Communication in an organization is ubiquitous and complex. Virtually all jobs, occupations, or professions rely on communication with other organizational members. Communication can be formal or informal, verbal or nonverbal, written or electronic, spontaneous or strategic, task or relationally oriented. In any form and at any level, communication is consequential. Communicating is not a neutral act; it does not simply move information from one organizational member to another. It is a complex transaction among organizational members influenced by a number of factors. Simply put, the communication system of an organization influences the people in the organization and its activities. Because this process is not neat or tidy, and because the communication system is difficult to see as a whole, scholars have developed a variety of lenses for identifying and investigating the culture that emanates from organizational communication systems. A brief review of the way in which organizational culture developed as a construct serves as an introduction to these primary lenses.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE CONSTRUCT

Like you, researchers and scholars spend at least a third of each 24 hour day as members of organizations. More of our waking hours are spent
in organizations with our colleagues than at home with family and friends. Particularly in the United States, a substantial portion of our identities is connected with the organizational memberships we claim. We are also clients and customers of organizations. For example, we see glimpses of organizations as we stand in line at the grocery store waiting for a clerk to conduct a price check, visit the doctor’s office expecting to see the doctor but spending more time with a nurse, and negotiating with a salesperson when purchasing a new car. Organizations are central to our society—in creating a viable economy and in structuring our system of government. As a result, our contact with organizations is nearly constant.

This constant presence of and interaction with organizations has transformed us from a traditional society based on households, families, and agriculture to an organizational society (Morgan, 1997). It is no wonder that scholars who study organizations are intrigued with organizational cultures. Morgan argues that viewing organizations through a cultural lens—rather than simply as bureaucracies or hierarchies—reveals the rich symbolism that exists in all aspects of organizational life. A cultural lens also shifts the more traditional focus in organizational studies from that of managers, leaders, and executives to all organizational members, as cultural elements exist in interactions throughout the organization. Through a cultural perspective, researchers can explore (a) an organization’s way of life, (b) how that reality is created, (c) how that reality is interpreted by various organizational stakeholders, and (d) the influence of those interpretations on organizational life and organizational activities. With a better understanding there is the opportunity for individuals to make more informed choices to help organizations be profitable and humane (Martin & Frost, 1996).

The threads and notions of organizational culture began early in the field of management, most notably with Elton Mayo’s human relations studies. One of the first to recognize the role of social interaction and its influence on organizations, Mayo can be credited for identifying that (a) informal interactions among organizational members set up expectations and constraints that cannot be explained by other organizational structures, and (b) employees’ beliefs, attitudes, and values brought with them into the work setting influence how they view themselves, the organization, and their roles within it (Parker, 2000).

while Parker (2000) identifies the first use of the term in an article by Becker and Geer (1960). By 1969 organizational culture was inextricably linked to organizational change with Bennis (1969) proclaiming that the only way to change an organization was to change its culture.

In the 1970s, communication studies of organizational culture became more prevalent when scholars’ use of systems theory “relocated communication as the central process in organizations and equated communicating with organizing” (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001, p. 293). Weick’s (1979) book, The Social Psychology of Organizing, was particularly influential in moving researchers toward discovering systems or patterns of interpretation in organizations. An explosion of scholarly studies on organizational culture or organizational symbolism appeared in the 1980s. At about the same time, popular business books, such as Peters and Waterman (1982) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) provided case analyses of organizational cultures resulting in prescriptive advice for practitioners. Since that time, scholarly interest in the study of organizational culture has continued to increase.

Communication scholars have been particularly intrigued by the concept of organizational culture because of the way in which messages, meanings, and symbols are central to an organization’s existence; and over the years, organizational communication scholars have contributed their expertise in symbolic interaction to the study of organizational culture. More recently, organizational communication scholars have taken an interpretive approach to the study of organizational culture (Putnam, 1983). The interpretive approach focuses on the complexity of meanings in social interaction and emerged directly in opposition to positivist and functional social science beliefs. This approach treats organizations as social constructions of reality with the processes of organizing and communicating being inextricably linked. From this perspective, communication is not something that an organization does; rather, the process of communicating creates the organization.

As Putnam (1983) explains, the interpretive approach supported two traditions: the naturalistic and critical study of organizational communication.

Naturalistic research aims to describe and to understand organizational reality as it is without questioning what it could or should become. It adopts a regulation stance for understanding how the status quo works, irrespective of the power structures that maintain it. . . . Critical research strives for emancipation through a critique
of social order. In industrial society critical theorists see bureaucratic hierarchies and practices as creating a false consensus among organizational members. Exposing the pseudo nature of this consensus provides alternatives for changing the status quo. (p. 53)

The hallmark of naturalistic research is its ability to provide findings that (a) describe and interpret organizational messages and meanings, (b) reflect the organization’s social reality so that it is recognizable to organizational members, and (c) are informative to those outside the organization (Bantz, 1983). The goal of critical research is social change. Thus, the hallmark of critical research is its ability to uncover practices that constrain communication and develop findings that contribute to free and open communication situations in which societal, organizational, and individual interests can be mutually accomplished (Deetz & Kersten, 1983).

Communication scholars have contributed to the growth and development of the study of organizational culture in five ways (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). First, a communication perspective has demonstrated the symbolic nature of day-to-day conversations and routine practices, emphasizing that culture is present in all organizational communication. Second, a communication perspective emphasizes the way in which both interpretation and action exist within communication practice. Third, the communication perspective on organizational culture recognizes how societal patterns and norms facilitate or constrain the practices of individuals within a particular organizational culture. In other words, this perspective recognizes that any organizational culture is embedded in a larger culture. Fourth, the communication perspective honors a variety of researcher-organization relationships. The researcher can be within, close to, or more removed from the culture being studied. Finally, the communication perspective acknowledges all motives as legitimate for the study of organizational culture. These five contributions underscore the role of cultural studies in moving the study of organizations and organizational communication from a rational, objective, and abstract perspective, to one that is capable of providing deep, rich, and realistic understandings of organizations and the experiences of people within them (Alvesson, 2002). Greater attention to organizational culture also provided a conceptual bridge between micro- and macro-level views of organizations, by connecting the whole of the organization with everyday experiences (Smircich, 1983).
Accordingly, Deetz (1988) argues that the goals of organizational culture studies should be twofold. The first goal should be to generate insight about cultural processes by understanding how individuals create sense and meaning at a particular time and location, and to demonstrate how our sensemaking of our work lives articulates basic information about cultural processes. The second goal should be to continue to develop and re-form organizational practices acknowledging the complexity of the work environment, the variety of stakeholders, and their competing interests.

In addition to these goals, the investigation of organizational culture has the potential to produce three outcomes (Schein, 1992) vital to our understanding of and practice in organizations. Greater diversity along any dimension will require a deeper understanding of how different groups can integrate their work activities. A deeper understanding of integration is also required as organizations acknowledge diverse groups within the workforce. Second, technology is increasingly being used to enhance the communication and work activities of organizational members. A new technology, or a new use of an existing technology, can substantially alter the work environment and accompanying work practices, as well as mediate interpretations. Third, cultural analysis is necessary to manage organizations across national and ethnic boundaries. On a local level, increasing globalization has created a work environment where some employees communicate with coworkers and clients distributed across time zones and nations. On a broader scale, understanding culture is essential when organizations from two nations merge or when international joint ventures or strategic alliances are created.

Scholars and practitioners view organizational culture differently, and the scholar’s perspective is unique. Practitioners can oversimplify what organizational culture is and how culture can be used as a mechanism for improving productivity and performance (Martin & Frost, 1996). Scholars, using multiple theoretical and methodological lenses, can illuminate the complexity (and messiness) of organizational culture—revealing it for what it is rather than what managers want or expect it to be. Scholars’ focus on the way in which culture is developed, maintained, or changed can identify frames or scripts that managers can credibly use to bridge the different assumptions held by organizational members. Thus, organizational culture is popular with both scholars and practitioners, and enjoys both academic respectability and practical relevance (Alvesson & Berg, 1991).
Given the history of organizational culture scholarship, and the variety of academic disciplines that have contributed to its development, scholars bring many different perspectives to the study of organizational culture. Each of the perspectives, or lenses, described in the following sections is useful for studying the processes of communicating and organizing that create an organization’s culture. Each has merit, and each has shortcomings. No one lens can reveal a complete view of an organization’s culture—thus, the necessity of multiple lenses. Lenses can be used singly or in combination. Used together, different lenses are likely to reveal different cultural elements, as well as different interpretations of the organization’s culture.

THE LENS OF SYMBOLIC PERFORMANCE

Early on scholars argued that organizational culture emerged through the interpretation of symbols. A symbol is an object, word, or action that stands for something else or something more than the object, word, or action itself (Cohen, 1974). From the symbolic perspective, the everyday conversations among organizational members were considered, well, ordinary and everyday. Rather, the focus was on symbolic devices, as when metaphors, stories, jokes, rituals, and myths were used purposely. Because such occurrences were infrequent, great significance could be attached to them when they were used (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). When interpretations of these symbols were shared, culture became a mechanism for regulating organizational behavior (Allaire & Firsio, 1984).

Although important information can be learned about an organization’s culture by examining its unique and highly visible symbolic elements, this approach sacrifices the complexity and depth that come from studying the organization’s communication system as a whole. Thus, this limited view was replaced by the view that all types of communication—including the mundane and everyday—were responsible for the creation, maintenance, and transformation of organizational reality (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Rather than focusing on one type of symbol or a set of symbols, this perspective moved to acknowledge that a system of symbols—including the everyday and the unique—is responsible for creating complexity, and sometimes contradictions, in the totality of organizational communication and the organization’s resulting culture (Carbaugh, 1988b). Thus, this view of organizational
culture seeks to examine the way in which communication brings culture into being. Rather than simply identifying artifacts, values, and assumptions as cultural displays or symbolic representations of organizational culture, the symbolic performance perspective examines the way in which organizational performances reveal cultural meaning as well as how the performance itself is developed, maintained, and changed.

