

# Organizational influence processes : perceptions of values, communication and effectiveness

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## ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCE PROCESSES: PERCEPTIONS OF VALUES, COMMUNICATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

The most significant contribution of this research is the discovery that value dimensions and communication practices within organizations are strongly related to measures of perceptions of organizational effectiveness and work satisfactions. These relationships were not only found within individual organizations, but were even stronger across organizations. The strength of these relationships provides support for a co-evolutionary model which suggests that we cannot arbitrarily punctuate distinctions among perceptions of organizational culture (as operationalized in value dimensions), work satisfactions, communication processes, and organizational effectiveness. Organizations that develop effective communication processes are more likely to both have more positive work environments and be more effective in achieving their objectives. Similarly, organizations that are effective are more likely to have the resources and talent to develop effective communication practices and a positive work environment.

Individuals in eight organizations were utilized to establish the initial relationships among organizational value dimensions (cultural themes), an expanded measure of organizational effectiveness, work satisfactions and a variety of communication processes. Importantly, the organizations differed in individual perceptions of effectiveness and the values (cultural rules) operating in each organization. These organizational differences supported analytic strategies grouping cultural rules into two across-organization value dimensions: a "taking care of business" dimension and a "how to operate politically" dimension. The understanding of these complex relationships both within and across contexts extends current theoretical explanations and is significant for professionals charged with the development of a variety of organizational messages.

*Keywords:* Organizational Values, Organizational Effectiveness, Sensemaking Communication Rules, Organizational Politics

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## Introduction

The importance of understanding how diverse organizational members perceive and interpret their complex environments is a fundamental challenge for those interested in both individual and organization-wide responses and behaviors. For the past several years attempts to understand perception and interpretation processes have focused on organizational cultures, symbolism, and sensemaking with a view of organizations as dynamic, continually changing, and meaning-producing (Deetz, 1992; Hofstede, 1984, 1991; Weick, 1995).

The study of interpretative processes within organizations has generated a renewed interest in the influences to which organizational members attend and how these influences relate to a variety of organizational processes. Inherent in this evolution of thinking about interpretative processes are important questions about communication, uncertainty, values, risk, and overall conceptions of organizational effectiveness. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine a co-evolutionary perspective which seeks to link organizational value dimensions (cultural thematic rules) across organizations to descriptions of organizational effectiveness, work satisfactions, and a variety of organizational communication processes. Specifically, this study sought to establish relationships among value dimensions, expanded descriptions of organizational effectiveness, work satisfactions, and perceptions of organizational communication processes in order to better understand how perceptions frequently described as organizational outcomes may more appropriately be considered as simultaneous influence and outcome processes. Expanded understanding of how organizational members interpret their complex environments is of theoretical and pedagogical interest and of significant practical importance for those responsible for leadership and the development of a variety of organizational messages.

## Background and research perspective

In recent years the evolving construct of culture has moved from a somewhat static view to a concept that focuses on communication and socially constructed processes which assist individuals in organizing and interpreting a variety of experiences (Hofstede, 1984, 1991; Schein, 1984; Morey & Luthans, 1985; Deetz, 1992; Thralls, 1992; & Weick, 1995).

Thralls (1992), in positioning communication as the essence of the social reality construction process, suggests that, "Communication is viewed as essential to this construction of social reality because it is through symbols and language that culture is constituted and communicated to others. Interpretive anthropologists hold communication processes as so central to any understanding of culture that many theorists now commonly refer to cultures as texts, a concept popularized by Geertz (Local Knowledge). According to this view, social activities are textualized through meaningful symbolic transactions, including visual and verbal forms of expression. These textualizations are synonymous with culture because it is through communication that the social organization of groups is defined and culture made a material reality. Communication also provides access to culture: Through the 'reading' of a culture's texts, people formulate an understanding of the world in which they operate, and thus they learn about and become socialized into a culture (Thralls 1992: 381)."

Barabas (1990) contends, "...the social constructionist 'view' is based on the assumption that what we know lies neither in the mind nor in nature as mirrored in the mind, but resides within a particular community of knowledgeable peers. Thus, there is no universal foundation for knowledge, only the agreement and consensus of the community (Barabas 1990: 61)." Barabas relates organizational culture to producing and shaping knowledge, "...the community, or the individuals within a particular environment, generate and sustain the organizational culture. Two complementary perspectives on knowledge construction pertain here: the evolutionary model of Weick (1979) and the social information processing model of Salanick and Pfeffer (1978). The evolutionary model emphasizes how knowledge is constructed and interpreted at the organizational level. According to this model, environmental cues within the organization stimulate individuals to enact, select, and retain certain information. These environmental cues, or 'cognitive maps' (see Johnson, 1977), are stored in the organization's 'memory' in the form of legends, stories, myths, operations procedures, employee manuals, and the like. These furthermore serve as a basis for guiding, interpreting, and evaluating the appropriateness of one's behavior. By contrast, the social information processing model emphasizes how an organization's social environment shapes the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of its members, and in so doing, influences those of the organization. Through social interaction, individuals begin to perceive and structure experience in similar

ways, and this sense of 'group think' or community in turn gives rise to organizational culture: to commonly held views of an organization's image, shared assumptions, goals, and means of achieving them" (Barabas 1990: 73-74).

### Cultural Theme and Role and Value analyses

Cultural theme analysis has been widely utilized to examine a variety of cultural processes within organizations (Agar, 1979; Spradley, 1979, 1980; Schall, 1983; Morey & Luthans, 1985; Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1989; Morley & Shockley-Zalabak, 1991; and Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1994). Morey and Luthans (1985) define themes as, "recurrent and important principles occurring in a number of cultural domains. Themes are used in this sense to link subsystems of cultural meaning because they are assertions of high generality that apply to a number of situations. People use them to organize their behavior and interpret experience (Spradley, 1980). As Agar (1979) explains, "themes deal with important beliefs, values, and rules of behavior that cross boundaries and context. The study of themes would be especially useful for analyzing organizations 'as if' (metaphorically) they were cultural systems" (Morey and Luthans 1985: 224).

