, CETI personnel invite potential candidates to attend a presentation on the firm. The presentation is usually tailored to certain disciplines at a school. For instance, the presentation used for systems engineers may not be the same presentation given to an audience made up of computer science students, or the content may be adapted to align with the first-hand experiences of the presenting employee.

There is not a deck of slides mandated by the recruiting department or the executive team. The basic recruiting deck is a marriage of the business development slides on company projects blended with human resources slides on work environment and benefits. The primary emphasis of the slides portrays CETI as a place where people can grow in their career. One recent hire, although not straight from college, told me the reason he chose CETI over two much larger companies was because of the educational opportunities. “Career focus and education oriented define the firm for me,” he shared,

using the wording of a core value without pausing. The deck moves from locations to benefits (e.g., education) to projects and finally to the cultural slides such as CETI Culture and Life at CETI.

Jack, one of the interviewed employees, takes particular pride in his college recruiting participation. When he pulls together a presentation he is sure to select the firm's "leading-edge, dynamic projects." I pressed him on whether this was setting realistic expectations for students who might assume that everyone works on the glamorous projects, and he conceded that, "It might, but, I try to be up front with them. If they ask me a question, I give them a straight answer. I even give them my contact information in case they have any questions after I leave or during the recruiting process." Beyond the presentation, Jack forwards award announcements, press releases, excerpts from the newsletter, and the president's bi-weekly messages to college students the company would like to hire.

Jack's writing doesn't create new texts on the organizational culture, but it selectively highlights certain aspects of it. Although Jack's passing of information may seem to fall in the transmission area of Slack *et al.*'s scale, he is making rhetorical decisions in what information he shares. Jack is rearticulating the organizational culture to meet his rhetorical need and personal interpretation, and "with the recognition that the communicator articulates and rearticulates meaning comes the responsibility for that rearticulation" (Slack *et al.*, 1993, p. 33). As suggested by the rearticulation of organizational culture in recruiting slides and repeated in other genres such as the annual

report and press release, writers in the firm sometimes take on responsibility for things they can't control.

One executive calls the communicating of all the company's work as "fun, exciting, and challenging," as "chasing the red sports car." Company literature is notably mute on any projects that require the more mundane, but necessary, tasks pertaining to systems maintenance, requirements management, or software testing. Several of the people I interviewed described the mental picture they had painted before joining CETI only to learn that not everyone is placed on a "sexy" project, especially college hires who have little experience. "People are willing to accept an imperfect world if you're a straight shooter," lamented one recent college hire. He had joined the company with a certain perception about where he would be working and the kind of work he would do. Fortunately, the task he is now on has been a pleasant surprise in complex work and supportive coworkers, but he feels that the mental image communicated on the college campus and in presentations was an inaccurate, incomplete one. Jablin's warning of "surprises" was certainly true in his case.

The conflict arises because the writers who communicate the organizational culture don't always have the institutional authority to place new candidates into positions on the projects they highlight. They are truthful in saying CETI performs the projects they emphasize, but the question of whether the audience will work on those particular projects goes unasked and unanswered during most presentations. Borrowing again from Fahnestock's (1986) discussion of scientific fact, she marks the "enormous gap between the public's right to know and the public's ability to understand" (p. 276). If

applied to organizational culture, there certainly is a gap between a prospective employee's right to know what awaits him, but there is also a problem in communicating the diversity of roles on projects and trying to communicate the whole concept in a very short amount of time. CETI is also trying to attract, not dissuade, potential employees.

The annual report illustrates how executives can empower authors to achieve the desired rhetorical effect. The report holds a place of prominence in recruiting at CETI, and, consequently, is scrutinized by executive-level authors. The text is designed with recruiting in mind and is distributed during interviews to all potential candidates.

Although the annual report is widely distributed during recruiting, the recruiting department does not help to write any portion of it. The report is almost the exclusive product of collaboration between the executive team and technical communicators in the Corporate Development group. The president maintains final approval.

Though the president maintains final approval authority, he does empower lower-level employees to author sections that benefit from a non-executive point of view. I draft the CETI at a Glance, President's Letter, About CETI, some success stories, the Culture page, and the Awards page. After 5 years with the company, I have adapted my writing choices to align with the tastes of the executive team. For instance, when I draft the CETI at a Glance section and the President's Letter, I am pulling themes and quotes from the president's newsletter and email messages. I then weave together the pieces using memories of public addresses and even conversations I have with other employees. For instance, in the course of this situated study, I gained a clearer understanding of the themes that attracted current employees to the company. The ability to grow in one's

career and perform meaningful work were common comments in the interviews.

Consequently, I sought out any letters from Paul that communicated this theme and added some of my own understanding to connect the pieces into a cohesive message.

Writers at all levels are able to use facts in a rhetorical manner in the annual report as they do in the presentation genre. Rather than simply say “welcome aboard” to several new executives in the President’s Letter, the wording was changed to communicate the intended organizational culture of building careers. The final text states, “CETI welcomes industry leaders to the executive team – providing the leadership component needed to grow our people.” Using the annual report, the president is able to communicate facts from the past year that reinforce his vision of the firm's culture.