**Characteristics of Organizational Performances**

The organizational performances that reveal organizational culture have four core characteristics (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, 1983). First, organizational performances are interactive. Organizational members create and participate in them together. No organizational role or function is independent from others. When people enact their organizational roles, these role enactments acknowledge the roles of others. In a sales presentation, the sales agent role is enacted with the role of customer. In a team meeting, coworker roles are enacted as the team chooses a new team leader.

Second, organizational performances are contextual. They happen in a particular organization within a larger set of organizational events. The situational and temporal embeddedness of an organizational performance allows specialized and localized meanings to develop. For example, team members choosing a new team leader know what activities are the responsibilities of the team leader and choose a team leader based on the information unique to this team. In doing so, they reinforce the role of team members and team leader, the relationship between those two roles, and the activities of people within those roles. This performance is grounded in the team’s history (and perhaps the organization’s history of teamwork), and provides a map to future behavior.

Third, organizational performances are episodic. Having a beginning and end, organizational members can tell one performance from another. Much of organizational life is driven by events: formalized events such as work shifts, Monday morning meetings, budget cycles, and annual performance appraisals; and informal events such as coming to agreement that it’s time for lunch, a lunch hour that stretches regularly to 90 minutes, and coffee breaks. Whether formal or informal, these events—or episodes—create regularity and a routine for the flow of work, as well as a framework for interpretation. Monday morning
meetings, which are supposed to start at 8 a.m., really start when the division manager signals that it is time to start. Thus, the interaction up to, within, and coming from the episode can be interpreted as typical (“We never start on time”), unusual (“I wonder why he’s late today”), or uncertain (“Can we just decide on a meeting time and stick with it?”).

Fourth, organizational performances are improvisational. While an organization’s culture can provide some structure for a performance, a performance is never fully scripted. Moreover, organizational members can alter the script or completely ignore it. New employee orientation may cover the same material for each new orientation session. But each session is also unique as employees ask questions requiring the trainer to move through some material quickly to allow adequate time to focus on the particular material that is unclear or unfamiliar. While the trainer is ready to answer any question, the number and topic of the questions creates a different performance in each new orientation session. While the trainer may have expectations about her organizational performance, she cannot know if she will be able to follow those expectations until she interacts with the new employees. Some of the questions asked may allow her to fall back on her expectations and training outline; other questions may require that she improvise or create an answer on the spot.

Types of Organizational Performance Processes

Despite the diversity of organizational performances, there are types of organizational performances that can generally be found in organizations: ritual, passion, social codes or practices, politics, and enculturation (Pacanowsky & O’Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). Organizational performances are processes through which symbols take on and display meaning. A richer explanation of organizational culture occurs when we can identify what the ritual is, how it came into being, what cultural meanings are enacted or developed in the performance, and why organizational members enact these performances.

The first type of organizational performance is rituals—personal, task, social, or organizational performances that occur regularly to punctuate work experiences. For example, Jeff goes to work early to allow himself time to leisurely drink a cup of coffee at his desk (personal ritual) before his work team joins him in his cubicle (task ritual). But before the team moves through its agenda, Jeff knows that Samantha will encourage others to share what they did the night before
(social ritual). When Jeff recognizes that everyone has said something, he moves the team quickly through the agenda so that he will not be late for his manager’s meeting that immediately follows this one (organizational ritual). Examining this series of rituals, we can discover how team members’ view and value meetings, what assumptions provide a background for work in meetings, and what artifacts signal that meetings are ready to begin and end.

A second type of organizational performance is passion, or the heightened description of common workplace activities. Most jobs have routine elements. Even the glamour job of being an actor has work activities that most report as tedious or boring: coming in before dawn to the make-up trailer to be fitted with a wig, make-up, prosthetic teeth, and costume to become the character; and waiting for technical adjustments to light and sound equipment between takes. These routine activities are transformed into passions in the form of stories told by actors about the tedium and time-consuming activities of getting into character. In some instances, the drama of being transformed into one’s character becomes a key part to promoting the movie. The organizational performance of passion is transforming common work activities into heightened and enhanced descriptions of those activities, often in the form of stories.

A third type of organizational performance is the social codes of behavior at work. Courtesies, one type of social code, are enacted by flight attendants as they welcome passengers on board, and by a coworker who lets the person making only one copy cut in at the copy machine. Pleasantries, another code of behavior, are exemplified when colleagues engage in small talk waiting for others to join the meeting. Seemingly senseless, these activities reveal organizational members’ communication and working styles and provide openings for making introductions and creating relationships. Another code of work behavior is sociability, a performance that implies familiarity among interactants. Telling an inappropriate joke to the right person is a form of sociability—you would not be secure in telling the joke if you did not know that the person you share it with will not take offense. The final code of work behavior is labeled privacies and can be exemplified by the way in which one worker momentarily invades a coworker’s personal space to whisper something secretive in the other’s ear. Privacies are those performances in which sensitive or political information is being communicated, and thus, requires a protocol (e.g., a performance appraisal behind a shut door) to make the activity fit appropriately within the normal work routine.
The fourth type of organizational performance is politics. Showing personal abilities, recruiting allies, bargaining, and negotiating are political performances in organizations because they demonstrate power, control, and influence. For example, in your organization salespeople compete with one another for customers as they walk in the door. Some customers had complained to management that they felt bombarded as one salesperson after another asked, “Do you need some help?” To avoid such problems, your manager implemented a procedure for linking customers to salespeople. Based on a rotating schedule, salespeople are “up” to greet and help new customers as each new customer enters the store. Initially, everyone liked the new procedure, and it was used efficiently and effectively. But, soon, the salespeople had conflicting ideas of identifying customers. Some salespeople believed that if it was their turn to be “up,” then that customer should be theirs even if they had gone into the storeroom momentarily to retrieve something. Other salespeople believed that a rotation for being “up” was forfeited if a salesperson was not ready to greet customers as they walked through the door. To avoid a potential forfeit, many of your colleagues started to avoid stocking and cleaning tasks that were part of the job. Those who did continue with these chores—and also put themselves at risk for not being available when customers entered—were verbally rewarded by the manager. But those who refused to perform the stocking and cleaning chores were rewarded with increased sales. In this example, a group of salespeople quickly divided into two groups, each trying to recruit the others to join them. One group attempted to positively influence the manager by continuing to perform tasks that would result in praise; the other attempted to demonstrate power by strategically avoiding the stocking and cleaning tasks. This cultural performance demonstrates how organizational members’ use of power, control, and influence created a political interpretation of the procedure of being “up.”

The final type of organizational performance is enculturation. These are the interaction activities by which organizational members acquire knowledge and skills to be considered competent in their work roles. Certainly new employees must be acculturated; but seasoned employees may also be expected to learn new procedures. Nevertheless beyond learning the task skills necessary for the job, employees must also learn how to negotiate organizational realities, such as asking for a raise or time off, positively influencing coworkers when they are not those
coworkers’ supervisor, and bringing concerns to the attention of the union steward. Each of these activities requires learning the ropes; for other organizational members, these activities require teaching the ropes. Thus, enculturation is the process by which organizational members learn the intricacies of organizational life.

Witmer’s (1997) study of the world’s largest and most successful Alcoholics Anonymous group, the Friendship Group, demonstrates the processual nature of communication, and the role of symbolic performances in creating an organization’s culture. Using a variety of methodologies—field observation, interviews, unobtrusive methods—Witmer discovered how the Friendship Group’s founder created, and its members continued to enact, a culture distinct from other A.A. meeting groups. The founder, a dynamic and powerful leader, brought his own (and more rigid and intense) interpretation of A.A. into this organization. Claiming that acting better made him feel better, the founder’s behaviors soon became cultural performances for his followers in the group as well. The Friendship Group ritualized and continued to practice for over 30 years greeting people at meetings with a formal reception line, repeatedly using specific phrases (e.g., “it is an honor and a privilege”) to address the group, and adhering to a dress code that set the tone of disciplined behavior for the group. Members were organized into activities to keep active and away from events where alcohol was likely to be served. Although no longer formally the group’s leader, the founder’s informal authority was not disputed. Sponsors of new members taught and reinforced this culture by setting the example of the culture in their one-on-one meetings, group meetings, and Friendship Group activities. The rituals reinforced disciplined behavior and celebrated sobriety, which in turn created an organizational culture that valued action, acceptance, and selflessness as a route to recovery.

Locating and analyzing the communicative performances between and among organizational members within an organization’s communication system demonstrates how an organization enacts its culture and creates it symbolic self. This view of organizational culture moves beyond simply identifying the assumptions, values, and artifacts as symbolic representations of culture. Rather the organizational performance perspective reveals how meaning is created from cultural symbols and the way in which these meanings are integrated into a performance.
THE LENS OF NARRATIVE REPRODUCTION

Everyone has stories about their work experience. A narrative is a story, and a common way for people to make sense of their organizational experiences (Boje, 1991; Bormann, 1983). While organizational stories are about particular actors and particular events, they serve as artifacts to provide information about an organization’s values, norms, and beliefs (Bruner, 1991; Meyer, 1995). The specifics are the exemplars of the culture the storyteller wants to describe. A story is essentially the unfolding of action that has a beginning, middle, and end. In its telling, the specifics are meaningful only to the whole.