In related work, Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1989) and Morley and Shockley-Zalabak (1991) examined relationships among organizational founders' values, individual organization member values, organizational culture, organizational communication activities, and perceptions of organizational outcomes. Both studies were based on the Schall (1983) argument that a communication rule-based approach was particularly appropriate for the study of "shared realities" and values that influence organizational expectations. Cushman, King, and Smith (1988) have characterized the Schall approach as a contingency rules theory perspective that permits various subcultures based on rule sets and images both similar to and divergent from the formal culture espoused by management. The Schall approach coupled with the Poole and McPhee (1983) and Poole, Seibold and McPhee (1985) structurational rules theory perspective provides a dynamic view of communication rules, where diverse rule sets emerge through complex formal and informal interactions. Structurational theory further proposes a reciprocal relationship

where rules not only influence behavior but rules also are influenced by members' conceptions of appropriate behaviors.

Gilsdorf (1998) defines rules as "...the assumptions organizational members make about the right way to communicate in given situations in their particular organization. Rules might be formal or informal; written or oral; implicit or explicit; general (an organization-wide policy, for instance) or particular (specific to a department or even to a task); positively stated or implied ('do this') or negatively stated or implied ('avoid this'; Gilsdorf, 1987) (Gilsdorf 1998: 174)." Gilsdorf identifies a variety of categories of rules: written and acknowledged; written but unacknowledged; unwritten and explicitly stated/acknowledged; and unwritten, definitely present, but unacknowledged and unlikely to be viewed as policy. Gilsdorf relates communication rules to culture, "Written rules are conveyed by familiar means such as policy statements, memos, or posters. In contrast, unwritten rules are not always easy to trace. Some are clear, some are 'fuzzy.' The more they are understood rather than explicit, the more they blur into the area that is considered *culture*—that is, an organization's shared vision, values, beliefs, goals, and practices. Rules are sometimes formulated deliberately but sometimes coalesce from practice. Whatever their origin, rules exist, and they guide the decisions of organizational actors" (Gilsdorf 1998: 175).

Schall (1983) has described a communication rule-based approach as identifying broad cultural themes in the form of communication rules that influence individual understanding and perceptions of behavior. Schall defines thematic communication rules as general operationalizations of values and beliefs. These rules are capable of influencing behavior and can be evaluated and sanctioned. The Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1989), Morley and Shockley-Zalabak (1991), and Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1994) studies defined thematic rules as implicit organizational values, beliefs, and assumptions identified and evaluated by organizational members as guides for expected day-to-day behaviors.

The primary focus of the Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1989, 1991, 1994) work in a series of U.S.A. high-technology companies tested and supported a model that suggested individuals hold personal values, beliefs, and assumptions about ideal organizational life that they continually contrast with their perceptions of organizational reality as evidenced in organizational culture themes. This contrast between members' own ideal and their perceived organizational reality was found to be related to organizational satisfaction and estimations of organizations' quality and

overall effectiveness. Morley, Shockley-Zalabak, and Cesaria (1997) extended this model to European organizations and established a series of value dimensions (cultural themes) across organizations which tap three important organizational constructs: (1) how success is defined; (2) the degree of acceptance/conformity expected; and (3) how expectations of work life should be defined.

Studies of organization as opposed to individual values increasingly are common (Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990; Kabanoff, Waldersee, & Cohen, 1995; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991; Rousseau, 1990). Complexes of values are conceived of as value structures or the overall pattern of relations among a set of values, containing elements of both compatibility and conflict among them (Schwartz, 1992; Kabanoff, Waldersee, & Cohen, 1995). At both the individual and organization-wide level values structures or dimensions are theorized as central for understanding organizational structures, functioning, creation, change, and culture.

### Organizational Sensemaking

Weick's (1995) work on organizational sensemaking articulates important relationships among values, environmental influences, communication, and both individual and collective organizational action. His discussions help us move beyond notions of communication producing a variety of organizational outcomes to a more comprehensive understanding of the simultaneous intersections of perceptions and action. Sensemaking, according to Weick (1995), is grounded in both individual and social activity and is about such things as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning. Weick, in presenting varying perspectives on sensemaking from Starbuck and Milliken (1988), Thomas, Clark and Gioia (1993), and Sackman (1991) describes influences to which organizational members attend and how these influences relate to a variety of organizational processes. Specifically, Starbuck and Milliken (1988) suggest that when people put stimuli into frameworks, this enables them "to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict (Starbuck and Milliken 1988: 51)." Thomas, Clark, and Gioia (1993) present sensemaking as "the reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning ascription, and action

(Clark, and Gioia 1993: 240)” while Sackman (1991) describes sense-making mechanisms that “include the standards and rules for perceiving, interpreting, believing, and acting that are typically used in a given cultural setting (Sackman 1991: 33)”.

In Weick’s (1995) conception of sensemaking as (1) grounded in identity construction, (2) retrospective, (3) inactive of sensible environments, (4) social, (5) ongoing, (6) focused on and by extracted cues, and (7) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy, organizational values become a prominent resource used in sensemaking. Weick describes expectations as resources for sensemaking and relates these expectations to the notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy when he states, “The combination of perpetual striving to know new people and to cope with time pressure should increase the salience of expectations and the likelihood that people will act so as to confirm them....most people in organizations spend most of their time trying to make sense under conditions where self-fulfilling prophecies should flourish. And self-fulfilling prophecies flourish, because they are one of the few sensemaking processes that work (Weick’s 1995: 153).” Weick focuses on information load, complexity, and turbulence as occasions for sensemaking. He devotes particular attention to ambiguity and uncertainty as common sensemaking occasions in organizations. Weick’s work provides a significant foundation from which to examine perceptions of organizational effectiveness and work satisfactions as co-evolutionary processes simultaneously operating as influences and outcomes of organizational behavior.