Regardless of who authors a section, editing can realign authorial power. Tom was able to use edits to existing facts to emote the sense of meaningful work. I was asked to work with line personnel to draft several success stories. The stories use a scenario/solution schema. One story in particular regarding the company's ability to bring together academic and government researchers and help them with computational science gave me the power of authorship, but Tom’s edits drew the scale almost back to message transmission. The scenario described fictional government researchers working in isolation from academic researchers who had already worked out some of the problems frustrating the government team. Tom had a very definite sense of the message he wanted to communicate. Simply describing the CETI solution was not enough. We went through several revisions before identifying phrasing that conveyed the message of critical, complex work that Tom wanted to exhibit.

Editing review can also realign the responsibility that accompanies authorship. In my attempts to get the correct phrasing, I encountered a problem when the president interpreted the meaning of my words as conflicting with the image of our organizational culture. Trying to show the importance of connecting academic and government researchers, I had stated that a lack of interaction could “needlessly endanger the lives of American soldiers.” The president interpreted the message as insinuating a reproof of our government clients. I then changed the wording to reflect “needless frustration for government researchers.” The responsibility inherent in authorship in this instance made the president aware of a possible client insult that I did not see. Allowing a non-scientific person to assume ownership of the story gave rise to a potential crisis. My efforts to insert emotion into the story and accommodate it to a broad audience created a risk simple reporting would have avoided.

CETI’s website content also communicates facts in a way designed to inform on organizational culture. Potential hires use the site to conduct pre-interview research. Several interviewees mentioned that press releases and award announcements on the company’s website left them with a positive image of the firm. They felt industry accolades provided an independent evaluation of the organizational culture they were about to join. Human resources and recruiting awards were mentioned as the most effective in conveying a welcoming organizational culture. Again, a certain expectation is created with the posting of these awards. Often, they are bestowed based on corporate policies, with little research into the practical application among employees. For instance a commuter award may describe an ideal scenario for employees on some projects but not

all. One client may require CETI personnel to be at work at a specific time negating the benefit of flexible hours other employees value on their project. In a microcosm of organizational culture itself, the written product and actual situation do not always align on every point. As a result of feedback from recent college-grads, a team of employees is currently revamping the website to more closely align with the tastes and preferences of potential employees. What was a clearing house for company news is now being given the benefit of rhetorical collaboration.

Genres may start as “isolated, rational actions” but end up as “part of an embedded social process that over time produces, reproduces, and modifies particular genres of communication” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p. 323). The influences of writers, executive-level edits, employee feedback, and a dozen other authorial power struggles create a social process that keeps CETI’s genres in a constant state of adaptation.

ASSIMILATION

Once a person joins the company, they start to test the company on the messages of recruiting. “We need to recognize that unrealistic and unmet expectations and promises are not just phenomena experienced by newcomers but by all organizational members as they are continuously negotiating the assimilation process” (Jablin, 2001, p. 757). From the company perspective, managers want to get their new team members acclimated into the organizational culture as quickly as possible. Again, presentations are important, and so is manager-generated writing in the form of redistributed corporate messaging and specialized information sheets about client expectations.

Adapting messages to better communicate with organization members is a critical practice in successful organizational culture writing. Those who adapt the messages assume a degree of authorial power. In my interviews I came across several project managers who consider it their duty to make sure their people are well informed. They will often receive a company-wide email, called CETI-alls, add a few notes to the top, and forward it to their team. An individual at one of the company's larger branches said that he goes a step further. He reads the email, extracts the information that concerns his remote team, and passes along a new message that is tailored for an audience outside of the Washington, D.C. Metro area. By adapting the messages coming from the corporate office, the manager ceases to transmit the email (the message is “a fixed entity; it moves in space ‘whole cloth’ from origin to destination,”), and instead translates the message (a social practice is “encoded” into discourse by a communicator and “decoded” back into social action by the message receiver) (Slack *et al.*, 1993, p. 173 & 177). The translation view acknowledges that messages are not simply passing through managers without being influenced. However, the act results in more people reading the message. Some of the junior members of the team admitted they always read emails from their manager, but don't always read emails that are CETI-alls.

Several interviewees voiced the wish for information on their client upon entry to the firm. Many of CETI's projects are located on client sites, and each client has its own culture and personality. CETI employees new to a project spend valuable time trying to test the political waters. In the case of one isolated employee, he told of the confusing first weeks where he was trying understand what orders from the client should be

followed. As the sole CETI employee at his location, he had no corporate experience to draw on to understand his client. As a result, the client started tasking him with work outside of the project's scope, and the employee was unsure how to manage the client's expectations – an understandably confusing and stressful situation for the new employee.

Managers combat confusion and counter-cultures by composing checklists for newcomers that clearly define duties. This is not a corporately dictated practice; it relies on the initiative of individual managers. Such a practice allows managers to actively participate in how newcomers will interact with the team and client – a significant influence on those new hires' relationship to the organizational culture. The president also mentioned the dangers of “counter cultures.” Employees isolated from CETI coworkers are surrounded by client employees or other contractors. This results in an increased risk that they will be assimilated into a non-CETI culture. Again, checklists can help by outlining expectations and the CETI way of doing things – reducing stress and the influence of counter cultures.

From the president down through recent college hires, people expressed the need to first address administrative details before they could think about things such as the organizational culture. Paul, the president, said, “You first have to get the ‘administrivia’ out of the way. We do it face to face to minimize the stress of learning a new workplace.” He further commented on the positive feedback he receives on the half-day orientation program that the company conducts for all incoming employees. Held in the corporate office, every new employee in the DC area attends in person and is presented necessary information by a series of corporate personnel such as HR, accounting, and systems. Each

presenter speaks to a few slides that are meant to quickly acclimate new hires to company policies and practices. I mention this orientation not because it is a written form of organizational culture, but because it enables other writing. Paul refers to administrative data such as time cards and health benefits as “high stress” concerns for incoming employees. By tackling these quickly, managers are freed to concentrate more on project concerns and organizational culture.

