1 Introduction

Setting the Stage

> All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players:
> They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays
> many parts.
>
> —Shakespeare, 1564–1616, *As You Like It,*
> Burchell (Ed.), 1954, p. 42

Objectives:

- Reflect on the pervasiveness of organizations in our lives
- State the goal of cultural analysis
- Apply guides for selecting an organization for analysis

Stage Terms:

- Organizational culture
- Cultural analysis
- Organization
- Organizational performance

Cradle to Grave

When we ask students to name and describe an organization, they often first think of a workplace they have been a part of as an adult. However, by focusing on workplaces, we miss the great variety of organizations that shape and define us throughout our lives. Our first experiences in organizations were like many of yours: Bright lights and masked strangers welcomed us into a hospital birthing room. Since that time, we have lived, breathed, laughed and cried, worked or consulted with, and dreamed and been bored in a wide array of organizations including business offices, advertising agencies, nonprofits, universities, prisons, and day cares. Some of them have inspired us, and some of them have broken our hearts. All of them create expectations and perceptions that follow us all the rest of our lives. Beyond the myriad examples of tragic

and comic tales we could each tell from our experiences as employees, we also have countless stories from our experiences as customers, volunteers, and patients. The point is clear—we cannot escape an inextricable connection with organizations. Yet we easily take for granted the impact of organizations, the very stages on which we live out our lives. We know when to show up, we know when something goes wrong with a piece of equipment or a relationship, but we rarely see the big picture of how all the various aspects of the stage impact us. The purpose of this workbook is to equip us to create more competent organizational performances. Such performances are grounded in learning the way our communication shapes and is shaped by the culture of the organization and national culture as well.

> *Organizations are places that carry us from cradle to grave by shaping our sense of identity, role, and meaning in life.*

In the years that have passed since the startling birth experience, we have come to believe that organizations are no more and no less than a significant stage for human drama. Our research on cultures in hospitals, engineering firms, churches, banks, airlines, phone companies, schools, and day care centers and our service experiences in hospitals, multinationals, and nursing homes have all underscored our conviction that organizations are far more than the places where we work and make money. They are places that carry us from "the cradle to the grave" by shaping our sense of identity, role, and meaning in life.

Thus, while our motivation to study organizations began with a pragmatic sense that our livelihoods depended on being able to work in organizations, a deeper, more fundamental concern has emerged. We want to improve our ability to shape and direct organizations in ways that are more humane. We believe such an effort to be fundamental to practitioners, scholars, teachers, and students, but more importantly as participants in the human drama. The goal of this workbook, therefore, is not simply to teach you how to conduct a cultural analysis, but it has implications for your role as a change agent within an organization and within your community. In short, the workbook is designed to help you by heightened awareness to do better what you do almost every day—make decisions about the best ways to lead and communicate in your organization(s). The quality of such decisions is enhanced through engaging in the process of conducting a cultural analysis.

FAQs on Cultural Analysis

This chapter sets the stage for conducting a cultural analysis by clarifying the approach we take in this workbook. While the remaining chapters provide greater depth on the "how to" of understanding and improving organizational performances, our goal here is to respond to seven common questions about the major approach and features of this workbook. As you review our responses to these questions you should gain a clearer sense of the process of cultural analysis, as well as criteria to consider in selecting an organization.

1. What Do You Mean by Organizational Culture?

We provide several definitions in Chapter 3. Our favorite is from Geertz (1973), that culture consists of the webs of significance that we have spun for ourselves. His

definition highlights that culture consists of meaning and that it is constructed and interactive. Each organization has a unique way of doing things. Just as each national culture or civilization has its own unique language, artifacts, values, celebrations, heroes, history, and norms, each organization is unique in these same ways. At a deeper level, organization members create and/or are indoctrinated into unique beliefs and assumptions that form the basis for acting together. Some beliefs and assumptions may operate at a conscious level. Basic assumptions such as those about human nature and human relations are more likely to operate at the unconscious level. For example, I might just assume that supervisors make decisions and employees carry them out without ever consciously questioning that assumption. In contrast, when actors understand and identify with the history, norms, and values of a group, they can become a true ensemble cast by coordinating their actions more effectively with others'. They can also understand the symbolic significance of events and actions in a more thorough way and identify the many subcultures that together form and shape the overall organizational culture. This practical knowledge can then aid us in being ethical and responsible in the way we shape these cultures in our interactions with others.

2. Just What Do You Mean by a Cultural Analysis?

Just as anthropologists immerse themselves in a foreign culture to understand it, students of organizational culture use many of the same methods to understand an organization's culture. For example, they systematically observe artifacts and interactions, analyze written documents, participate in rites and rituals, and interview culture members about the meanings they attach to organizational objects and events. Interestingly, actors use many of the same techniques of observation, interviewing, and analyzing scripts in the process of crafting a credible and compelling performance on the stage or in film.