For example, Bill, who works for an insurance company as an adjuster, tells the following story when asked how employees are motivated:

Okay, you know that we have the Bestest Awards. Each quarter, our managers get together and pick the employee from each department that they believe is best—or, it may be the employee they think has made the most improvement. Whatever. Anyway, at the end of the year, the managers get together again and pick the Best of the Best out of each division’s Bestest award winners at the department level. This person—last year it was Georgeanna—gets a cruise to Alaska... in August... when the rest of us are melting in the heat and humidity. Now think about it. Let’s say I won a Bestest award at the end of this quarter—that’s in March. By the way, the award is a certificate given at the quarterly meeting. And, then let’s say that I’m selected as the Best of the Best at the end of the year, but I don’t get to take my cruise until the following August. I’m getting rewarded 15 months after my supposedly award-winning performance. What kind of motivation is that? [pause.] At any rate, I wanted you to know about the awards here and how they work.

In this story, Bill is describing his organizational experiences. Although he is describing a particular organizational practice (how departmental awards are given), he is also providing information about how the organization values its employees. Notice that his description of the awards is accompanied by his positive evaluation of the award (i.e., an Alaskan cruise when it is hot where he lives), and his negative evaluation of how the award is given (i.e., 15 months after
someone’s performance is acknowledged). In telling this story, Bill is describing, and in essence evaluating, the organizational culture and its norms for evaluating and rewarding employees.

Notice how the narrative is generated from one person’s viewpoint. Also notice how the narrative reproduces the culture and provides insight into what the culture values (Meyer, 1995). A new employee would not have experienced these events. However, listening to Bill’s narrative, a new employee would have some information, both objective and subjective, that would undoubtedly influence her expectations about the organization. Indeed, a new employee might even accept this narrative description and evaluation about organizational rewards and tell the story herself until she has direct experience with this practice, at which point she will modify the story to suit her needs and view of the organization (Boje, 1991). If others in the organization tell the same or similar story, the narrative will gain legitimacy and be seen as the way things really are—even though the story varies by its teller. Legitimacy in this case is not located in truth. Rather, legitimacy depends on the narrative’s plausibility.

Of course, not all organizational events are story worthy. For an organizational story to be worth telling, there must some event worth telling about. In organizational life, that event is usually something that deviates from normal practice, known as a breach of social order (Bruner, 1991). Although negative deviations are more common, narratives can also be developed when there are positive deviations from organizational norms. In the narrative above, there is a minor and major breach that forms the basis of the story. First, the storyteller reports the minor breach about how employees are selected for the award. Are employees selected because they are the best performers? Or, are employees selected because they have made the most improvement? This may seem like a minor detail, but this aspect of the narrative also alludes to the storyteller’s belief that no clear criteria exist for how employees are identified as award recipients. In an organization, lack of objective criteria gives power to managerial subjectivity both in what the award represents and who gets the award. The storyteller reports the major breach as the delay between the employee’s performance and taking the cruise, the reward for superior performance. Underlying the narrative is the storyteller’s negative evaluation of this practice and his belief that performance and rewards should be more closely linked.

In examining the orientation of the storyteller to the organization, another interpretation of this narrative is possible. Notice how the
storyteller reports that Georgeanna won last year’s Best of the Best Award. Then Bill projects the story into the future by describing the hypothetical situation in which he wins the award. The way in which the story is told suggests that he has not won either the quarterly or the annual award, which is his implicit evaluation of what his manager thinks of him.

Narratives are particularly powerful in passing along organizational culture because they are a natural component of organizational communication. Not only do organizational members purposely tell stories, but they also tell stories as part of their ongoing conversations when working through conflict and solving problems. Thus, storytelling to others and story construction with one another are often used as employees create a logic or rationale for understanding the complexity of what is happening in their organization (Jameson, 2001), as well as creating bonds that hold organizational members together (Coopman & Meidlinger, 2000; Kaufman, 2003).

**Controlling Organizational Culture Through Narratives**

Long acknowledged for their influence in creating cohesive and productive organizational cultures (Mohan, 1993), stories are never neutral. Each narrative relays more than just information (Taylor & Van Every, 2000), especially the interests of dominant groups (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001) by indicating what values are accepted and which are rejected (Coopman & Meidlinger, 2000). Because stories reinforce what is and what is not valued, they both produce and reproduce the organization’s power structure (Mumby, 1988). In other words, “organizational stories are not innocuous. Rather they are inherently linked to organizational issues of power and hierarchy” (Coopman & Meidlinger, 2000, p. 579).

When multiple organizational members tell (and retell) similar stories, the specifics of the stories accrue and are taken as findings about artifacts, values, and assumptions of an organization’s culture (Bruner, 1991). Many managers use stories in public meetings to demonstrate (and reinforce) how organizational objectives should be enacted and to demonstrate what the organization can realize (and what employees should do) when the values of the organization’s culture are upheld. And, of course, stories can become powerfully dangerous when management reconstructs the organizational events of a story to serve as a managerial representation that meets their needs.

It is not uncommon for members of an organization to create a set of connected and shared stories about some aspect of organizational
life. A manager might tell a newcomer several stories about how the department’s employees treat one another to express the family-like atmosphere fostered under his supervision. A CEO might repeatedly tell stories of how her account managers repeatedly go the extra mile in producing results for clients. Stories like these create a general principle about how employees should behave, and in turn, can control employee behavior. Because the principle can be expressed in different sets of specifics, the principle becomes a legitimate part of the organization’s culture, and part of its control mechanism.

THE LENS OF TEXTUAL REPRODUCTION

Written texts are widely prominent in organizations, providing a fixed view on organizational culture (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Written texts exist as formal communication in the form of newsletters, mission statements, procedures, handbooks, reports, and slogans. Typically these represent managerial perspectives because of their permanence and ability to be controlled.

Gilsdorf’s (1998) study found that managerial employees across a wide variety of organizational types and sizes pointed to memos, postings, and newsletters as being more influential than manuals, policies, and handbooks. Not surprisingly, they indicated that management should control most or all communication within an organization. Emphasizing the role of textual reproduction of organizational culture, these managers pointed to instances in which a policy should have been developed to provide guidance about verbal communication, and how when policies or procedures were not followed or enforced, problems occurred.

However, informal texts, such as graffiti, can also portray a view of an organization’s culture. Not only is graffiti informal, it is not controlled by an organization’s established management structure. Graffiti, often humorous, also serves as a territorial marker implying who has been in the space, as well as their values about the space or the organization that provides it. Because of its informality, spontaneous, and cumulative nature, graffiti writers can express their views of the culture without being identified directly and, at the same time, take a stand against the culture while creating a space for like-minded others to express their views. For example, Scheibel (1994) analyzed the graffiti in the editing rooms in a communication department at a university.
Students’ graffiti revealed their alienation toward the conditions of their films (school projects with short time demands, lack of equipment) and the process of filmmaking (long nights, lonely editing sessions), which established the film school culture that is interpreted against the background of the film industry. Graffiti disclosed students’ perceptions of relationships with other students, faculty, university administration, and the filmmaking industry while portraying themselves in a favorable way. As an example of how students used graffiti to express the relationship between student filmmaker and faculty, one entry read:

You know you’ve got a good film when ____ hates it!

So what if ____ doesn’t like it.

Remember to do what you want—not what ____ wants you to do. (p. 12)

Such comments express students’ views of artistic control or ownership over the film product relative to the frequent criticism students received from faculty.

Textual reproductions of organizational culture are especially useful for exploring espoused versus enacted elements of culture. Formal documentation represents the espoused view. Written documents tell what should happen or explain the culture from a managerial perspective. Alternately, informal texts are better representations of the enacted culture. At one manufacturing plant, the company newsletter (the formal espoused view of culture) was regularly ignored by hourly employees. Believing that the newsletter was managerial propaganda, the hourly workers used the newsletter to make paper airplanes, folded them and used them under table legs to keep tables from wobbling, or kept a stack of the newsletters in a box as a door stop. Using the formal textual representation of the organization’s culture in these informal ways demonstrated the tension between espoused and enacted values.

THE LENS OF MANAGEMENT

Starting as a topic of academic pursuit in the human relations movement (Parker, 2000), organizational culture quickly found its way into
business conversations and the popular press, in part, prompted by the management principles laid out in *In Search of Excellence* (Peters & Waterman, 1982) and *Corporate Cultures* (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). These books responded to practical management needs, such as dealing with increased competition, more turbulent markets, shrinking productivity, increased organizational size, and social changes. Thus, pitching organizational culture as a kind of social glue to hold an organization together was very appealing (Alvesson & Berg, 1991). Executives and managers at all levels sought to instill in their own organizations and units the principles described in these popular business books, which are now considered classic management texts. Soon, executives and managers expected that their organization’s culture would be evaluated when organizational development and change experts were consulted in hopes of improving business outcomes. So, it is not surprising that the study of organizational culture took on a managerial perspective.

Clearly, enthusiasm for studying organizational culture and the role of communication in creating and maintaining culture blossomed from the managerial perspective presented in these popular business books. This movement was more prescriptive than descriptive (Parker, 2000). Moreover, explanations that resulted from this movement suffered from a particular attribution bias. “If the organization succeeds, it is because of the vision of the executive and the collective mission of the workforce. If the company fails, the culture is weak, or inappropriately adapted to a changing environment” (p. 25). Either way, the term *organizational culture* became synonymous with everything that was right or wrong with an organization.

**Culture as a Control Device**

Treating organizational culture as a resource or tool, a managerial perspective of organizational culture can be characterized by a number of elements. First and foremost, from this perspective, organizational culture is developed and directed by managers for the purpose of improving operating efficiencies, enhancing the bottom line, or creating satisfied customers. Thus, organizational culture is seen as an internal process that influences external outcomes. The role of managers from this perspective is to create a culture in which employees are happy and satisfied so that they will follow managerial directives.

This means, essentially, that organizational culture is viewed as a control device. Managers want to create or manufacture a culture
that will motivate their employees to work productively. From this perspective, communication is seen as a relatively straightforward instrumental activity under the control of management that can be used to achieve organizational outcomes. Thus, communication is treated as one aspect of the organization that can easily be changed or improved upon (Penman, 2000).