Uncertainty is a cancer. In order to reduce uncertainty among new employees, Jack, the author of recruiting presentations, has gone a step further. He has drafted a single page on his thoughts about how to be successful at CETI. He distributes this to all new employees who he helped to recruit. The sheet consists of 10 bullet points and short narrative. The themes include participating in activities, not becoming discouraged if a personal project is slow to take shape, and always speaking up. Speaking up was also at the top of Paul's list of things a newcomer should know when joining CETI. Jack's document is a powerful piece of written organizational culture when evaluated against literature on newcomer assimilation. Vernon Miller points out that “newcomers frequently resort to seeking role-related information as their information need may pre-date others' sharing information” (1996, p. 1). Things such as the first-day orientation, project-specific checklists, and Jack's success document are available on an employee's first day and consequently “lessen the chances of voluntarily or non-voluntarily exiting the organization due to poor performance stemming from inadequate amounts of information from superiors and coworkers” (Miller, 1996, p. 1). The authors of those documents wield a considerable amount of power. Their writing forms a significant

portion of a new employee's organizational culture perception until personal experience can create a more complete picture. Although speaking of mergers, Schweiger and Denisi (1991) point out the importance of communication at the start of a new project: "Any failure to communicate leaves employees uncertain about their futures, and it is often that uncertainty, rather than the changes [of a new project in the case of CETI] that is so stressful for employees" (p. 110).

The lack of executive guidance in regards to check lists and project-specific assimilation suggests that trust is placed in project managers to successfully orient newcomers. In the words of one interviewee new to the firm, "Why would I care about organizational culture? It is only an issue if there is a problem, and I haven't had any culture problems per se." It seems that the leadership team is willing to allow the project-level aspects of assimilation out of their control so long as no issues arise.

A final tool in the assimilation process is a mandatory new employee orientation conducted by the president and Sr. Vice President of Corporate Development. During the three-part series, employees are shown slides about the company's culture. These slides outline all of the company's projects, descriptions of all the groups, a map of the company's offices, an explanation of the awards program, and many other components of the organizational culture. From the first slide to the last, the president is the sole author. He does not iterate with other writers on this presentation, making the new employee orientation a pure transmission of his ideal culture. Whereas the project-level assimilation was placed in the control of project manager writers, the understanding of the firm in its entirety remains the domain of the president. Melewar and Karaosmanoglu (2006) draw a

strong correlation between corporate identity and a company's founder, so it is probably a wise rhetorical choice for the president to conduct the new employee orientation – which communicates so much about the organizational culture.

REINFORCEMENT

Once employees are indoctrinated into the organizational culture, the written genres become crucial to maintaining a single understanding. Without constant reaffirmation from the executives, employees are quick to manipulate the organizational culture to their own understanding. CETI harnesses the need for people to internalize organizational culture by requiring employees to write about it. Additionally, constant emails are used.

In her discussion of what makes a genre, Carolyn Miller (1984) states that, “We have many and confused intentions, but few effective orientation centers for joint action” (p. 158). Miller's observation still holds true. As we see in the spectrum of authorship at CETI, every employee becomes a recursive component in the understanding and communication of the organizational culture. Add to this situation the fact that “the potential for genre modification is inherent in every act of communication” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p. 308). The result is that reinforcement of organizational culture is a vital act within any firm to maintain a cohesive sense of self.

Bi-Weekly Grams and Other Emails:

Adapting company-wide emails to specific groups of employees can increase the effectiveness of the message. Many managers adapt company-wide emails to their team's specific rhetorical need. Company-wide emails are sent via the CETI-all distribution list.

Only a few people have permission to use this powerful communication tool: the president (bi-weekly grams), the director of systems (network failures and infrastructure announcements), human resources personnel (benefits news, training sessions, and employee satisfaction surveys), the executive secretary (upcoming social events, calls for sports team participants, site-specific announcements), and the lead writer (internal press releases, newsletter releases, and announcements of new communications venues).

Usually each of these people confines their emails to messages related to their role.

Though many employees appreciate these timely announcements and feel like they are a good tool in the communications arsenal, at least one recent college hire refers to the emails as “CETI Spam,” in spite of a corporate strategy of short, effective email writing.

Particularly among the younger demographic of the firm, these emails are often ignored.

The result is that pertinent information goes unread. This gap in articulating the organizational culture is sometimes filled by the redistributed messages of managers.

The core values:

The core values genre – 5 traits with accompanying one-sentence descriptions – is susceptible to the influences of non-executive writers. As hinted by Tom in his interview, the core values are sometimes used in ways that do not align with their original intent. Some people, especially when given the veil of anonymity, are quick to intone the core values when they perceive a violation. By doing so, they are reinterpreting the value in order to suit the needs of a particular situation. For instance, CETI recently tested a tool that restricts access to streaming video. The trial was launched just prior to the NCAA tournament, and no announcement was made. The company's anonymous discussion

board was soon host to several indignant postings that claimed the action was not in line with the core value of Mutual Respect. Whether the post aligned with the true intent of the value is open for debate, but this is just the type of “crying foul” that Tom warned against in his interview.