We define a cultural analysis *as a process of capturing the unique qualities of an organization as revealed in values, history, stories, and other elements created through interactions that have significance for organizational effectiveness and the personal development of members.* One way to gain clarity about the organizational cultural analysis process is to use analogies: to make connections between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the known to the unknown. One organizational culture class participant said that the cultural analysis process was like the *Wheel of Fortune* television game. In that game, participants have to fill in the missing letters of a phrase based on a clue from the moderator. If participants guess too early and get it wrong, they are penalized by losing a turn. And of course, if they guess too late, they risk losing to other contestants willing to take a risk. The challenge is to have enough information about the word puzzle to make a credible interpretation. In the same way, if you attempt a definitive interpretation of a culture too early in the process, you may pay the price of misunderstanding the culture. We also recognize that, at some point, you have enough data for a realistic (although not perfect) cultural interpretation, and you need to move ahead to application. We agree with the need to balance thoroughness with timely application, and you will learn in this workbook a process of cultural analysis that emphasizes careful reflection on cultural data combined with application. We have identified two different analogies as a way to clarify the process and to encourage you to move systematically through the five cultural analysis steps outlined in this workbook.

Gerald's Analogy: Paint My Numbers

We have a painting in our home of a wolf. The dark eyes and menacing face peer out from behind the white bark of aspens. The painting was our son, Eli's, first time to paint by numbers. Not true art you might say. Imagine, however, if Eli did not have a color and number code. He would have to determine colors that seemed best together. He would need to create a convincing palette that made the wolf come to life.

A cultural analysis is like painting with numbers and colors without the code for three reasons. First, the cultural analysis process does not begin with a blank canvas. The paint by numbers box comes with a canvas with lines and numbers on it; the colors are in the box. In the same way, organizations come with a barrage of colors and numbers. In Chapter 4 we label these colors as elements of culture (e.g., values, stories, rituals). You do not have to create these cultural elements; you do have to identify them. You will have to find a corresponding, convincing match for the color with a number in the culture. In short, you will be called on to create a credible interpretation.

Second, the analysis process requires an awareness of how your background and assumptions color the process. Eli has seen pictures of wolves (and a few at the zoo). He has ideas of acceptable hues. In the same way, we begin the process with experiences that literally *color* the process. Thus, no two analyses are going to be the same. Yet for the picture to be convincing to those who view it, one must discern how previous experiences influence the interpretation process. We discuss in Chapter 5 the process of *bracketing,* which involves recognizing our reactions and responses that color our interpretation.

Finally, the analysis process influences the researcher and the organization. Eli completes a paint by numbers and in the process, he is more aware of one way wolves may appear in nature. His painting also influences others who view it. In a similar way, the cultural analysis process influences our experience with life in organizations. You will attend to communication in ways that will be new to you. Our hope is you will become more adept and responsible in your communication based on this analysis. Furthermore, the questions you ask during interviews and the report you provide the organization will prompt reflection on and possible changes in communication practices. The potential impact of your analysis indicates the importance of maintaining high ethical standards in the process.

Angi's Analogy: The Jigsaw Puzzle

The cultural analysis is similar to putting together a complex jigsaw puzzle without having a picture on the box to guide your efforts. The point of this analogy is to understand the tensions between seeing parts versus the whole and to appreciate the impact the process has on the person doing the analysis. This metaphor applies in several ways:

First, it is often difficult to get a sense of the big picture when you are looking at individual pieces. Only after you have assembled a number of segments can you start to get an idea of the picture the puzzle will create.

Second, it takes both dark and bright pieces in most cases to assemble a complete puzzle. I recently read a story of a young girl who secretly stole pieces of a puzzle her family was assembling and hid them under the sofa cushion because they were so ugly. In frustration, her family began to despair of ever being able to put the puzzle together because so many pieces were missing. Only when the girl provided the dark pieces could the entire picture be revealed. Sometimes in our cultural analysis it is tempting to linger on the positive stories and upbeat images. They rarely form the complete picture. Sometimes you must provide the dark elements to understand the complete

culture. Critical theorists such as Mumby (1993), Deetz (1991), and Deetz, Tracy, and Simpson (2000) have encouraged this phase of analysis.

Finally, the process of putting together the puzzle is often as important as the finished product. The mental exercise of seeing connections, of developing creativity, and of growing in patience and discipline will develop the puzzle builder even if the particular puzzle is not an interesting one. Chapter 8 guides you through this process of interpretation of cultural data.

Unlike puzzles, which have a set order and only one way for all of the parts to fit together, cultural analysis is a complex and interpretive pursuit. Four different people sitting around a table would see the picture from different perspectives and develop similar but varying pictures, and each of those constructions would have degrees of validity and usefulness for understanding the organization.