Two examples demonstrate this. The Center for Corporate Culture and Organizational Health—summarizing evidence from literature reviews, database assessments, and interviews with business leaders, human resource professionals and consultants—concludes that “healthier organizational cultures are likely to reduce workforce turnover and stress; improve employee health, productivity, performance, and retention; and lead to significant improvements in business results” (Levey & Levey, 2000a, ¶ 3). Further, leaders are encouraged to “develop organizational cultures with the strong foundation of trust and mutual respect necessary for almost super-fluid communication” (Levey & Levey, 2000b, ¶ 10). From this perspective, organizational culture is produced by managers with the intent of making workers productive.

Other evidence of organizational culture being used as a control device comes from a scholarly investigation of the impact of the organizational cultures of university nursing programs on the scholarly productivity of nursing professors (McNeal, 2000). Improving informational resources, finding ways to promote faculty accomplishments, and periodically reducing workloads were reported as strategies college deans and department chairs could take to change their organizational cultures to improve faculty productivity. While these structural changes might create the expected outcomes and benefit the faculty as well as the university, notice that the recommendations are directed toward administrators—not the nursing professors who must produce scholarship in addition to their teaching and clinical responsibilities. The underlying assumption is that if administrators control the work environment, and hence, change the culture, they can control worker output. Both examples demonstrate why some managers believe that organizational culture can be directly influenced by them to produce enhanced organizational outcomes.

Employee Selection

A second way to characterize organizational culture from a managerial perspective is to view it as a screening device in selecting
employees. All organizations must hire employees, and the costs of doing so coupled with the costs of training new employees can be significant. Thus, one goal of organizations is to minimize employee turnover. One way to do this is to hire employees that fit with the organization’s culture. Such an objective assumes two things: First, that employees in authoritative positions know what its culture is, and second, that these employees can identify these characteristics in new hires. The presumption is that when individuals are a good fit with an organization, there will be congruence between their patterns of values and the organization’s patterns of values (Chatman, 1991).

O’Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) set out to demonstrate that person-organization fit was achievable and a viable mechanism for reducing turnover. First, the research team created the Organizational Culture Profile, a questionnaire comprised of 54 values across seven dimensions: aggressive, detail oriented, innovative, outcome oriented, respectful, stable, and team oriented. Next, the Profile was used to identify the cultures of organizations in the accounting, consulting, health care, postal service, and transportation industries (Chatman & Jehn, 1994; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Vandenberghe, 1999). An implicit assumption of such an approach is that a few dimensions are appropriate across a wide variety of organizations. This approach also presumes that the profile will represent what is shared about the culture across all employees in the organization (Chatman & Jehn, 1994).

Once identified, then organizations could screen potential recruits for their individual value profile. Across many organizations, researchers found that when new employees exhibited a values profile similar or close to the values profile of the organization that hired them, new employees expressed higher levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and were more likely to stay longer with the organization. Thus, person-culture fit is often a central part of the interviewing and selection process. Human resource personnel and managers often compose questions (“What would you do . . . ? How would you handle . . . ?”) to determine if the applicant fits with the organization’s culture.

Goodall (1990) provides a different view of person-organization fit. His ethnographic study of a computer software company reveals how fit was achieved through entering the organization with nonverbal artifacts similar to those valued by organizational members. Rather than person-organization fit being based on personality, fit was achieved
because new employees displayed the dress, appearance, and artifacts valued by organizational members. Thus, looking like you can easily play the part is a strategic device new employees can use to fit in to a new organization. Looking like you fit in suggests to others that you value the same things as they do. Indeed, research has demonstrated that a good person-organization fit results in quicker adjustment by new hires, higher levels of individual satisfaction, and longer organizational tenure (Chatman, 1991).

Organizational Culture and Organizational Success

The functional perspective of organizational culture, embraced in the management literature and popular press, often examines how an organization’s culture can be managed or changed to influence organizational success. Because managers and executives are primarily responsible (at least from a financial point of view) for the success of an organization, it makes sense then to argue that an organization’s culture is the product of its decision making (Schoenberger, 1997), especially the decision making that is done by the managers and executives who steer the course of the organization’s activities. Managerial decisions in for-profit organizations are generally future-oriented and strategic in nature with the objective of improving organizational income, net sales, invested capital, income/sales ratio, or income/investment ratio. For example, decisions about market expansion, product or service quality, return on investment, and adoption of new technologies are intended to improve what the organization produces with the expectation that doing so will improve the organization’s financial success. This is a key point. From this perspective, organizational success is financial success, even when customer satisfaction is measured. So, how is organizational culture tied to an organization’s financial success?

These types of decisions, intended to improve organizational success, are embedded with the cultural values and beliefs of the key decision makers. Once the decisions are made and implemented, the policies and practices that emanate from them function to either enhance or modify the organization’s values and beliefs (Denison, 1990). Thus, how decision makers interact in making the decisions, and communicate those decisions to others in the organization, ties organizational culture to organizational effectiveness.
Despite the number of studies that have attempted to demonstrate the link between organizational culture and organizational performance, the evidence is far from convincing (Alvesson, 2002). There may, in fact, be conditions and circumstances in which an organization’s culture will predict organizational success, but those conditions and circumstances have not been well identified. Characteristics that are likely to influence this relationship include degree of cultural integration, controllable work situations, degree of cultural adaptability or flexibility, and valuing both internal and external constituencies (Wilderom, Glunk & Maslowski, 2000).

Typically, findings that support the culture-performance link are drawn from studies that operationalize organizational culture simplistically as shared values or values consensus (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001) without considering the likelihood of multiple cultures. As a result, culture-performance studies tend to cast culture broadly using only the most general values and norms and fail to capture the cultural complexity (Alvesson, 2002). Such studies are more likely to take the view that strong cultures enhance organizational performance without considering the way in which strong cultures can negatively impact organizations’ capacities for change (Alvesson, 2002). Studies that pursue an organizational culture-performance link are typically cast as cause and effect (Siehl & Martin, 1990). That is, if the culture is of a particular type, strength, or variety, then a specific outcome will be achieved. Such a position de-emphasizes the roles of all organizational members in creating organizational culture, and the many interpretations that can be generated and sustained.

A conceptually stronger argument about the culture-performance link is found in Alvesson’s (2002) notion that some elements of culture may be related to other manifestations of culture. For example, feelings of community could lead to reduced turnover. But to claim that an organization’s culture as a whole is responsible for organizational success is problematic to conceptualize and study.

When organizational success is the focus, organizational culture becomes a means to that end. The popular press and literature continue to embrace the notion that there are good and bad cultures and that a strong unified culture is best (Morgan, 1997). Some organizations hire trainers and consultants to coach an organization (usually leaders at the executive level) through a cultural change process. Arguably, the belief that what is good for the organization is in the best interest of
employees seems reasonable. But when organizational culture is created and managed to entice or provoke employees to accept working harder, there are potential drawbacks and liabilities. Management has always been an ideological practice—promoting attitudes, values, and norms—to control employees (Morgan, 1997). Recently, however, some attempts at culture control to achieve organizational success have included value-engineering practices that employees resist and resent. Subtle manipulations disguised as rewards for employees breed distrust. Morgan clarifies: “There is an important distinction to be drawn between attempts to create networks of shared meaning that link key members of an organization around visions, values, and codes of practice . . . and the use of culture as a manipulative tool” (p. 151).

Using Culture as a Competitive Advantage

Yet another way to characterize organizational culture from the managerial perspective is to view it as the element that distinguishes it from other similar organizations, and, as a result, provides a competitive advantage. Scholars argue that it is the human resources of an organization that provide a sustainable competitive advantage (Ferris, Hochwarter, Buckley, Harrell-Cook, & Frink, 1999). Organizations in the same industry are likely to use the same technology, and have similar access to financial resources. The one thing that is unique for an organization is its mix of employees. As a result, an organization’s culture can provide a competitive advantage because competitors would have great difficulty in imitating it.

Executives and managers believe this premise, and it is reinforced by articles written in professional and trade associations (McKenna, 2003; Mitchell, & Yates, 2002). The presumption is that a strong, unified, and coherent culture is the path to excellence or high performance (Alvesson & Berg, 1991). At UPS, for example, organization executives consider its culture as a strategic asset. UPS senior vice president of human resources explains that the UPS culture is based on hiring and retaining the right people, nurturing innovation, and building a customer mindset. UPS, which employs 350,000 worldwide, communicates its values through training and education programs; relies on the business principles developed by its founder (known as the UPS Policy Book and Code of Business Conduct); and introduces new employees to its business from the ground up—all UPS employees begin their careers at the loading docks or in package cars (Soupata, 2001).
The Two Sides of Managerial Views

Despite the popular position promoted by many business books—that managers are solely responsible for an organization's culture—management scholarship presents a more varied perspective of organizational culture. Some management scholars adopt a position very similar to that of organizational communication scholars in acknowledging the role of all organizational members in the creation of an organization's culture. Adopting this perspective, a manager would appreciate that employees are as active in the creation of culture as managers and executives. To change some aspect of the culture, a manager would create clear, consistent, and continual messages about the change with that communication positioned within an environment that supports the desired change. By listening to employee concerns and seeking their input and feedback, managers include employees in creating or changing the culture. From this perspective, a manager would also acknowledge that employees may not attend to these cues or perceive them as she intended (Isaac & Pitt, 2001).

The two managerial positions toward organizational culture can be characterized this way. The traditional managerial position is more objective and presumes that an organization's culture resides in the organization as a result of other management controlled resources, such as organizational structure, technology, and managerial strategies. From this view, “a culture is something an organization has” (Smircich, 1983, p. 347). The second managerial position, which is more subjective and more similar to communication perspectives on organizational culture, presumes that culture is the essence of the organization. Thus, it would be logical to believe that all members contribute to the creation of that essence. From this view, “a culture is something an organization is” (Smircich, 1983, p. 347). It is unclear how practicing managers actually conceptualize organizational culture. However, the first position is the one that the contemporary popular business literature continues to fuel, as its books are directed toward what managers can do to direct or influence their organizational culture.