Through corporately mandated, interactive writing assignments, Tom and the other executives have tried to limit the unintentional definition shift of the core values that results from the words being used by every individual in the firm. Their favorite tool for cementing the values is to encourage people to write about them. While the use of core values in hallway conversations or anonymous discussion boards tends to bend the value's exigency to the current needs of the user, structured writing seems to guide the writer closer to the executive-driven intent of the value. As mentioned in the discussion of this peculiar genre, the executives of CETI require all of the company's junior members to eventually enroll in a leadership class led by the president. In preparation for the class, all participants are asked to draft a short anecdote of how they have seen the company's core values in action. The participants (usually 15 to a class) then share the story aloud among their peers and the president. The process forces people to see the values as actions rather than words on a page. The drafting, editing, and public sharing of their writing engages writers to think very clearly about the values and how they are applied in their work lives.

Some leaders also require their managers to write up any instances where they see the core values in action. One early example appeared in the company's most recent

newsletter, reinforcing culture through the words of a client-site employee rather than those of an executive.

The practice of requiring employees to write to the core values would seem to capitulate the executives' influence over the organizational culture, but it has the opposite effect. When people are directed to write about the organizational culture in a public setting, they consider audience expectations before sharing. Consequently, they align their writing with generally held interpretations of the organizational culture. The stories then become a part of the organizational culture and are in turn communicated by the executives. I was startled to hear that my personal core values story from leadership training was used as an anecdote by the president in a new employee orientation session.

CETI successfully maintains the meaning of its core values through writing. Indeed, any time that employees are required to internalize an idea enough to write about it, some element of the organizational culture is being strengthened through action. As Bernstein (1984) writes, "In communication we must never assume. And this is paramount in internal communications" (p. 85). Requiring writers to accept some of the responsibility of authorship mitigates the danger inherent in assuming people are consuming and understanding writing that describes the organizational culture. It is a bit like the professional-world equivalent of having grade-schoolers recite their lessons to reinforce understanding.

CORPORATE GUIDANCE

The intent of a message and the way it is used don't always align. If an organization accepts this fact and finds ways to adapt their communication strategy to foster better reception among organization members, its culture benefits. Employee writing fosters the type of recursive process needed to introduce member feedback into corporate communications. Failure to incorporate employee writing into an element of envisioned organizational culture undermines its effectiveness. Corporate strategy must integrate employee tactics.

THE STRUCTURATION THEORY LENS

When I interviewed Tom, the Senior Vice President of Corporate Development, he shared his exasperation over people misusing the company's core values: "Don't load too much stuff into the values to suit your immediate needs. It diminishes the values if we corrupt them to address any perceived slight. The values were never intended to be all things to all people." Tom's words illustrate that corporate strategy is not always adopted by organizational members in their everyday tactics. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau (1984) outlines the difference between "strategies" and "tactics" (p. xix). De Certeau uses the example of navigating a city to illustrate the difference between

the two. Strategies are methods used by institutions like city planners laying out a street grid. People may choose to use that street grid in an expected way, or, more likely, they will use alleys and shortcuts to find their way to a destination. This improvised use becomes de Certeau's tactics (1984). If this concept is applied to the writing of organizational culture at CETI, patterns of tactics emerge where employees do not identify with the organizational culture strategies from the executive level and reconstruct written organizational culture to align with their understanding.

Furthermore, de Certeau's ideas can be enhanced within the framework of structuration theory. As defined by Anthony Giddens (1984), structuration explores the interplay between actions, motivation, and rationalization. "One of the main propositions of structuration theory is that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (the duality of structure)" (p. 19). In the case of CETI, the rules and resources created by the executive level are drawn upon and altered by non-executives. Those elements of the written organizational culture that are adopted by employees become part of the organizational culture and, in turn, writers formalize actions they witness which constitute the organizational culture.

This section will focus on several themes within CETI's organizational culture that were produced at the executive level and consequently accepted, rejected, or manipulated at the employee level. Some of these themes have connected with employees and taken on a rich life within the discourse of the firm. Others have remained executive communications and, if mentioned at all, are spoken of with indifference or rejection.

Labels – Knowledge Leader

Even with executive backing and media saturation, an organizational culture may not find acceptance with organization members. For nearly a year, the president of CETI has been advocating a new term to describe CETI employees – Knowledge Leaders. However, hallway conversations, my interviews, and even the anonymous message board have indicated that the term does not appeal to many people in the company. Several people offered the phrase as one commonly used in CETI materials, but few gave a consistent definition of what it means. One employee launched into his opinion of the term with the zest of someone speaking of a favorite pet peeve: “It's not that I dislike it, but it doesn't resonate. It's like saying you're a great employee. Is it bestowed? Are all of us already Knowledge Leaders today, or is it something we must strive for? Who are our Knowledge Leader role models? What are the traits of a Knowledge Leader?”

The term may suffer from a perception that it is an ideal not yet achieved, not a current description. Another manager-level employee stated the problem in a way that captured the majority of feedback on the phrase. “Knowledge Leaders is what we want to be, but we're not there yet.” For all of the misunderstanding surrounding the term, it has been incorporated in the annual report, it is the frequent topic of Paul's Bi-Weekly Grams and President's Letters, and a group of volunteers has been tasked with renaming the awards at the annual awards banquet to reflect the concept – (e.g. Employee of the Year will become something along the lines of Junior Knowledge Leader). To expand upon de Certeau's example, a new road system was created, but the new map leaves off certain existing roads and pens in others that do not yet exist.