### Organizational Uncertainty

Milliken (1987) relates prevailing notions of organizational uncertainty to both communication and impact or evaluative (effectiveness) processes. Milliken suggests that prevailing definitions of uncertainty locate that uncertainty in one of three places: state uncertainty, effect uncertainty, and response uncertainty. State uncertainty occurs when people lack an understanding or information about how components of the environment are changing. Communication scholars frequently have referred to this type of uncertainty as receiving deficiencies (Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979). Effect uncertainty results when the impact of change on the organization is not known or understood and, is, therefore, inherently an evaluative/effectiveness dimension. Finally, response uncertainty is de-



scribed as a lack of understanding response options available. Within the context of human communication, response uncertainty can be related to a variety of communication sending behaviors. Weick (1995) contends variations in uncertainty conditions contribute to a stronger or weaker tendency to construct and pursue occasions of sensemaking.

### Organizational Effectiveness

For many years the ambiguous yet important concept of organizational effectiveness has been treated as an outcome of complex organizational culture and communication processes (Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1989, Morley & Shockley-Zalabak, 1991; Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1994). Beginning with the work of Chester Barnard (1938), a variety of communication activities have been associated with organizational commitment and satisfaction in much the same manner as commitment and work satisfaction more recently have been attributed to congruence between individual and organizational values. Specifically, organizational communication has been linked to job satisfaction (Goldhaber, Yates, Porter, & Lesniak, 1978), perceptions of managerial effectiveness (Clampitt & Downs, 1983; Lewis, Cummings, & Long, 1981), and employee productivity (Pincus, 1986). All of these studies have examined the perception and interpretation of effectiveness and satisfaction as outcomes of communication and cultural processes. Milliken (1990) suggests an important counter perspective to treating effectiveness as an organizational outcome when he argues, "effectiveness is generally studied as an outcome variable, yet managers' perceptions of an organization's past or current effectiveness may also influence how they will interpret and respond to changes in their organization's environment (Milliken (1990: 48)." Shelby's (1998), in proposing her strategic choice construct for business communication, also challenges traditional views of effectiveness. Shelby describes business communication as combining the rhetorical and the instrumental by "creating knowledge during an exchange, which may be 'instrumental' in effecting communication outcomes (Shelby's 1998: 387)." The work of Sitkin and Weingart (1995) on determinants of risk propensity in organizational decision making supports Milliken's challenge. Specifically, Sitkin and Weingart found that prior evaluations of success influenced risk propensity in decision making. In other words, evaluations of decision outcomes became influences for future behavior.

## New Challenges

The importance of examining new perspectives for understanding our complex communication environments is driven, at least in part, by the growing global characteristics of our organizational worlds (Deetz, 1992; Suchan & Dulek, 1998). Suchan and Dulek (1998) describe, "Forces causing the revolution include massive changes in technology, a global marketplace, and constant, intense internal and external competition that has taken the notion of operating efficiency to a new level of meaning. In response to these changes, managerial roles have changed dramatically, organizational structures have become more flexible, and workers' job tasks have, of necessity, become more fluid. In short, many managers, particularly senior-level leaders, find themselves in a unique business context that Vaill (1989) describes as a 'permanent white-water environment (Vaill 1989: 2).' Change and turbulence are the norm (Suchan and Dulek (1998: 87)." Furthermore, globalization has given rise to generalizations across cultures of many widely-accepted theoretical and explanatory perspectives (Weick & Van Orden, 1991; Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris, 1997). In their effort to extend models developed in the U.S.A. to other parts of the world, Shockley-Zalabak and Cesaria (1992) and Morley, Shockley-Zalabak, and Cesaria (1997) have examined models of communication relationships within U.S.A. high-technology firms and contrasted those findings with high-technology firms in Europe. Their findings support for both research locations the centrality of communication for perceptions of organizational effectiveness and the importance of the cultural context for both communication and effectiveness. The Morley, Shockley-Zalabak, and Cesaria (1997) study specifically calls for expanded studies of interpretative processes in diverse international and in multi-national organizations. The data reported in this research supports this call with data collection in 10 Italian organizations all engaged in international business.

## The Research Problem

Based on the foregoing literatures, this study attempted to establish basic relationships among value dimensions, work satisfactions, an expanded measure of perceived organizational effectiveness, and a variety of communication processes in order to support a co-evolutionary perspec-

tive which proposes that perceptions of value dimensions (cultural themes) cannot be separated from more traditional measures of perceptions frequently referred to as organizational outcomes. The study was designed to provide a foundation for an argument which suggests we cannot arbitrarily punctuate distinctions among perceptions of organizational values, perceptions of communication processes, and perceptions of work satisfactions and organizational effectiveness. The co-evolutionary model would envision a context where perceptions, interpretations, behaviors, and outcomes are so inextricably linked that they are indistinguishable in time simultaneously contributing to the ongoing creating and shaping of organizational happenings. In essence, this argument proposes value dimensions, communication processes, and perceptions of work satisfactions and organizational effectiveness constitute complex interpretive processes for both individuals and the organization as a whole.