3. What Is an Organization?

Keyton (2005) defines "*an organization*" as a "dynamic system of organizational members, influenced by external stakeholders, who communicate within and across organizational structures in a purposeful and ordered way to achieve a superordinate goal" (p. 10). While we concur with Keyton's focus on "dynamic systems," our approach in this book takes a social constructivist perspective (Pearce, 2007). We view organizations as continually constructed and reconstructed through interactions. In other words, communication is not just something we do to one another, but our interactions are at the heart of the organizing process (Weick, 1979). This focus on communication as an organizing process suggests that while organizational members have "superordinate goals," the process of cultural analysis reveals the paradoxical, unintentional, and sometimes contradictory nature of these goals.

There are a wide variety of organizations, from churches, families, and civic, social, and nonprofit groups to government agencies and corporations. Today's organization is especially diverse, with virtual organizations, outsourcing, and multinational hybrids. The boundaries and membership of organizations are not always as cut and dried as they may appear. For example, who counts as a member of a professional sports team? Only the athletes, cheerleaders, and coaches? Team physicians who may be members of a medical practice but travel with the team on weekends? What about the die-hard fans who come to every game and may have a 50-year history of following a team? A significant decision you will face is who "counts" as an organization member and where you want to draw your boundaries of the organization. There is no single correct answer to how you define an organization. For some purposes, a researcher might want to define an organization more narrowly by focusing primarily on employees, while for other purposes an expanded view that includes organizational stakeholders might be more appropriate. In short, organizations are multilayered and multifaceted, consisting of individuals and groups with both common and competing interests.

4. What Is the End Goal of the Process?

Comments from practitioners who have applied this cultural analysis process provide examples of how they have used the cultural insights.

- I now have the ability to see situations from different frames.
- I got my last job because the interviewer was intrigued by my answers about organizational culture and how quickly I could "read" the organization.
- I have improved my ability to apply theory to the real world.

- I saved myself a lot of time and energy by deciding during an interview process that I didn't fit the culture. Even though the salary was great, I would have become frustrated quickly.

- I have gained a better understanding of my organization and the steps involved in a cultural analysis.

- Seeing how I impact an organization. It was a little upsetting to see how I could have made more of a positive difference. I wish I had known last fall what I know now.

- I have learned that in any organization, change must start with me.

Although you may not make one of these statements, we are confident that anyone completing this process will learn how to conduct a cultural analysis. You will also be taken through an application section that allows you to develop links between your analysis and organizational effectiveness, diversity, change management, symbolic leadership, and ethics. We included these application chapters because many students ask how they can use their new cultural insights in practical ways. We are convinced that culture gives a new and distinct lens through which to view organizational processes such as change, leadership, and the encouragement of diversity. We are confident that as a result of this workbook, you can become a more competent and assured actor in your organization, better able to understand and question basic organizational assumptions and practices.

5. Why Use a Dramatic Metaphor in This Text?

Viewing organizational life through the lens of dramatism has a long history, from Aristotle to Kenneth Burke (1972) and Erving Goffman (1959, 1974) to more contemporary writers. Boje, Luhman, and Cunliffe (2003) point out that writers have used the theater metaphor in two broad ways in describing organizations: those describing organizations as "like theater" (Goffman) and those who treat organizations as being theater (Burke). We see value in understanding organizations through a drama/theater lens, whether through Goffman's metaphor or Burke's literal approach.

Organizational life can be illuminated by examining it through the lens of theater. Organization members are actors who coordinate their actions in performances—some tightly scripted and traditional; others, improvised and informal. Like dramatic genres, organizational performances sometimes can be categorized by themes or archetypes. Some organizations are highly controlled with the emphasis on directors or stars, while others are ensemble casts. Some organizational performances by leaders have employees as intended audiences, while other performances involve all organizational members with consumers or policy makers as audience.

Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) write about organizational communication as performance and say that organizational performances have four characteristics: they are interactive, contextual, episodic, and improvisational. Some performances are episodic on an interpersonal level—with two employees enacting an episode to determine power or credibility in their relationship. Others are larger organizational performances with a company trying to recover credibility after a crisis or mistake. As you conduct a cultural analysis, you will be challenged to listen in on performances. For instance, you might hear an employee story (episode) about what one coworker said to another (interactive) about recent layoffs (contextual) as they discuss the various ways organizational members are responding (improvisational) to management mandates.

Rehearsal 1.1 Applying the Drama Metaphor

Purpose: Identify the value and limits of the theater metaphor.

1. What value do you see in using the theater/drama metaphor to reflect on organizational life and communication?

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   _____

2. What limits or possible cautions should we consider in using this metaphor?

   _____

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6. What Is in This Workbook?