In an attempt to understand why the phrase has not gained acceptance among CETI employees, I approached Tom to ask him about the history of the term and the company's past efforts at constructing a widely accepted title for CETI employees. Many years ago, when CETI was only half the size it is today, the leadership team tried unite the firm through branding. The result was the opposite. The phrase "Masters of Extreme Systems" was generated by the former president to define the firm. At the time, recent wins with the government for very complex projects in the area of high performance computing coupled with other contracts in the firm that dealt with very complex problems suggested such a phrase would connect well with people who had come to the company to work with the best employees in the industry. However, when employees heard the term, many felt it only applied to those few working on high performance computers. "They didn't translate their work on projects like designing an Internet-based payment system as 'extreme' even though their code protected millions of dollars," lamented Tom in a weary tone. The ultimate result was an exodus of personnel who felt the company was going in a direction of which they were not a part.

CETI needs to establish a common understanding to remain competitive. "Organizational identity perceptions can influence organizational performance because they influence how external constituents evaluate an organization's legitimacy, which in turn affects its ability to access needed human and material resources" (Ran & Duimering, 2007, p. 155-156). Though important, executives are wary of repeating past mistakes in trying to define the company's people. Consequently, nearly every individual in the firm has her own understanding of what CETI does, and will give a different

description depending on the work she does on a particular project. The company employs people ranging from computational scientists with doctorates in advanced physics to technical architects who can help an organization identify areas of needless redundancy in their technology infrastructure. Such a diverse employee base makes the quest for a common understanding difficult. Nevertheless,

CETI needs its employees to feel that they are part of a larger concept than just their team. The executives fear that by defining the company by individuals' characteristics rather than a corporate characteristic, CETI will be perceived as a high-end recruiting agency. During our interview, I asked the president about phrases he hears regarding the firm. He shared that clients will often ask him, "Where do you keep finding the best people?" While the clients' praise of CETI's personnel aligns with the company's expressed organizational culture of employing the best and brightest people, it does not go to the next level of communicating an *organizational* culture.

Finding the unifying definition could result in several benefits. "Focusing on niche capabilities is okay if you're building a boutique company, but we're trying to build something larger," said the president during our interview. He went on to add, "One of the most important things a new employee should know when joining CETI is that this is a career, not a job. Find out what interesting stuff is going on elsewhere in the firm." Paul's comment reinforces the importance of creating an organizational-wide culture. He wants to attract employees with the promise of lots of growth opportunities. If they only ever see their own project, they will be limited in their choices for career growth and be more likely to become dissatisfied in their role and leave for another company. Tom, in

his interview, shared, “Our clients don’t know the full scope of what we do. We bid a contract to do something we have done elsewhere, and the client doubts our abilities because they have only experienced a small part of our skill-set. Our HPC customers don’t know about our consulting work in healthcare, and healthcare clients don’t know we have dozens of very smart software developers.” Tom believes a common brand across the company would help employees located with each client to better communicate the breadth of CETI’s technical abilities. “We want a shared culture,” he concludes. A shared culture would benefit the firm by instilling a greater sense of affiliation among its diverse employees.

A lack of use in employee writing contributes to the Knowledge Leader failure. When compared to the strategies used by executives to communicate the firm's core values, Knowledge Leader doesn't enjoy nearly as much exposure. The lack of use may be a result or a determinate of its unpopularity – the “duality of structure” described by Giddens (1984). Of particular note is its lack of socialization. The core values are written about and shared at every level of the firm. The Knowledge Leader term is almost entirely the domain of the president's writing, and people are never placed in situations where they must write their own text around the idea. The very managers that are so helpful in modifying and passing on the executive-level messages to their teams are some of those most adamantly opposed to the Knowledge Leader title. Employees see it as a “marketing phrase” rather than a meaningful definition of who they are. The situation is similar to that in a field study conducted by Jennie Dautermann (1993) among writers at a hospital who formed a sub committee which produced a standards document that failed to

gain affirmation outside of the group. “Composing together enabled [the sub group of writers] to mediate their own experience through language, to recognize the discourses of others, and to begin to carve out a place for their own voices in the community (Dautermann, 1993, p. 109-110). The “group negotiations” of the sub group of writers resulted in acceptance of the document being limited to those who participated in its writing (Dautermann, 1993).

CETI will continue to struggle with defining its employees until the corporate strategy incorporates employee tactics into the creation process. Despite the lack of buy-in for the term at CETI, nearly every employee when asked to give the pervasive characteristics of CETI employees and the firm as a whole mentioned smart, motivated, committed people. Tom explained, “Knowledge Leader will continue to be an issue. The concept is there, but the understanding and words are not.” Spilka (1990) states that “in successful rhetorical situations [in her study], orality is the primary way people communicate and reach consensus on the ideas and values of the corporate culture” (p. 63). Reaching consensus is precisely the result that can emerge from socialized writing.