### Research Question

In order to examine the concept of the co-evolutionary perspective, it was necessary to not only examine the strengths of the relationships among the research constructs but to examine those relationships across organizations. Under the co-evolutionary perspective individuals within organizations have an unpunctuated, intertwined set of perceptions of organizational effectiveness, values, and communication practices. Moreover, the collective of individual perceptions of effectiveness, values, and communication within an organization gives an organization its somewhat unique cultural realities. In order for the co-evolutionary perspective to have merit both the individual realities within organizations and the organizational realities of effectiveness, values, and communication practices also must be interrelated across organizations. Simply put, as organizations approach a cultural reality of ineffectiveness, the co-evolutionary perspective suggests they also are more likely to exhibit realities of destructive values, work dissatisfactions, and poor communication practices. Conversely, because of the unpunctuated nature of the co-evolutionary perspective we could equivalently state that as organizations embrace facilitative values, have satisfied employees, and engage in effective communication practices they will approach a cultural reality of effectiveness. From a practical point of view, this approach assumes that value di-

mensions can be identified across organizations and that organizations with different goals can have their effectiveness assessed in a common way that permits cross-organizational comparisons. Therefore, the following research question was utilized to examine the viability of the proposed argument.

Can organizational value dimensions across organizations be identified which relate to varying descriptions of organizational effectiveness, work satisfactions, and perceptions of communication processes including reception and sending shortfalls?

Operationalizations of the definitions utilized in the research question are as follows:

Value dimensions are defined as clusters of cultural thematic rules established through a variety of data analyses; cultural thematic rules are implicit organizational values, beliefs, and assumptions identified and evaluated by organizational members as guides for expected day-to-day behaviors; organizational effectiveness is described as the achievement of a composite of 15 items based on organizational objectives commonly found in the literature and the contrast of that achievement level with the importance of the composite of the 15 items; work satisfactions relate to individual satisfaction with organizational relationships, organizational products and services, organizational strategy, and other factors related to an organization's competency and future; and communication processes describe level of message reception and sending needs.

## Methods

Prior to the collection of the data reported in this paper, the authors conducted a pilot data collection at two divisions of a different high-technology organization in Italy. The purpose of the pilot was to determine the generalizability of methods previously used in U.S.A. high-technology organizations to high-technology Italian companies. Specifically, the native Italian-speaking member of the research team was trained in interpretative methods of data collection previously utilized in the work of Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1989, 1991, 1994, 1997). This process involved conducting both in-depth interviews of 125 employees and 15 focus groups. Although focus group methodology is generally a more efficient data collection method than interviews, the interviews were used to increase the likelihood of sensitive issues emerging. Both interviews

and focus groups were structured around a set of nonleading open-ended probes designed to elicit employees' perceptions of the nature of the organization's values, their own values, and everyday business practices by themselves and the organization. Extensive interview and focus group notes were taken by the native Italian speaking member of the team and subsequently submitted to a Glaser and Strauss (1967)- like qualitative grounded analysis in order to identify recurring perceptions of business and communication practices, perceived satisfactions and dissatisfactions, perceived organizational values, and general reoccurrent areas of concern. Specifically, Shockley-Zalabak and Cesaria (1992) reported the efficacy of the methodology and its appropriateness for cross cultural use. Relationship models established in the U.S.A. (Shockley-Zalabak & Morley, 1989, 1991) were supported with the Italian pilot data. In 1997, Morley, Shockley-Zalabak, and Cesaria extended the methodology to other organizations reporting that relationships among organizational culture themes, employee values, organizational communication activities, and perceptions of a variety of organizational outcomes are similar but not identical for U.S.A. and Italian high-technology organizations. The research project reported in this work is an extension of the work of the earlier two data collections.

Based on examination of field notes, a 442-question instrument was developed in Italian by the native speaking Italian member of the research team. The instrument covered ten substantive areas in addition to general demographic questions. In many instances, questions were utilized from the previous English work of Shockley-Zalabak and Morley (1989, 1991, 1994). In the remaining instances the questions were originally developed in Italian. Translation and back translation were completed for all English to Italian questions and Italian to English statements and questions. Some of the original Italian statements do not translate directly into common English business terms.

## Participation

Four hundred and ninety-two Italian professionals employed by ten different companies in twelve different Italian cities were surveyed. Three of the smaller companies, however, were somewhat artificially distinct in that they shared a common reporting hierarchy. Therefore, for the purpose of the present study, it was decided, prior to examining the data,

that the three would be treated as a single company. All of these companies were part of a large Italian conglomerate. The largest of the companies had approximately 5,400 employees and the smallest nearly 400. All eight of the companies were headquartered in Italy, involved in international trade and multi-national partnerships, and had been in business between five and 40 years. Approximately 83 percent of respondents were male, and 17 percent were female. Over half of the employees were between 37 and 45 years old, reported having been in the work force a mean of 18 years, and with their present employer for an average of 11 years. Respondents were overwhelmingly supervisors and managers with 77 percent reporting they had formal supervisory responsibilities. Among those with formal supervisory responsibilities 34 percent indicated they were "Dirigente," which roughly corresponds to upper- and upper-middle management in U.S.A. firms. The remaining 66 percent reported being "Quadro" which is approximately equivalent to first-line managers and supervisors in U.S.A. firms. Respondents were given one week to complete the survey during times of their choosing and 85% of them returned the survey within that time frame.

### Instrumentation

Although the survey instrument contained 442 substantive questions and 17 demographic questions, the present analysis focused on three sections of the instrument. Specifically, work satisfaction or satisfaction with work outcomes, was measured on a one-to-five scale using the 13 items from the ICA organizational unit audit (Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979) with the addition of eight supplemental items: My organization's use of technology; My organization's ability to change; My organization's future; My future with my organization; My organization's marketing of its products or services; My organization's strategy; and The capability of my organization's employees. The work satisfaction measure had an alpha reliability of .93.