THE LENS OF POWER AND POLITICS

Power and politics are manifested in many different ways in organizations—four of which are primary to this discussion (Ragins, 1995). First, power can exist in an organizational member’s ability, in their perceived ability, or in others’ perceptions of that ability. For example, the attorney who wins the most cases, and secures the most fees for his
law firm, is perceived by his colleagues as setting the standard for production quality and quantity. Second, power can exist in the interactions among organizational members. Even without having a legitimate or formal role typically associated with rewards and punishments, an individual, through his or her interactions and relationships, can reward and punish others. Acknowledging good performance or excluding a coworker from the discussion are subtle and informal power mechanisms available to employees at all levels. Referential, or charismatic, power is also available to all employees.

Third, power may be structural because it is built into the design of the organization. For example, status attached to certain organizational functions (e.g., international operations, the engineering department) or roles (e.g., special assistant to the president, CFO) is derived from the organization’s structure. In these cases, discretionary power over people, information, and resources is legitimized by the organization. Fourth, sociopolitical power—such as racism, sexism, and classism—can be imported from the organization’s larger social environment into the organization. The assumptions and values embedded within and between demographic groups from which an organization pulls its employees are likely to be reflected in the organization’s culture. As a result of these four types of power, the cultural diversity of an organization may reflect an unequal allocation of power among diverse groups (Ragins, 1995).

Because the ideology of organizational leaders influences the values and assumptions of their organizations (Ragins, 1995) an ethnocentric perspective can emerge and result in unstated and unconscious bias. Thus, a leader’s ideology—the biases and perceptions held by that person—can infiltrate what the organization defines as success and who it allows to be successful (i.e., structural power). Both factors contribute to a self-perpetuating cycle reinforcing inequity from both social and individual sources. Sociopolitical and structural power are integrated and built into the day-to-day interactions and influence perceptions of power throughout the organization. The integration of these power sources can result in segregation of certain demographic groups into low-power jobs, functions, or departments with few opportunities for advancement. This integration can also create stressful and unhealthy work environments as organizational members from certain demographic groups are reminded on a daily basis of the value of their work or worth to the organization. Low wages, being denied participation in organizational discussions, or being mistreated by a boss of a
dominant demographic group are painful reminders that some groups of employees have power and others do not. It would be impossible for an organization’s culture not to carry symbolic meaning about who and what is powerful and who and what is not.

The Political Division of Employees and Managers

Obviously, not all cultural aspects are positive in nature or seen as positive by employees. Employee discrimination, harassment, and emotional abuse—behaviors that can be knowingly or unknowingly endorsed by management—often result in employee dissatisfaction and resistance. Employees experiencing abuse from their superiors can resist by taking personal leave days, focusing their energy on self-preservation rather than completing work goals, or leaving the organization.

Supervisors are charged with the organizational responsibility of evaluating employees and their performance—a practice that creates the potential for abuse to occur (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Thus, it is not surprising that most discriminatory and harassing abuse is carried out by supervisors on their subordinates. How the organization responds when an employee reports abuse from a supervisor is indicative of the organization’s (or least management’s) values about abuse, the role and nature of supervision in the organization, as well as beliefs about the superior-subordinate relationship—all elements of the organization’s culture. For example, an organization can take a variety of positions: take no action, admit that a problem exists but take no action, promise action but do nothing, attribute the problem to a personality conflict, ask the abused employee to change his or her behavior, minimize the complaint but enhance the abuser’s organizational status, label the abused employee as a troublemaker, retaliate against the victim, or discipline or terminate the abuser (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Notice that all but the last action demonstrates negative value toward the employee. Although abuse is situated in a specific workplace relationship of unequal power, organizational reaction to the abuse can influence other individuals who are not subject to the initial abuse. If employees believe the workplace is an unjust place, they can resist the cultural norms that support the existence of abuse.

Of course, employees can resist the politics and power embedded in organizations’ cultures. In the mid to late 1980s, the television series *Designing Women* had attracted a large viewership and was regularly one of the 10 most watched shows. Part of the show’s success was
attributed to Delta Burke who played one of the characters, Suzanne. Although the show was a vehicle for an ensemble cast, the basis for the show’s setting, its characters, and most of the scripts were attributable to Linda Bloodworth-Thomason, one of the show’s co-producers (see Keyton, 1994; Smith & Keyton, 2001). Thus, the culture of Mozark Productions that produced the show could be described as strongly leader-centered (i.e., Bloodworth-Thomason), yet group oriented. Tension between the producer and the actress heightened, as Burke’s star status escalated while Bloodworth-Thomason continued to write ensemble-oriented scripts allowing her to control the actresses. In the final episode of the 1989–1990 season a conflict erupted during production of the episode with Burke refusing to do a scene as written by Bloodworth-Thomason. Her resistance resulted in delay of production and contract negotiations. Eventually, the conflict moved into the public arena as both parties used the media to state their claims. In this case, creative control of the show was equal to reasserting cultural control and Burke’s resistance attempt eventually resulted in her leaving the show as well as the show’s cancellation.

Organizational Culture and the Critical Perspective

The critical perspective views the communication of an organization as an index of its ideology (Cooren & Taylor, 1997). Thus, critical cultural studies explore forms of organizational domination and control as well as the ways organizational members perpetuate or resist these forms. Deetz (1992) explains that the time spent in organizations and the influence of organizational routines and practices on our everyday lives (as both employees and consumers) ensures that we live under multiple forms of corporate control. Therefore, the critical perspective of organizational culture focuses on the ways in which organizational communication practices negatively influence employees’ quality of life.

Two elements are essential to understanding a critical perspective of organizational culture. First, organizations reside in the communication activities of its members. Second, organizations are sites of hierarchy, dominance, and power, and, as a result, organizational members have varying degrees of power and status and varying degrees of control over message creation and message meaning. When powerful organizational members can get others to accept their views about the organization and values about working, as they often do, then powerful organizational
members are in a position to create the normative practices of the organization’s culture. At first glance this may not seem so bad—after all, someone has to be in charge, and employees are paid to work.

However, powerful organizational members can establish a culture that is more favorable to them and less favorable to the less powerful. And, sometimes that is obvious. But, a favorable-unfavorable imbalance can be created and presented in such a way as to be seen as normal. When that happens, less powerful organizational members accept the views and values of the powerful without question. Two examples of critical cultural studies amplify these issues.

In a case analysis (Barker & Cheney, 1994) of Tech USA, a communications hardware manufacturing company was changing from a traditional hierarchical structure to self-managing teams. Under the previous structure, supervisors would provide directives and orders; under the new self-managing structure, the teams were to develop mechanisms to regulate worker attendance. The vision for the self-managing team structure was laid out in a statement by management that included values, such as personal initiative, responsibility, commitment to the team, and quality of individual and team contributions. As the teams worked, team members began to “establish value-laden premises that they expected each other to identify with and to apply” (p. 34). Thus, discipline that earlier had been established and practiced by management was now transferred to and willingly accepted by team members. These values were embedded in their interactions; moreover, the values were embraced by everyone, resulting in few attendance problems.

Several years later, after an influx of new employees, attendance problems became significant obstacles to work completion. Now, the seasoned team members who identified strongly with the teamwork values talked directly about the need to be on time. The subject was brought up at team meetings, team members began to monitor others’ attendance, and peer pressure was used to acknowledge and remedy the problem. Teams began to develop attendance policies, give reprimands and warnings, and report violations to management so attendance infractions could be entered on personnel records. Over a period of time, the teams had embraced the teamwork values with such passion that this attendance discourse was a regular part of their interactions. Not surprisingly, through collaborative efforts the teams developed an attendance policy that was “eerily reminiscent of the old, supervisory system” (Barker & Cheney, 1994, p. 36). Although employees had the opportunity to enact the self-managing team structure in
many potential ways, they eventually chose, embraced, and codified a stance toward attendance that was essentially the same as the previous system—emphasizing the power of organizational norms and its power when employees willingly monitor their own performance on behalf of the organization.

As a second example, Zoller’s (2003) study of an automobile manufacturing plant revealed the way in which employees, called associates, consented to work conditions that were, in essence, hazardous to their health. By self-identifying as a good associate, employees used several mechanisms to manage the contradictions between acknowledging the health risks of their work activities and supporting and protecting their employer. Some employees tolerated the increasing production pace, and its accompanying physical risks, by emphasizing that a fast pace masked the amount of time spent on the line; others argued they preferred to be in an active job rather than sitting behind a desk. Employees also acknowledged that being a good associate meant being able to take the hard work. Further, they emphasized the level of fitness required for the job instead of emphasizing the physical demands of the work that could be potentially unsafe. The level of physicality and the pace of work were accepted by employees because they believed that they were paid well (relative to other work available in their area).

In these ways, employees were trading their physical safety for the organization’s production goals and, as a result of this trade-off, embracing the organization’s view that valued quick-paced physical labor without complaints from employees. Thus, the culture shifted the responsibility of safety from the organization to the employees. Employees consented to this value shift despite experiencing numbness in their hands, injuring their teeth, and experiencing other injuries while working the line. Employees further embraced this shift by seeing their personal physicians rather than reporting injuries as OSHA incidents, and by maintaining their physical strength by working out on their personal time. In this culture, the shift for the responsibility of safety was structured by management in part because the company doctor refused to classify injuries as work-related and in part by the organization’s provision of a recreation center as a benefit to employees.