If we further apply Spilka's idea of orality in the workplace, we see that those instances where writers have the most discussion during the drafting of organizational culture documents are the most successful. Spilka (1990) argues the interaction involved in business literature is often more important than the resulting text. In particular to organizational culture, her field study revealed that “by using interaction to achieve a corporate consensus concerning documents' purposes, contents, and other rhetorical features, the writers helped their corporation fulfill social goals, such as encouraging

collaboration and working toward compromise. Simultaneously, these writers also assisted the corporation in developing and sustaining its unique cultural values, conventions, and taboos” (p. 45-46). This observation is born out by Dautermann's study and the success of the core values at CETI where employees are active participants in the writing surrounding this element of the organizational structure.

The Red Sports Car

CETI’s communication of a culture full of exciting and challenging work creates difficulties for employees who feel their role does not align with that description. Following a communications strategy that embraces the concept of Knowledge Leaders, CETI leadership always reinforces the efficacy of its work. Every project the company works on is meant to align with its mission of “Building Solutions for America's Safety and Prosperity.” To their credit every project does align with this idea, but in its communication, a gap appears between interpretation and application.

Even though employees readily accept that the organization employs elite personnel, they don’t always affirm the elite nature of their tasks. Intelligence, technical expertise, and even elitism were mentioned by interviewees describing the company. There is no doubt that what CETI highlights in its annual report, press releases, and newsletters is the organizational culture—but this emphasis is akin to focusing on flying planes for the air force. Flying is the first thing people think of concerning the air force, but logic dictates that there are dozens of other roles for every pilot. While the company portrays itself as focusing on highly difficult, challenging work, the truth is that there are elements of a project that require more mundane skills. For instance, a person may be

part of a team designing the software for a new tank's firing system, but the team needs people to do the requirements gathering, code testing, and maintenance. At this point employees in ancillary roles are left to develop tactics that allow them to reconcile their mundane roles with the mission of saving the lives of Americans.

The issue was described by one executive as the “Red Sports Car” mentality. When asked to describe the pervasive characteristics of CETI employees, he immediately mentioned that everyone wants to go after the “really sexy” work – challenges that require a lot of thought and creativity. While very interesting, this type of work cannot be the sole occupation of the company. Clients want complete solutions to a problem, from the exciting elements to the more common ones. Another weakness in the mindset is that even the really challenging problems eventually need to transition to maintenance activities. The red sports car becomes a family mini-van after a little time. Recruiting and marketing materials highlight premier projects and tout the most interesting work. CETI’s recruiting approach creates the criteria for misunderstanding among new employees, many of whom will find they are not working exclusively on the premier projects.

A recent bi-weekly-gram dealt with the subject. The president related the story of a janitor mopping floors at NASA during the Apollo missions. When asked what he was doing, he answered, “sending men to the moon.” Paul’s message is harshly honest. Mopping floors is necessary, and performing support work frees others to accomplish the greater goals. He went on to say that all roles require equal levels of commitment and “knowledge leadership,” for without the one, you couldn't have the other.

Although helpful in managing the perceptions of existing employees, this type of executive message is not part of the firm's recruiting mix. Texts such as the annual report focus exclusively on the “sexiest” work the company performs. CETI runs the risk of losing recruits with a message of “come mop the floors that will send people to the moon.” To make the misrepresentation worse, CETI employees perpetuate the elitist messages. Jack, the manager who takes such pride in this college recruiting, admitted that he focuses solely on the most interesting work of the firm in his presentations.

Given the conditions, CETI is faced with the problem of alleviating the dissatisfaction of new employees who join the firm and don't perform the work they had imagined. The answer may lie in the words of the college hire dissatisfied with the accuracy of college recruiting messages. He said, “People are willing to accept an imperfect world if you're a straight shooter.” He didn't mind being placed on a project that was not his ideal, but he wanted to know up front what to realistically expect. With these gaps in expectations and actuality, CETI's executive team is faced with a daunting dilemma. They need to develop a strategy that conveys the merit of the company's work while setting realistic expectations for what an employee's role will be. A Practice Lead noted the importance of communicating *why* something is done. “People don't mind working hard, but they want to know why.” The intended organizational culture of “red sports cars” relies on a motivated team of not only drivers but pit crew. Bernstein (1984) supports the idea of full disclosure, “Companies don't simply omit to explain what is happening but *why*” (p. 85). The why is the key to motivating people and encouraging them to use the executive's discursively created street map.

Open Communication

To combat the perception that employees feel they are not in the roles they were intended for, the executive team has gone to great lengths to create an organizational culture that encourages honest and open communication – particularly from the junior levels up. In his interview, Paul elaborated, “people who ask questions do a lot better in the organization than those who don't. We really need people to speak up. I can't address issues that are never raised.” His strategy of open communication includes an anonymous question board on the internal website, a standing invitation for anyone in the company to visit his office, an open microphone at quarterly all-hands meetings, and the establishment of a volunteer team dedicated to evaluating and implementing employee suggestions. Many people during the interviews noted easy access to executives as one of their favorite aspects of the organizational culture. However, others felt that while the open communication sounds great, they aren't sure how to practice it. One recent hire in the firm's New Jersey site was unclear how he would go about contacting Paul. “I like the idea of executive access, but I don't feel it's a direct route to Paul. I'm sure you have to go through extra people like the executive assistant and maybe even my manager.”

Dispersed employees who lack the ability to witness organizational culture behavior first-hand, may feel disassociated with the culture. In analyzing the answers of employees located at corporate headquarters versus those at other sites, the ability of people in headquarters to simply walk to Paul's office creates a significant difference in the perception of executive access. People who have worked at headquarters were much more likely to note executive access as a positive element of the organizational culture.