The two measures of communication activities were calculated as deficiency scores. The first was a measure of uncertainty. Respondents indicated on a one-to-five scale how much information they were currently receiving for each of 16 different categories. Ten of the issues were taken from the ICA audit category for receiving information and six questions were added based on interviews. The added items were: Why I have my given

job assignment; Service or program developments in my organization; How my job relates to the total operation of my organization; My firm's long-term strategies; My group's long-term strategies; and The implementation process of the new job-scoping system. In addition to indicating how much information they currently receive, respondents also were asked on each of the above questions how much information they needed to receive. Subsequently, the amount they reported currently receiving was subtracted from how much they reported needing to receive, and the average of these 16 differences constituted the uncertainty/receiving shortfall measure. The uncertainty measure had an alpha reliability of .91.

The second communication measure was an analogous sending deficiency score where respondents reported the amount of information they currently send and the amount of information they needed to send on nine different work-related issues. Seven of the issues were taken from the ICA sending measure and the two additional measures were: Providing information about needed changes and Disagreeing with others about work issues. The alpha reliability of the sending difference score was .85.

Perceptions of organizational effectiveness were assessed with 15 items that were based on organizational objectives commonly found in the literature on organizational effectiveness. The 15 items were: Client Satisfaction, Quality, Adaptation, Survival, Achievement of Objectives, Profit, Utilization of Resources, Employee Satisfaction, Creativity, Productivity, Performance, long-term Strategy, Growth, Social Responsibility, and Public Service. Because the different companies used in the study had different objectives, a somewhat complex scoring process was used. The rationale behind the scoring system was if a company did not have an item on the instrument as an organizational objective the company should not be penalized in an overall effectiveness score for failing to achieve that item. This was accomplished by constructing a proportion where the total  $n$  was the total number of points possible divided into the number of points earned. Specifically, for each of the 15 items, respondents indicated on a zero to four scale, the degree to which the item was important to the organization as an indicator of effectiveness. On a second zero to four scale, respondents also indicated how well the organization had achieved each of the objectives. Total possible points was calculated as four times the score given each indicator on the importance scale. Therefore, if an indicator was rated as zero in importance, then the total possible points would not increase. If an indicator was rated in importance as two, then the possible points would increase by eight because there was the poten-

tial of receiving a four on the Achievement of Objectives scale. Mathematically the denominator can be expressed as:  $S I * 4$ , where "I" represents the importance rating. The numerator contained the number of effectiveness points actually earned. This was calculated as the sum of the importance times achieved products or  $S I * A$  where I represents importance and "A" the rating of how well the objective was achieved. For example, if an indicator was two in importance and was rated a three in achievement, then six points would be earned. Finally, the number of points actually obtained was divided by the total number of points possible to obtain the proportion of possible effectiveness points. The number of points actually obtained measure had an alpha reliability of .90.

A second calculated measure was a self report-estimate of participants' position in the organizational hierarchy. Specifically, in the demographics portion of the survey respondents were asked to indicate how many levels were below them and how many levels were above them in the organizational hierarchy. The total number of levels in the organization was taken to be the sum of these two estimates. Relative position in the hierarchy was calculated as the number of levels below the participant divided by the total number of levels. Therefore, a person at the very top of an organization would have a score of 1.0 while a person at the bottom would have a score approaching zero.

The final two measures were composed of items suggested during the initial interviews. The first measure asked respondents to report the extent to which each statement represented a company rule. The specific items are reported in Table I. The second measure consisted of 26 items that asked questions about the overall corporate organization to which the ten organizations reported. These items can be found in Table II.

## Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted in three stages. Stage one attempted to reduce the 42 perceived company rules and organizational characteristics into conceptually meaningful and reliable dimensions via principal components analyses. Because the company and the conglomerate organization's corporate headquarters represented different target objects, the principal components analyses were carried out separately. The second stage of the analysis used the individual respondent as the unit of analysis. This involved intercorrelating the effectiveness measure with the



communication shortfall measures, the work satisfaction measure, the position in the organizational hierarchy, as well as two dimensions for company culture and two for conglomerate characteristics discovered in the principal components analyses. In the final stage of the analysis, each of the eight companies was treated as the unit of analysis, and the same measures were intercorrelated.

## Results

Examination of the skree plot from a varimax rotated principle components analysis of 42 rule statements appeared to yield a two-factor solution. The two factor solution was further suggested when a three factor solution was attempted, but no rule-like statement in the unrotated factor loadings loaded more heavily on the third factor than on either of the previous two (Table I). The first factor tended to suggest that the rule was to "take care of business" while the second factor was a negative perception of the rule being "politics of success." The factors had respective eigenvalues of 9.94 and 4.34 which correspond to 23.7 and 10.3 percent of the variance. A second set of 26 statements about the overall conglomerate's work environment also was submitted to a principle components analysis. The skree plot was suggestive of a two-factor solution. When a three factor solution was attempted four items did load higher on the unrotated third factor, but not substantially higher. The two-factor solution was retained. The first factor focused on issues concerning communication and control, while the second factor was more of a general positive work environment. The eigenvalues for the factors were 5.94 and 2.37 which respectively translates into 22.9 and 9.1 percent of the variance (Table II).

These two factors, the perceived effectiveness, receiving, and sending measures were subsequently correlated. The correlations reported in Table III indicate that perceived organizational effectiveness was negatively related to communication shortfalls and intracompany politics, but positively related to the "company conducting business" factor and the conglomerate factors of "communication/control" and a "positive work environment." Follow up analyses, however, found significant differences in how managers at the Dirigente (N=149) and Quadro (N=285) levels perceived their organization. Specifically, managers at the rank of Dirigente saw their own organization as more effective, reported higher

work satisfaction, less information receiving and sending deficiencies, less internal politics, and reported being higher in the organization than those at the Quadro rank (Table IV). However, when Dirigentes rated the overarching conglomerate they found it to have greater communication and control problems, but still saw it as a more positive work environment than the Quadro managers.