Organizational Culture and Concertive Control

Organizational power often comes in the form of concertive control, especially when organizations are motivated to pursue ongoing
change through popular management frameworks, programs, or strategies that emphasize employee participation. Concertive control occurs when employees adopt management’s interpretation of values and objectives in support of the organization’s mission (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985). The irony is that while change programs espouse that using their particular framework will allow the organization and its employees to be more flexible and adapt to environmental uncertainty, the change programs are often enacted as top-down strategies to control and dominate employees and their work environments (Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000). Although employee flexibility and autonomy can exist in a concertive organization, employees are guided in their decision making based on their identification with the values that serve the organization’s interests.

Such control can be established through three mechanisms (Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000). First, goals and values can be communicated through employee newsletters and annual reports; seeing these in print solidifies them as being real. Often presented in short phrases (e.g., “Focus on the customer,” “Lean and mean,” “More in 2004”), goals and values become repeatable slogans that can be adapted to any of the organization’s work settings. Second, managers can communicate goals and values orally, framing them within the advantages and virtues of the change program to create a vision of the future. For example, a study of employees in a large retail organization revealed that their perceptions about employee morale predicted their identification with the organization (Schrodt, 2002). Their responses to items from the Organizational Culture Survey (Glaser, Zamanou & Hacker, 1987), such as The organization motivates me to put out my best efforts and Working here feels like being part of a family, better predicted their organizational identification than items capturing their perceptions about teamwork, information flow, involvement, supervision, and the use of meetings in the organization. The values of trust and respect adopted and endorsed by the organization as part of its culture created a positive, but controlling, relationship between employees and the organization. Employees who reported identifying with the organization were more motivated in performing their organizational roles.

Third, managers can use active participation strategies in which employees help create the methods and strategies by which they (and the organization) will achieve the stated vision. As a form of control, concertive control can be effective and received positively by employees (e.g., Sobo & Sadler, 2002). At the outset, such change programs are
touted as empowering for employees, and such a premise can encourage employees to accept the program. Ironically, however, “control is masked by high-flying talk about mission, values, and ethics . . . precisely the kind of case in which control is most subtle . . . where it masks its own mechanisms and diverts the gaze of participants from the recognition of power” (Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000, p. 558). Employees—although enthusiastic about the organizational changes—were being influenced to work harder and more hours; some were asked to work unpaid weekends while others in the organization had lost their jobs. Although the efficiencies and gains in effectiveness that can be achieved through such change programs are laudable goals, the possibility does exist for employees to be disadvantaged, as they are less aware of the way in which the change program controls them.

Organizational Culture and Gender and Race

Demographic trends are evidence that organizations will experience greater gender and racial diversity in the workforce. Many organizations have programs (e.g., day care, flexible work hours, and hiring and recruiting more people of color) or policies (e.g., sexual harassment and antidiscrimination policies) purportedly designed to address some diversity issues. The absence or presence of such policies and programs are artifacts of the values and assumptions implicit in organizations’ cultures relative to gender and racial diversity. Yet even when such programs or policies are in place, most organizations have not developed innovative strategies for increasing the acceptance and support of diverse employees (Corsini & Fogliasso, 1997).

Gender

Because assumptions and values that are communicated create a culture, and because gender is socially constructed, workplaces are intersections of both organizational and societal cultures imbued with notions about gender. As a result, organizational cultures generally are male dominated and reinforce those gender stereotypes, beliefs, and assumptions (Alvesson, 2002). It is important to acknowledge that a male-dominated organization does not simply mean that males are favored and women are disfavored. Rather, both men and women can subscribe to masculine values and assumptions in an organization because organizations and society are based on male models. This
masculine orientation is embedded within structure (e.g., organizational hierarchy), activity (e.g., the organization sponsors golf tournaments for its executives), and language (e.g., sales contests, competitive strategies, price wars), and it becomes and is perceived by employees as the normal or natural manner in which organizations function, even as women internalize this orientation that devalues their own (Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996).

For example, Ashcraft and Pacanowsky (1996) describe and analyze the culture of Office Inc., a commercial office furniture organization, which was founded by and is largely staffed by women. Most of the company’s 32 employees are women; only 9 men work at Office, Inc. Employees were quick to point out that their organization was different due to the large number of female employees. Yet, they were hesitant to label their organization or its culture as feminine even though they identified their focus on relational concerns—including emotions, feelings, and a dislike of direct approaches for managing conflict—as characteristic of the Office, Inc. culture. Complicating employees’ view of their organization’s culture was their acknowledgement of the pettiness and jealousy that allowed a destructive cycle of indirect competition to also characterize the culture. As a result, getting ahead was achieved at the expense of someone else. One female employee described her disappointment at joining an organization largely composed of women only to find the other women divided into impenetrable cliques. While female employees “embraced a ‘female’ concern for human relationships in business affairs, they simultaneously revered the gendered values of conventional business practices, including the supremacy of objectivity and a limited conception of rationality as rigidly task-centered, strictly linear, and non-emotional” (p. 233). Many women voiced their difficulties in balancing the contributions that being female provided with the normalized masculine characteristics of the business world.

In another example, Dougherty (2001) examined how sexual harassment functions within a regional comprehensive health care center. Male employees argued that the emotional nature of their work created stress, and that engaging in sexual communication and behavior was one way to reduce the stress. Their cultural assumption was: This workplace behavior serves important stress reducing functions, therefore it is not sexual harassment. On the other hand, female employees did not view sexual behavior as functional or appropriate, but they did view it as the norm in their organization. In this organization,
organizational norms and assumptions about the same behaviors were differentiated by gender.

While a masculine orientation to organizing “traps people in all respects from occupational choice to acceptance/rejection of tasks in every day working life” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 134), women are more likely to suffer physically, psychologically, economically, and socially from an organization’s masculine orientation. The stories of Frances Conley (1998), who resigned her position as professor of neurosurgery at Stanford University medical school due to overt gender discrimination, and Lois Jenson (Bingham & Gansler, 2002), who initiated the class action sexual harassment suit against Eveleth Mines, demonstrate the embedded ways in which organizational cultures can uphold masculine values as normative while devaluing the workplace contributions of females. Both stories underscore the way organizational cultures can be differentiated into male and female subcultures with the female subculture being subordinated to the male subculture.

In reporting her experiences, Conley (1998) describes performing brain surgery with a junior male resident observing and assisting when one of her male colleagues burst into the operating room and asked, “How’s it going, honey?” (p. 65). Lois Jenson worked in an organizational culture in which the following sign (Bingham & Gansler, 2002, p. 132) was posted on the company’s locked bulletin board along with work schedules and assignments, and company job postings:

Sexual harassment in this area will not be reported

However, it will be graded

Both examples reveal the normative acceptance of the masculine orientation in these organizational cultures, as both communication behaviors were public and common.

As another example of gender domination in organization cultures, Murphy’s (1998) examination of flight attendants explores the way in which the gender-stereotyped profession is enacted in one airline’s culture. She explains that although no longer legal, the airline’s written policies and procedures present a feminine construction of airline attendant as caretaker, mother, subordinate, and sexual object. Although both women and men are now employed as flight attendants, the profession is still predominantly staffed by women and the profession is still feminized by airline organizations and the flying public. For example, one
written airline rule dictated that flight attendants should “assure that all pilots have sufficient beverages before taxi and during cruise to avoid dehydration” (p. 512). Flight attendants, she observed, resented the airline’s rule that flight attendants must take care of, or serve, pilots when they are busy with boarding, safety, and other passenger service activities. In addition to the internal organizational value that subordinated flight attendants to pilots, Murphy (1998) explains that flight attendants were also subjected to public, or external, value preferences. For example, passengers regularly made negative comments about flight attendants’ appearances in spite of having positive service experiences. Flight attendants, in their role as public representatives of the airline, work in organizational cultures in which societal influences help drive internal organizational values.

**Race**

Organizational cultures are also sites in which organizational values about race intersect with employees’ assumptions and values about race brought by them into the organizational environment. Just as gender is socially constructed, race is socially constructed, as we choose to interpret race in particular ways. The values and assumptions relative to race and racial differences that are negotiated in society are also negotiated in organizations.

While it is true that the United States is becoming a more culturally diverse workforce, it is also true that “people of color persistently and disproportionately occupy menial service-sector jobs” (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003, p. 5). Just as organizations are predominantly masculine, they also predominantly support values and ideals of Whites, Caucasians, or European Americans. As a result, organizational cultural diversity can result in tension, conflict, and discrimination as dominant values intersect with values held by groups of minority employees. At a surface level, some employees have more organizational power based simply on their cultural background—most often when employees’ cultural background is similar to that of the legitimate power holders in the organization.

As an example, in a study of a large organization (Meares, Oetzel, Torres, Derkacs, & Ginossar, 2004), interviews with employees revealed the way in which different cultural groups perceived mistreatment in their organization. Narratives of European Americans indicated that they perceived themselves as having the agency to
confront and rectify mistreatment within the organizational structure. For example, a European American male in his 50s said, “I’m a White male, so I’m not used to it. I’m not preconditioned, so I wouldn’t let it [mistreatment] pass” (p. 13). Conversely, organizational members from minority cultural groups indicated that they had little confidence that they would be able resolve or eliminate mistreatment on their own. For example, a 40-year-old Hispanic woman said:

I’d try to resolve with the person, but often it goes nowhere. If you go higher up you get on the shit list of troublemakers, which affects promotion and appraisal, and managers say you are not a team player. I feel that there’s no effort to institute fairness. . . . Everything can’t be fair, but an effort should be made, an attempt. (p. 15)

The narratives of organizational members from different cultural groups revealed that mistreatment was culturally based. The narratives also revealed the different assumptions different groups of organizational members held about mistreatment and what they could do about it. Undoubtedly, in this organization the intersection of organizational and cultural values created differentiated subcultures.