Others don't witness people taking advantage of the strategy and are hesitant to participate in a ritual with which they are unfamiliar. There are those who feel comfortable picking up the phone and calling the president to complain of some cultural issue, but they are rare.

It is one thing for management to use open communication strategies, but without participation by employees, they become words on paper. Many non-corporate work locations have weekly lunches where managers communicate important news and take the pulse of the team. While some employees shared that this was a meaningful event with open dialogue, others lamented that the lunches are a one-way communication venue. The non-written example of monologue lunches indicates that currently the non-participative tactics of many employees thwart the intention of the open communication strategies communicated by the executive team in corporate genres.

Continued Growth

Organizational culture benefits when the writing strategy of executives adapts to the tactics of employees. Strategy and tactics worked in tandem through the executives' dedication to education. In addition to calling out the company's education programs in recruiting presentations, press releases on education-related awards, and mention in the annual report, I was asked to draft a brochure on the various company-sponsored education programs. Entitled "CETI University," the hand-out was designed to supplement college recruiting materials. In addition to describing internal training, the brochure outlines tuition reimbursement for employees pursuing higher education.

CETI executives worked with a D.C.-based university to develop a Master's curriculum for employees pursuing an advanced degree in computer science. Although the program was quite popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s, attendance took a drastic downturn in the 2004/2005 school year. More and more employees were looking for MBAs or alternate degrees outside of the computer science discipline. The change coincided with a move by the company from positioning itself as a technological boutique to an organization of talented individuals. Employees abstained from the program and lobbied for the ability to attend other programs. There were even people pursuing computer science degrees that didn't care for the CETI program. The result was that the firm discontinued its specialized program and now simply reimburses employees for their tuition at the school of their choice.

As we can see from the success of an organizational culture element such as education, which was modified to suit the uses of its participants, organizational culture depends on the duality of structure described by Giddens. Actions comparable to the president incorporating my core values story in his presentation show a recursive pattern at CETI. If the idea of recursive activity is further applied to genre theory, as Yates and Orlikowski do, the genres, and consequently writing of organizational culture at CETI, is in a constant state of flux. The words written today are acted upon, become habit, and are assimilated into the culture. However, there is a constant struggle among agents regarding this assimilation. As proved by the thwarting tactics of employees in response to the president's Knowledge Leader strategy, not all writing will be accepted and retained in

the organizational culture. However, as the president adapts his writing to the tastes of the employees, the strategy comes closer and closer to the tactics.

CONCLUSION

APPLYING THIS STUDY AT CETI:

The organizational culture guide that I was encouraged to draft by CETI's management is in the company's near future. However, this study has shown that it will only be a small element in a much larger strategy to use writing to communicate and develop organizational culture. This study shows the power that comes with writing about organizational culture. It is up to companies to harness that power and adapt its writing strategies accordingly. Analysis of CETI's writing through the theoretical lenses of genre theory, articulation theory, and structuration theory has revealed a number of significant insights regarding writing and organizational culture.

GENRE THEORY:

Adapt Genres to Meet Evolving Rhetorical Needs: Using genre theory, I sought the ways in which writing was created in response to a recurrent rhetorical situation, keeping in mind that those genres may adapt over time (Miller, 1984). CETI uses organizational culture writing for three basic purposes: recruiting, assimilation of new employees, and reinforcement of organizational culture among existing employees. CETI has adapted traditional genres to meet rhetorical needs in the areas that have the most impact on the company's organizational culture. For instance, the traditional annual

report genre adopts elements of the year book genre to communicate a culture that values employees and their contributions. The examination illustrated that as rhetorical situations change, so must the genres. Genres such as annual reports, executive emails, presentations, marketing materials, and core values “both shape and are shaped by individuals’ communicative actions” (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992, p. 300). Those genres which adapted themselves to audience tastes are consequently shown to be the most effective. The annual report, president emails, and recruiting presentations all evolved over time in response to influences such as employee feedback and reception among potential employees.

Writing about Organizational Culture Must Consciously Address the Gap Between Current and Envisioned State: Genre analysis shows that CETI’s recruiting presentations depict a company that is still growing. The genre adapts its portrayal of organizational culture to align with the expectations of college students and meet the rhetorical needs of a company searching for individuals lured by the promise of a challenging work environment. The analysis of this particular genre also uncovered a potential danger. The close alignment of written organizational culture and actual circumstances is a major concern of organizational members. Across the interviewees, there is a realization that writing about organizational culture is more vision than present circumstance, but there is also a wish for the gap between the two to narrow over time, and the current size of the gap to be well communicated.

Genres Not Intended for Organizational Members Can Influence Organizational Culture: My interviews and observations revealed that genres not intended to inform

organizational culture can nonetheless contribute in significant ways. Press releases proved to be an element of organizational culture that was not written for an internal audience, yet many employees, especially those outside of the corporate headquarters, revealed that they take a keen interest in the company's press releases. As CETI continues to grow, it will need to consider the impact that external marketing has on internal audiences in regards to its organizational culture.

Writing Can Serve as a Catalyst for Organizational Culture Dialogue and Change: The president identified a potential crisis of upsetting a customer with the wording of a success story in the annual report. The president's resulting dialogue communicated his view of the organizational culture in a way that would not have been as clear if he had tried to write a warning to his writers. The dialogue necessitated in the writing of the annual report as a whole actually acted as a catalyst in many circumstances to alter the executive-level interpretation of the company's organizational culture. The act of writing guided vital elements of CETI's communicated organizational culture such as the description of its divisions, the understanding of its core technical competencies, and even its vocabulary in the case of "information technology." Furthermore, finding the balance between the simple relating of facts and eliciting an emotional response proved to be a challenging, risky, but ultimately informative experience.