Additional follow up analyses attempted to see if the eight identified companies differed in perceived effectiveness, receiving shortfalls, sending shortfalls, and the two factors. Results from the five one-way ANOVAs revealed significant differences among the companies in perceived effectiveness, receiving shortfall, orientation toward taking care of business, and toward politically maneuvering for success. No significant differences were found among the companies on the sending shortfall measure (Table VI). Because of these differences, correlations were run among the principle variables in order to ascertain if organizations that had evolved into differing levels of perceived organizational effectiveness, had also evolved into correspondingly differing levels of facilitative to destructive values, communication practices, and work satisfaction. This required the aggregation of all individual evaluations into one score for each company on the measures of perceived effectiveness, receiving shortfall, sending shortfall, taking care of business factor, politics factor, the corporate factors of communication and work environment, organizational position and work satisfaction. That is, the companies become the units of analysis. Table VII contains the results of the correlational analysis when the companies were used as the units of analysis. Although the company sample size was small ( $N=8$ ), the correlations between the perceived effectiveness measure and many of the communication and factor measures were so strong that most were significant. Because companies were used as the unit of analysis, these results strongly suggest that communication shortfalls and the factor measures are highly related to organizational effectiveness, and this appears to generalize across organizations. In other words, the correlational analysis of individuals reported in Table III demonstrated that people who perceived their organization to communicate effectively were more likely to perceive the company as effective in achieving its objectives and vice versa. In contrast, the results in Table VII demonstrate that companies that have evolved into differing levels of perceived effectiveness also have evolved into organizations with different communication practices, work satisfactions, and values.

## Discussion

The most significant contribution of this research is the discovery that value dimensions and communication practices within organizations are strongly related to measures of organizational effectiveness and work satisfactions. These relationships were not only found within individual organizations, but were even stronger across organizations. The strength of these relationships at both the individual and organizational level provides the foundation to support a co-evolutionary perspective where perceptions of value dimensions (cultural themes), a variety of communication processes, and perceptions of work satisfactions and organizational effectiveness constitute together complex interpretive processes for both individuals and the organization as a whole. The strength of the relationships supports the perspective that value perceptions or understandings of broad cultural themes, perceptions of the adequacy of messages received, perceptions of message sending deficiencies, perceptions of work satisfactions, and perceptions of overall organizational effectiveness are so inextricably linked as to be sequentially indistinguishable. These findings are suggestive of the co-evolutionary perspective that interpretations, perceptions of behaviors, and perceptions of outcomes essentially occur simultaneously.

Individuals in eight organizations were utilized to establish the initial relationships among organizational rules, an expanded measure of organizational effectiveness, work satisfactions, and a variety of communication processes. Importantly, the organizations differed in individual perceptions of effectiveness and the rules operating in each organization. Differences also were evidenced by managerial level. These organizational differences supported analytic strategies grouping rules into two across-organization value dimensions: a "taking care of business" dimension and a "how to operate politically" dimension. The "taking care of business" dimension was characterized by organizational rules/values which supported setting high goals and creating business opportunities, valued organizational commitment and loyalty, rewarded risk-taking and good problem analysis, and encouraged positive interpersonal relationships, including speaking up. By contrast, the "how to operate politically" dimension was characterized by rules/values describing how to work in the old boy network and how to avoid conflict and unpopular decisions. Of particular interest were rules which suggested direct and open communication was to be avoided.

Values (rules) in the “taking care of business” dimension supported individual and group initiative in the accomplishment of organizational goals. Values (rules) in the “how to operate politically” dimension portrayed organizational achievement as related to an external locus of control, namely knowing the right people and presenting yourself effectively to powerful organizational members. The powerful relationships of the two dimensions to organizational effectiveness, work satisfactions, and a variety of communication processes is particularly interesting. Individuals who believe the organization is “taking care of business” also believe the organization is more effective, report more positive communication experiences, and exhibit more work satisfaction. Although not demonstrated by this research, the belief that the organization is effective, that individual effort matters, that individuals both receive and send the information they need, and that individuals are satisfied with a variety of work relationships may indeed promote the types of behaviors which result in more effective organizations with better communication. In other words, these powerful relationships are suggestive of the potential for the self-fulfilling prophecy described by Weick in his discussion of sensemaking as simultaneous interpretation and action.

The “how to operate politically” dimension permits the same potential explanation. In other words, the more individuals believe the organization operates politically the less effective they believe the organization, the less they report work satisfaction, and the more uncertain they are about communication. These beliefs have the potential to influence behaviors which, in turn, perpetuate the outcomes which they initially perceived. The relationships for both value dimensions are supportive of the co-evolutionary perspective.

The final analysis was based on an aggregating of individual employee evaluations into single scores for each company on the nine measures contained in Table VII. Treating the eight companies as the units of analysis permits making statements about how different companies with differing communication practices and cultures have different levels of perceived effectiveness. Importantly, the level of perceived organizational effectiveness was systematically related to values, communication practices, and work satisfactions. Furthermore, to the extent that one takes the philosophical stance that in the final analysis all we will ever have is intersubjective knowledge, then by aggregating management’s perceptions within organizations and correlating those aggregated perceptions

across organizations we are coming as close possible to measuring “real” effectiveness and “real” communication.

Although the correlations among the effectiveness, communication, and rule factor measures appear unusually high, this is because of the aggregated nature of the scores being correlated. Not only does aggregation bring about higher correlations, but as Rushton, Brainerd and Pressley (1983) explain, the aggregation of judgments across raters produces more valid measures than nonaggregated ratings. In terms of substantive conclusions, the larger the communication deficiency (unmet reception or sending needs) and the more political the work environment, the less effective companies will be perceived to perform. Conversely, the more focused on taking care of business, the better the communication and control, positiveness of the work environment, and higher the work satisfaction, the more effective companies will be perceived to perform. Finally, the general pattern of correlations in Table VII provides evidence for the construct validity of these measures in that the correlational pattern is what would be theoretically expected from a co-evolutionary perspective.