Using a much smaller health care facility in a small town that employed 49 African Americans and 471 White-Americans, Corsini and Fogliasso (1997) found that African American employees adjusted their communication style to that of the majority when answering phones or when interacting in formal organizational meetings. This examination underscores the additional burden placed on African Americans during these adaptations. Not only did they adapt their communication style to that of the organization’s culture, they also had to adapt their communication style to that of the majority or White culture. In comparison, White employees’ adaptation to the style of the organization is easier in that they are familiar with the majority culture style having grown up in it. The assumptions one carries about what constitutes an appropriate or effective communication style are influenced by our race and social interpretations of others. Carried into the workplace these assumptions can influence our evaluations of other workplace behaviors and motives.

While gender and cultural diversity can be beneficial to the workplace, the domination of masculine and White values often results in harassment and discrimination. Subtle value differences can become
manifest in the behaviors of majority group organizational members such that minority group members face systemic and organizational barriers by having less opportunity to (a) advance or be promoted, (b) take on or be given challenging assignments, and (c) be treated equally with respect to salary and other organizational benefits. In addition, an organizational culture that unknowingly or knowingly supports discriminatory practices can also result in informal barriers, such as daily and ongoing interaction that is rude, disrespectful, and prejudicial (Cox, 1993). Thus, the powerful (based on their ethnicity, race, or gender) enact organizational values that disadvantage the powerless (based on their ethnicity, race, or gender).

THE LENS OF TECHNOLOGY

Unless you work in an IT (information technology) job, you are probably like me. I like to learn and use new computer applications to help me be more efficient and effective in my job—but I do not know how the technology works (and I really do not care; I just want it to work).

As technology is applied to jobs, two types of expertise are created. First, there is the content expertise—employees who work on the machines that produce cardboard boxes are a good example. At one of these companies, many employees have been manufacturing boxes for more than 20 years. They are experts. They can identify a good box from a bad one. But as technology has developed, box making has become less industrial and more computerized, which requires the second type of expertise—process expertise. The large and complex machines now used in box making require employees with engineering, computer, and technical expertise, in addition to context expertise. With the new equipment, the box makers still make the call on whether the boxes are good or bad, and they understand how the machinery works. In fact, they are often the ones who fix the equipment or identify for the engineers or computer technicians what is wrong with the machinery. But, they do not make the machinery, nor do they program it, or write the programming code. As work processes become more reliant on more complicated technologies, other types of expertise are needed in the organization.

Think about how technology has changed organizations. If your primary work tool is a pencil, three things can happen: it needs to be sharpened, it snaps in two, or you lose it. The solution is simple: sharpen the pencil or get a new one. However, if your primary work tool is a
personal computer, many different malfunctions can happen. The power can be disrupted. The hardware can fail to function properly. The software can become infected with a virus. And, most workers cannot fix these things, as they are not electricians, computer techs, or software experts. Rather, they are experts in processing medical insurance claims, experts at scheduling airline flights, and experts in designing traffic flow. In this sense, improved technology distinguishes the process of work from the content of the work, and, in turn, requires organizations to employ cadres of employees or consultants who can get something fixed so we can get back to work.

Schein (1992) points to the irony that this situation has created. Many IT workers can be characterized as being intolerant of ambiguity, precise and accurate, and preferring logical rules and procedures. These characteristics are useful in creating electronic and computer systems and devices to help others accomplish their work. But frequently the order that technology provides is layered on a job that is best handled by an employee who can deal effectively with an ambiguous and imprecise work environment, and who can see the uniqueness in each situation and person. Thus, technology has heightened different approaches to work styles and their accompanying values.

A study of 18 government and for-profit organizations demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between organizational culture and technological implementation (Harper & Utley, 2001). When employees reported that their organizational cultures valued autonomy, trust, teamwork, flexibility, and the sharing of information, implementation of information technology systems was more successful. On the other hand, when employees reported that their organizational cultures valued a strong or rigid rule orientation and compliance to managers’ orientations, and could be characterized as careful, precise, or predictable, implementation of information technology systems was less successful. Thus, having technology is not enough. Having a culture that supports organizational members in their use of technology is also required.

The way in which technology structures work activities influences organizational members’ work roles and work relationships as well. Thus, the relationship between technology and organizational culture is inherent. Too frequently, the expense associated with technology causes it to be viewed as a universal organizational improvement without considering the ways in which different groups of employees might view or use it. As Huang, Newell, Galliers, and Pan (2003) found, subculture groups have different technology needs as well as
different relationships to the organization. As a result, different groups place different demands on the use of technology.

Technological Monitoring of Employees

A second impact technology has had on organizational culture is the opportunity technology provides to control and monitor employees (Schein, 1992). Companies routinely monitor employees’ email and web use; phone calls are recorded; and entrance and exit to one’s workspace is documented. The practice is widespread. The American Management Association (2000) reports that as many as 75% of large companies electronically monitor their employees in some way. In many organizations security is tied to technology.

Ostensibly, the action of swiping your organizational identification card to release the locked door to the building is for your safety. Yet, such devices also track your whereabouts and notify your supervisor when you are available for work. In one pharmaceutical company, pharmacy techs service customers around the country by phone on a rotating 24/7 schedule. Pharmacy techs are required to slide their identification cards through a card reader when they enter and exit the building, and when they take time for a scheduled break or lunch in the organization’s lunchroom. This type of monitoring allows management to shift calls from one tech to another by simply looking at a computer monitoring employees’ whereabouts. So rather than having a break between calls, techs found their phones ringing almost immediately as they completed the previous call. Techs who took longer-than-allowed breaks were reminded with a printout of their rules violations.

This type of managerial monitoring and control is arguably put into place to increase productivity, improve quality of service, and reduce costs (Alder, 2001). Yet, these systems can dampen employee enthusiasm and motivation, increase work stress, diminish employee health, and encourage employees to subvert and create ways around the system. Alternatively, employee performance monitoring systems have been reported to increase employee satisfaction and morale because they resulted in more objective performance appraisals and improved performance feedback. Still, assumptions about employee responsibility (and rights) are being challenged. As one tech said, “I work for them, but they don’t own me.” This type of monitoring and control emphasizes values than can hamper innovation and teamwork. “I’m here, I do my job; that’s it.”
As you might suspect, organizational culture influences employee attitudes and reactions to employee performance monitoring systems, especially employee reactions of fairness and trust. Members of supportive organizational cultures are more likely to have negative reactions as the practice of monitoring conflicts with a culture that values openness and support. Alder (2001) claims, however, that employees may respond more favorably to monitoring if organizations focus on monitoring task-related activities that are directly related to employee performance. Such a premise presents a conundrum, as not all monitoring devices can determine if your email, phone call, web activity, or break time is personal or work related. Electronic monitoring of employee activities is central to employees’ sense of fairness and trust, both of which will influence employees’ view of organizational culture.

THE LENS OF GLOBALIZATION

Many organizations have expanded beyond their national borders by entering global markets, working with foreign subsidiaries, creating international alliances, and engaging in multinational joint ventures. As such, these global organizations “are at the intersection of diverse communicative, cultural, and social practices” (Stohl, 2001, p. 325). This type of organizational global expansion has occurred due to the creation of international trade alliances (e.g., NAFTA, the European Union), and greater reliance on innovation that requires foreign labor and material resources, and in hopes of saturating new markets and securing more sales. With these expansion efforts, global organizations are (a) becoming structurally flatter and more team oriented, (b) increasingly relying on communication technology, (c) becoming geographically more scattered, and (d) becoming more culturally diverse. Despite the financial and market incentives for organizations to create international and multinational organizations, many suffer and fail due to cultural differences (Pothukuchi, Damanpour, Choi, Chen, & Park, 2002).

Traditionally, organizations are believed to be embedded in the larger society in which they exist. For example, national cultures vary along dimensions of orientation to time, authority or power, communication, community, formality, goal-orientation, performance orientation, space, structure—all dimensions that would influence business practices, how an organization is configured, how work is structured
and coordinated, and career and occupational expectations (Dickson, Aditya, & Chhokar, 2000; Hofstede, 2001; Stohl, 2001; Triandis, 1983). Despite the admission that cultural variability exists within any nation, national or societal culture is still assumed to coincide with the geographical boundaries of nation-states (Child, 1981). With the globalization of organizations, new questions about the relationship between national culture and organizational culture are being debated.

One of the most distinguishing features between nations and cultures is language. Even when two countries such as the United States and Great Britain speak the same language, nuances, patterns of speech, favored expressions, and idioms demonstrate differences between the two cultures. Language reveals what is valued by a nation and how society is structured. A language system is embedded within a nation’s historical, political, legal, and economic systems. Together these influence how organizations organize and how organizations and employees express organizational roles.

Because of these inherent national differences, communication competence is believed to be culture specific. Managers from one country who take work assignments in another often lack awareness of the foreign culture, and are often deficient in language skills as well. In particular, many U.S. citizens are more likely to be monolingual, relying entirely on their English language skills, as compared with citizens of other nations who are educated to be bilingual or multilingual.

Even when language skills are satisfactory and cultural awareness is heightened, it is still possible for organizational members to commit national cultural transgressions in organizational settings. One common cultural transgression is the overreliance on negative cultural stereotypes. Phrases such as “All Germans are . . .” or “All Mexicans are . . .” demonstrate an individual’s failure to see other organizational members as individuals with overgeneralizations based on group membership rather than individual employees’ work competencies or contributions. Another common transgression occurs when one national group is structurally positioned vis-à-vis other national groups. For example, phrases like “Americans think they need to lead this effort” or “German engineers are better” use cultural stereotypes to position one group as being organizationally superior (or deficient) to another.