ARTICULATION THEORY

Empowering Non-Executive Employees with Authorship Contributes to a Strong Organizational Culture: The lens of articulation theory highlighted how levels of

authorial power affect the organizational culture of CETI. The power of authorship and where it resides was a telling element of the genre analysis. Slack, Miler, and Doak provide a sliding scale of authorial power that shows technical communication as transmission, translation, and articulation (1993, p. 171). Identifying the author of particular pieces of CETI's over-all organizational culture communication plan showed that surrendering authorial power in the executive levels of CETI gained positive results among the non-executive levels and ultimately served the overall goals of the leadership team. Organizational culture writing in the hands of users proved to fall into every part of Slack *et al.*'s spectrum of authorship. The more writing was encouraged among employees by executives, the more closely the writing aligned with executive perceptions.

Align Authors and Writing Assignment with a Genre's Intended Audiences: The most successful documents at CETI deliberately aligned authors with audiences and subject matter. For instance, managers write documents that help new employees assimilate into the organizational culture. Managers also translate messages from the executives to meet the audience expectations of their teams. In the case of the annual report, a junior writer was given a good deal of responsibility with the explicit understanding that his role and level in the firm afforded him insight unavailable to someone at the CEO level. The result was written organizational culture that more closely aligned with the tastes of the annual report's non-executive readers. In another instance, a conscious decision by executives to encourage collaborative discourse around the firm's

core values resulted in the values being accepted and espoused at every level of the company.

Share Authorial Power and Take Responsibility for Writing Claims: Using writing for the basic functions of recruiting, assimilating, and retaining employees, moments of crisis arose when writers communicated elements of the organizational culture that they were not in a position to guarantee. Slack *et al.* (1993) warn that authorial power carries responsibility, but at CETI, the authorial power did not always align with the corporate responsibility of the writer. In the case of a manager depicting a company full of nothing but exciting jobs, he lacked the organizational responsibility to place all new employees into their dream jobs. While writing the annual report, a success story that I wrote was heavily edited by senior executives who felt responsible for the messages communicated and therefore retained ultimate authorial power. Articulation theory ultimately revealed that authorial power must be shared among all of the organization's members, but executives responsible for the company must align responsibility with the writing through tacit support of their writers or through editing privileges.

STRUCTURATION THEORY:

Actively Manage the Recursive Process of Writing About Organizational Culture: Structuration theory helped bring the company-employee writing relationships into sharper focus. The interplay between executive and non-executive in the creation of CETI genres along with the articulation activities of users can all be categorized as recursive. De Certeau's (1984) ideas about tactics (non-prescribed actions of users) and

strategies (the processes and messages originated by the CETI institution) highlight those areas where employees do not align their behavior with elements of the organizational culture disseminated by the executive team. CETI's writing around its organizational culture follows Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration in that the writing is recursive – the written culture is selectively acted upon and those actions become the content of new writing. Writing about organizational culture by organizational culture members resulted in concepts becoming internalized among employees.

Executive Strategy Must Incorporate Employee Tactics: The situation at CETI suggests the higher the level of feedback and incorporation of employee-driven tactics, the greater the success of a message. The president requires employees to write about the company's core values in leadership training. Later, the president uses some of those stories in other presentations. By encouraging non-executives to write about the organizational culture, he is creating an atmosphere where employee tactics (i.e., their interpretation of the culture) become the corporate strategy (i.e., the president's messages). Furthermore, this strategy has proved remarkably effective in preventing drastic shifts in the definition of cultural elements – for instance the core values. Consequently, messages such as the core values that the executive team strategically places in recursive environments are widely accepted by employees while messages such as the Knowledge Leader label that did not adapt to incorporate tactics faltered. CETI's example provides an illustrative template for how companies can adapt their writing strategies to harness the tactics of employees that will occur with or without the consent of executives.

APPENDIX

Demographics of Interviewed CETI Employees

Unique Respondent	Years with Company	Level in Company	Primary Work Location	# of work locations
1	.5	Entry/Junior	Remote client site	1
2	3	Mid-level	DC client site	1
3	7	Line Manager	Remote client site	1
4	.75	Entry/Junior	DC client site	1
5	12	Line Manager	DC client site / HQ	3
6	7	Line Manager	Remote client site	1
7	.75	Line Manager	Remote client site	1
8	.5	Line Manager	Remote client site	1
9	5.5	Mid-Level	DC client site	3
10	7	Line Manager	DC client site / HQ	3
11	8	Line Manager	Remote client site	4
12	3	Line Manager	DC client site	1
13	1	Entry/Junior	DC client site	2
14	5.5	Mid-level	HQ	1
15	17	Executive	HQ	1
16	1	Executive	HQ	2
17	3	Mid-level	HQ	1
18	1	Entry/Junior	DC client site / HQ	1
19	.2	Mid-level	DC client site / HQ	1
20	6	Line Manager	HQ/DC	2
21	.75	Entry/Junior	Remote client site	3
22	.5	Mid-level	Remote client site	1
23	10	Executive	HQ	3
24	1	Mid-level	Remote client site	1

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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