The implications for pedagogy and practice are extensive. The co-evolutionary perspective suggests that pedagogy should recognize the complexity of the communicative context which includes not only a myriad of messages but a variety of cultural themes as well as perceptions of work satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. As such, this research supports the concept of the simultaneous intersections of interpretative processes and action proposed in the sensemaking literature. This research also underscores the continuing need for the internationalization of research and teaching in communication and related fields.

The implications for practice also are far reaching. Leadership and individual contributors alike are called to understand their communication efforts in broader and more complex contexts. Messages are neither created nor received in vacuums. Knowledge and awareness of the cultural context become a leadership imperative with leadership recognizing they are inescapably a part of the cultural context. Value dimensions whether across organizations or cultural thematic rules within a given organization become part of evaluative processes within and across organizations. Communication message receiving and sending perceptions, work satisfactions, and organizational effectiveness perceptions are not punctuated as separate processes but should be viewed as intersections of perceptions, interpretations, behaviors, and outcomes. Leaders, professional communicators, and individual contributors alike may obtain a more accurate

understanding of their complex environments—including global changes—if these key constructs are reconceptualized with regard to their relationships one to another. The understanding in a given organization of the communication context is a necessity for effective message development and dissemination. In developing communication strategy, professionals also can be guided by the marked differences between organizations which are interpreted to be “doing business” from those interpreted as “operating politically.”

This research sought to lay a foundation to expand our understanding of interpretive processes within diverse international organizations. Although the strength of the relationships identified in this research supports the co-evolutionary perspective of simultaneous interpretation, behavior, and outcomes, the research does not provide understanding of how organizational members select environmental cues which influence perceptions, behaviors, and outcomes. More work in this area is needed and will make both theoretical and practical contributions. Finally, this study continues to demonstrate the centrality of communication for all types of organizational functioning.

Table I

## Rotated Factor Loadings For Organizational Value Measures

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Our main goal is to provide customers with value added.	.656210	-.186820
We take care of providing our customers with a good service.	.643450	-.176240
Skills in problem-solving help being successful.	.643320	-.186720
It is important to know how to work in a group.	.636300	-.021840
Do it better than the competition.	.577630	-.085060
Be highly esteemed by your subordinates to earn promotions.	.572090	-.129500
Group goals must be met.	.561930	.107130
Cooperation within the group/team is expected.	.558420	.019280
You must exhibit solidarity with your colleagues.	.550350	.010180
We want to be competitive on the market.	.548860	-.271710
Diversity in people is accepted.	.544050	-.122120
To be successful you must be on good terms with customers.	.531420	-.040530
Work/project team must be the gymnasium for young people development.	.531010	-.198710
Be straightforward with the management team above you.	.519690	-.084420
Be sure you are pulling your own weight.	.516150	-.106150
Growth is good for everybody.	.516130	-.199600
You must be a faithful employee.	.504230	-.080250

Table 1 (Cont'd)

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Set goals extremely high and not miss them by much.	.488600	-.000160
Management must act as a coach and advisor.	.481050	-.277980
Put the goals of the team before your own.	.473530	-.016330
It is important to create business opportunities.	.471030	-.292870
Analyze problems well.	.463340	-.172460
People are rewarded for taking risk.	.459290	-.191200
Be kind with everyone.	.440070	-.027740
Be willing to speak up!	.434040	-.224740
Pay attention to costs.	.431450	-.260300
In order to get on young people should see the whole technical and functional process.	.323580	-.076790
A "wing" (faction) spirit prevails (people who informally help each other to take advantages in promotions).	-.080100	.721840
Influence comes from knowing the right people.	-.095570	.718740
If you are a project manager, do not leave your subordinates to others projects.	-.055290	.697500
We need to be "present" (as a formality in important occasions).	-.163800	.691210
The number of subordinates is a factor of success.	-.083700	.689010
We prefer to avoid making decisions rather than displease someone.	-.164700	.667560



Table 1 (Cont'd)

	Factor 1	Factor 2
We prefer to avoid negotiating/managing conflicts.	-.130050	.663440
There is a close connection between your personal success and the project where you are.	-.064450	.644640
Belong to a "roped-party" is a way to be successful ("roped party" means "people who try to help each other in order to obtain advantages").	-.080350	.609730
You first belong to your project and just secondarily belong to your company.	-.012110	.598710
We participate in long meetings but - back in our office - everyone goes his own way.	-.138780	.597050
Direct and sincere communication is avoided.	-.260430	.571060
Avoid decisions which imply taking risk.	-.149960	.510710
Avoid carrying on Union activity for too long.	-.020710	.494480
We pay little attention to meeting work plans.	-.230740	.378490

Table 2

## Factors Based On Overall Corporate Characteristics

	Factor 1	Factor 2
It is difficult to understand appropriate behaviors.	.729320	.015250
There is little integration among the various firms.	.643450	.284980
It is hard to understand which behaviors are subject to penalties.	.638970	.012700
Economic issues knowledge (i.e. balance sheet reading, budgeting, order economic audit, r.o.i.) is not usual in our organizational culture.	.613500	.194040
A common corporate style of customer approach is missing: everyone goes his own way.	.611370	.251470
There is little integration among different companies.	.574530	.078330
Out of the working group, communication is very poor.	.560190	.122120
There is no communication between technicians and system engineers.	.506670	-.006940
Advanced software use is hardly a shared value.	.502900	.085390
Between function mobility is not appreciated enough.	.494380	.107540
Decision-making takes a long time.	.469740	.349600
The Grapevine substitutes for, and anticipates, formal communication channels.	.443750	.265220
Process installments organization makes project goal sharing difficult.	.418470	.057920
Customers have to meet various company representatives.	.404710	.061490
Efforts are appreciated.	.132620	.737090