The prevailing business practices, norms, and values of an organization are, to a large extent, aligned with the nation’s culture (Katz, Swanson, & Nelson, 2001; Lindsley, 1999). For example, the U.S. culture
supports the work values of salary equity, job independence, and compensation for initiative and performance. While widely supported as ideal values, these values are not always enacted; when enacted these values take on divergent forms; and alternative organizing structures support other sets of values. Thus, the alignment between a national culture and an organization’s culture is not always similar or isomorphic. Indeed, across 64 cultures and 800 organizations, Dickson, Aditya, and Chhokar (2000) discovered no consistent correspondence across cultural dimensions between organizations and societies. A pattern simply did not exist. National culture shifts over time and subcultural differences do exist within a nation’s larger cultural framework. Still, national cultural tendencies can and do surface in organizations.

Greater cultural complexity occurs when organizational members from many national cultures work together. For example, in studying U.S.-owned assembly plants in Mexico, organizations known as maquiladoras, Lindsley (1999) found that managers from the United States used communication behaviors that reflected an independent view of self with the result of violating Mexican communication behaviors that reflected an interdependent identity. Although managers from both groups shared an organizational identity, their national identities regularly conflicted. Thus, individuals drew on values from both their national culture and their organizational association that provided a layered interpretation of their experiences in the maquiladoras.

How do different cultural expectations influence business success? In the study of joint ventures, Pothukuchi, Damanpour, Choi, Chen, and Park (2002) discovered that differences in national and organizational culture influenced organizational outcomes differently. When the joint venture included organizations with different national cultures, the differences had the potential to positively or negatively influence efficiency and competitiveness of the joint venture. Thus, the direction of the influence depended on the ways in which the national cultures differed and the ways in which those differences were perceived by the international partners—as either conflicts and barriers, or as challenges and opportunities. When the joint venture included organizations with more similar organizational cultures—particularly around how the organizations shared information, the difference positively influenced employee satisfaction with the joint venture. Thus, while national cultural differences could generate positive or negative effects, differences in organizational culture were more likely to generate negatives ones. These findings suggest that how organizational members
view national cultural differences is key. If national cultural differences are perceived to be part of an international or multinational organizational culture and embraced positively, they can in turn create a challenging and stimulating work environment with organizational members developing an organizational culture to accommodate and bridge national cultural differences.

Some of these national culture issues are evident in the 1999 merger of Chrysler Corporation and Daimler Benz. This merger required that organizational members from two national cultures become integrated into one company, DaimlerChrysler AG. The companies had distinctive personalities and cultures. On one hand, Chrysler, an American company, valued innovation and flexibility in a highly focused business strategy; on the other hand, Daimler Benz, a German maker of luxury cars, valued rigid structure and managerial hierarchy. While Chrysler had little international success, Daimler Benz had operations throughout Europe, South America, and India causing industry experts to see the merger of the two companies as a logical fit.

Fitzgibbon and Seeger’s (2002) analysis of the metaphors used as strategic devices during the merger eventually revealed the extent to which these companies were different and the way in which national culture influenced those differences. Initially, the merger was announced accompanied by Daimler Benz CEO Jurgen Schrempp’s pronouncement that the companies complemented one another and created the perfect fit of two market leaders. He went so far as to indicate that the companies shared a common corporate culture and mission. Throughout the merger process, three metaphors—a single global entity, a good fit, and a marriage of equals—were repeated frequently by executives of both companies. Early in the merger process, Chrysler’s Integration Team identified that the expected “good fit” of markets and products must be accompanied by a cultural fit, and suggested cross-cultural training, and a shared and defined code of conduct. A few months later, a Chrysler management group revealed that one risk was that Chrysler’s identity and culture would be incorporated not into, but under Daimler’s way of doing business. Despite the projected values for the merged company, it did not result in a good cultural fit. Merging the American innovation and informality with German structure and bureaucratic form produced a confusion of American and German values, creating organizational inconsistencies with little synergy.
Obviously, the DaimlerChrysler AG merger involved organizational members at the highest executive and professional levels. If national cultures influence organizational culture at those levels where psychological rewards and material benefits from work are great, in what way are employees at lower hierarchical levels affected? Cruise line employees participated in a study that compared their national cultures with their organizational cultures, particularly examining the way in which national-organizational culture fit influenced their ratings of job satisfaction. Results revealed that lower level employees were more likely to have lower job satisfaction ratings when their organizational culture did not fit their national culture values. Given that lower level employees generally experience less job satisfaction than those in managerial ranks, these findings suggest the importance of greater national and organizational culture awareness among companies that employ workers from many cultures (Testa, Mueller, & Thomas, 2003).

These cases highlight the way in which international and multinational forms of organizing must address issues of cultural convergence and cultural divergence (Stohl, 2001). Cultural convergence emphasizes one best way—predominantly capitalism—of conducting business regardless of the cultural identities of the organizations involved. Convergence assumes that the marketplace has created organizations so similarly structured that multinational organizations can be organized in such a way as to bear no national allegiance. These supposedly culture-free multinational organizations can emerge because common market characteristics demand a common business language. Under the convergence frame, communication is viewed as functioning similarly across cultures. Cultural divergence, on the other hand, focuses on how business is conducted differently in different countries and highlights rather than dismisses national values and traditions. Divergence acknowledges that cultural differences do make a difference in how people interact in the conduct of business. However, organizations do not simply choose between cultural convergence and divergence. Rather, “the environmental and technological pressures on contemporary organizations to become more and more similar clash with the proprietary pull of cultural identifications, traditional values, and conventional practices of social life” (Stohl, 2001, p. 36). Despite being profit driven to build global markets, organizations cannot resist the influences of the political, legal, and social constraints of national culture. The interactions of organizational members are laden
with values drawn from these systems. Thus, when individuals from two or more national cultures interact within an organizational culture, the convergence-divergence dichotomy fails to leave room for cultural variation or practical contingencies created by the individuals in that organizational situation (Nelson & Gopalan, 2003; Ogbor, 2000).

Any exploration of organizational culture in multinational corporations must consider all potential cultural influences on organizational members. Obviously, national culture comparisons will be made. However, a simple U.S. versus Japanese cultural comparison, for example, will miss the variability within each culture—particularly on dimensions of gender, profession, ethnicity, and religion that produce powerful influences on organizational culture. This simple either/or comparison will also miss the cultural influences of each of the organizations or of each of the units within the organization, as well as regional, national, and industry influences (Sackmann, 1997). In a multinational organization, or any joint venture, “all of these potential cultural identities may simultaneously influence the cultural context of an organization” (p. 2).

This discussion reinforces the notion that organizations are facing a new business environment—one that integrates business strategy, innovation, strategic planning, technological change, organizational vision and mission with issues of organizational culture (Ulijn, O’Hair, Weggeman, Ledlow, & Hall, 2000). Expanding into global markets to create and sell innovative products is one way for organizations to remain competitive, as well as to attract and retain skilled workers. Generally, global organizations are faced with a number of communication challenges, as they find it necessary to make decision making more participative, rely more heavily on cross-functional teams and communication technology, and improve systems of organizational learning. Thus, communication within global organizations becomes increasingly more complex, as does communication with external constituents. As a result, organizational culture is challenged to both satisfy and represent the multiple perspectives evident in global organizations.

**SUMMARY**

Communication in an organization is ubiquitous and complex, and it is not neutral. Because the process of creating organizational culture is not neat or tidy, and because the communication system of an organization
is difficult to see as a whole, scholars use a variety of ways of identifying and investigating organizational culture.

The symbolic performance perspective acknowledges that a system of symbols—including the everyday and the unique—is responsible for creating complexity, and sometimes contradictions, in the totality of organizational communication and the organization’s resulting culture. This view of organizational culture seeks to examine the way in which communication brings culture into being.

Organizational culture as narrative reproduction examines stories as artifacts to understand an organization’s values, norms, and beliefs. From the storyteller’s perspective, the specifics of the story are the cultural elements that are salient to the storyteller. Organizational culture as textual reproductions examines the formal and informal written texts from organizations and their members. Textual reproductions of organizational culture are useful for exploring espoused versus enacted elements of culture. Formal documentation more frequently represents the managerial and espoused view of organizational culture while informal texts are better representations of the enacted culture.

From a managerial lens, organizational culture is viewed as prescriptive and treated as a resource or tool. From this perspective, organizational culture is developed and directed by managers for the purpose of improving operating efficiencies, enhancing the bottom line, or creating satisfied customers. Thus, a managerial lens views organizational culture as a control device, and as a screening device in selecting employees to achieve good person-organization fit. A managerial lens also views organization culture for how it can be managed or changed to influence organizational success or as a competitive advantage in the marketplace or in attracting new employees.

Power and politics are manifested in many different ways in organizations. This lens highlights those struggles in organizational culture from both functional and structural viewpoints, as well as from the critical perspectives. The critical perspective views the communication of an organization as an index of its ideology or culture. Thus, critical studies explore the ways in which organizational members resist domination and other forms of corporate control in the organization’s culture. Organizational cultures are also sites of concertive control—when employees adopt management’s interpretation of values and objectives in support of the organization’s mission. The values and assumptions relative to gender and race that are negotiated in society are also negotiated in organizations. Organizational cultures often replicate societal
power and domination as organizations are often constructed based on masculine and White values resulting in harassment and discrimination. Thus, viewing organizational culture from a gendered and racial viewpoint can illuminate how organizational power is created and maintained in an organization’s culture.

Technology and globalization are other external forces that influence organizational cultures. Technology structures the work of organizations, and as a result, influences organizational culture, work activities, organizational members’ work roles, and their work relationships. Too frequently, the expense associated with technology causes it to be viewed as a universal organizational improvement without considering the ways in which different groups of employees might view or use it. Electronic monitoring is another form of organizational technology use that influences organizational culture. Many organizations are being influenced by globalization as they have expanded beyond their national borders by entering global markets, working with foreign subsidiaries, creating international alliances, and engaging in multinational joint ventures. This new business environment creates an intersection of diverse communicative, cultural, and social practices that raises new questions about the appropriateness of the traditional cultural convergence and cultural divergence dichotomy.