Table 2 (Cont'd)

	Factor 1	Factor 2
The company shows appreciation.	.252680	.732430
Advancements are strictly linked to personal merit.	.102780	.676460
Individuals are evaluated and paid appropriately.	.051880	.669320
My organization encourages differences of opinion.	.126990	.581870
We usually cooperate beyond our own field of activity or own company.	.234750	.482630
Our products/services are of high quality.	.078010	.459700
We have confidence in our long term future.	.194610	.453110
There are unlimited opportunities here.	.007050	.439930
Stress levels are appropriate.	-.03027	.304430
We are more clever to acquire customers than to manage the ones already acquired.	.049340	.271860
We are very sensitive to the need of methodology such as Dafne.	.136840	.263040

Table 3

## Correlations Among Effectiveness Measure And Communication Measures

	Effectiveness	Company Factors						Corporate Headquarters	
		Receiving Shortfall	Sending Shortfall	Business Factor	Politics Factor	Comm/Control	Work Envior.	Pos.	
Receiving Shortfall	-.382***								
Sending Shortfall	-.232***	.423***							
Business	.513***	-.246***	-.110*						
Politics	-.415***	.368***	.157**	-.395***					
Comm/Control	.377***	-.317***	-.150**	.375***	-.625***				
Work Env.	.512***	-.500***	-.255***	.585***	-.476***	.422***			
Org. Pos	-.032	-.057	-.070	.048	.042	.014	.014		
Work Satisfaction	.576***	-.479***	-.219***	.528***	-.458***	.460***	.663***	.112	

\* p&lt;.05

\*\* p&lt;.01

\*\*\* p&lt;.001

Table 4  
T-tests For Differences Between Dirigente and Quadro Managers  
Levene's Test for

Homogeneity of Variances	F	Sig.	Mean t	Std. Error df	Sig.	Diff.	Diff.
Effectiveness	.009	.926	2.730	426	.007	.044	.0161
Receiving Shortfall	.062	.804	-6.399	425	.000	-.436	.0682
Sending Shortfall	2.154	.143	-2.596	343	.010	-.154	.0596
Business	1.385	.240	1.549	432	.122	.080	.0521
Politics	.106	.745	-2.267	432	.024	-.161	.0710
Comm/Control*	3.869	.050	2.723	267.3	.007	.164	.0602
Work Env.	1.351	.246	2.636	432	.009	.128	.0486
Org. Pos.	.147	.702	2.900	300	.004	.069	.0241
Work Satisfaction	.428	.513	4.702	.000	.268	.0570	

\*Used separate group variances

Table 5  
Means And Cell Counts By Company

Company	Effectiveness		Receiving Shortfall		Sending Short fall		Business Factor		Politics Factor		Comm. /Coord.		Work Envior.		Organizational Position		Work Satisfaction	
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
One	.524	137	1.69	138	.76	112	3.02	138	3.57	138	2.40	137	2.58	137	.46	62	2.76	138
Two	.519	46	1.63	46	.75	37	3.05	47	3.29	47	2.63	47	2.77	47	.44	31	2.93	47
Three	.567	61	1.51	63	.79	55	3.27	63	2.86	63	2.86	63	2.84	63	.25	39	2.86	63
Four	.645	35	1.31	34	.68	21	3.09	35	3.17	35	2.86	35	2.73	35	.31	28	3.01	35
Five	.485	119	1.82	120	.79	100	3.05	121	3.36	121	2.52	121	2.43	121	.31	76	2.53	121
Six	.254	19	1.87	18	1.08	14	2.58	19	3.73	19	2.23	19	2.21	19	.44	14	2.15	19
Seven	.522	54	1.52	53	.89	44	3.02	54	3.50	54	2.42	54	2.68	54	.40	43	2.80	54
Eight	.606	14	.94	12	.52	8	3.38	14	2.61	14	2.89	14	3.15	14	.35	12	3.43	14

Table 6  
F ratios for differences between high technology companies

Factor	df	F	eta <sup>2</sup>	Levene Statistic For Homogeneity of Variance
Effectiveness	7, 477	15.90***	.19	.87
Receiving Shortfall	7, 476	5.38***	.07	1.05
Sending Shortfall	7, 383	1.32	.02	1.52
Business Factor	7, 483	5.12***	.07	.44
Politics Factor	7, 483	11.29***	.14	2.46*
Comm/Coord.	7, 482	8.52***	.11	1.71
Work Envior.	7, 482	11.47***	.14	.78
Organizational Position	7, 297	6.46***	.13	5.67
Work Satisfaction	7, 483	12.41***	.15	.14

P<.05

\*\* P<.01

\*\*\* p<.001

Table 7

Correlations Among Effectiveness Measure and Communication Measures  
Using Company As the Unit of Analysis

	Effectiveness	Receiving Shortfall	Sending Shortfall	Corporate Company Factors			Headquarters Factors		
				Business Factor	Politics Factor	Comm. /Coord.	Work Envior.	Org. Pos.	
Receiving Shortfall	-.725*								
Sending Shortfall	-.874*	.796**							
Business	.892**	-.757*	-.878**						
Politics	-.706*	.825*	.793*	-.888**					
Comm./Coord.	.826**	-.783*	-.805*	.853**	-.926**				
Work Env.	.818*	-.900**	-.851**	.911**	-.884*	.837*			
Org. Pos	-.506	.339	.349	-.575	.654	-.710*	-.348		
Work Satisfaction	.880**	-.912**	-.923**	.888**	-.818*	.819*	.971***		-.286

\* p<.05  
\*\* p<.01  
\*\*\* p<.001



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