The workbook is organized around *five major steps* for conducting a cultural analysis. These steps are reviewed in the next chapter and provide the skeleton for this text. You will be taken through background material on the concept of culture before covering the basics of data collection, interpretation, and application. The major chapters share in common the following features:

- *Stage Terms:* At the start of each chapter we list important terms and concepts covered in the chapter. The reader may want to pay special attention to definitions and explanations of these terms contained in the chapter.

- *Connections:* In sections labeled "Connections" we assist the reader in making connections between theories and constructs and organizational practice by extended examples.

- *Rehearsals:* A variety of case studies and other activities are designed for hands-on experience with concepts. We incorporated activities that we have found enriching for workshop participants and students. You will find these activities in Rehearsal boxes in the workbook as well, at the ends of most chapters.

Each of the chapters builds toward a final project of analyzing an organizational culture in depth. You may want to analyze your own organization to understand its culture more fully, or you may want to practice your skills by choosing an organization of which you are not a member, or only a tangential part. Each choice has advantages and disadvantages.

7. How Do I Select an Organization for a Cultural Analysis?

There are a variety of factors to consider in selecting an organization. First and foremost, much depends on your goals for a cultural analysis. Use the following Rehearsal to determine your goals:

Rehearsal 1.2 Determining Your Purposes
for a Cultural Analysis

Purpose: Reflect on and identify possible purposes of the analysis you will conduct.

Check any of the following purposes that describe your reasons for conducting an organizational cultural analysis:

_____ Learn cultural analysis skills for work as a consultant

_____ Gain insight into another type of organization for career development

_____ Develop insight as a new employee to move up in your organization

_____ Learn to use cultural data to be a more effective leader in your own organization

_____ Identify ways to serve community organizations through knowledge of their respective cultures

_____ Learn about a different culture in an organization similar to your own to compare and contrast

_____ Other reason: _____

Your answers to these questions should influence your decision to do an analysis or audit as an "insider," a person who works for the organization you analyze, or as an "outsider," one who comes to the organization as a stranger. To facilitate your decision, we have outlined the pros and cons associated with each role.

As you reflect on your goals in light of the relative advantages and disadvantages of insider/outsider roles, realize that that these options may be viewed more as a continuum. Your relative knowledge and experience with an organization should be weighed. For example, in your own workplace, you may be new to the organization and/or industry, thus your knowledge of the culture and ability to work with the culture are far different from that of someone with extensive knowledge or experience. On the other hand, outside of the workplace, you may be a relative insider as a volunteer for the Arthritis Foundation or a church organization. You may also be somewhat of an insider due to weekly visits to a favorite restaurant or health club. Farther down the continuum toward being an outsider, you may never have worked for GM, but you have worked for another major auto company, and thus know something of the basic aspects of this industry. You may have read widely about a given industry, but have yet to visit an actual site. And then there are organizations that are completely alien to your world—you have heard of high-tech companies but have not read about, visited, or studied one.

The key to examining the pros and cons of the "insider" versus "outsider" perspective is more complex, and perhaps your decision ultimately comes down to your

immediate and/or long-range goals for developing this skill set. We have found value, as have our students and workshop participants, in engaging in a cultural analysis with goals ranging from "becoming a consultant," to "learning the ropes as a newcomer," to "enhancing the way one serves in the community." Regardless of your decision, the steps we outline will guide you in gaining valuable experience in conducting an analysis.

Other considerations (in addition to outsider/insider) might guide your choice of organization as well. What contacts do you have that might provide access to an organization to analyze? What organizations might provide especially interesting sites to study for your personal or professional development? Organizations are particularly interesting sites at some stages, such as start-up of new organizations at which culture is being formed, or major organizational transitions such as downsizing or leadership changes at which culture is being modified.

You should have confidence in proposing a cultural analysis to a potential organization. The report you will provide is professional and has significant value to the organization. If we were doing such a study for an organization, it might cost them several thousand dollars.

Rehearsal 1.3 Identifying an Organization

Purpose: Identify organizations that you might make the focus of an analysis.

Steps:

1. Review the pluses and minuses of being an insider versus an outsider in the cultural analysis process in Table 1.1.

2. Consider an organization you might serve as an outsider/consultant and then list the top three reasons it would be advantageous to the organization for you to serve in this role.

   Organization:

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. Consider an organization you might serve as an insider and then list the top three reasons it would be advantageous to the organization for you to serve in this role.

   Organization:

   _____

   _____

   _____

Table 1.1

As an Insider in the Organization	
Advantages	*Disadvantages*
Ease of access	Lack of perceived freedom for analysis
Personal communication insights	Bias due to being enmeshed in the culture; start with hidden assumptions
Potential value to your own organization	
Time—ease of data collection	Too familiar, thus "see less," ask fewer questions
	People do not explain things to you the same way they would to an outsider as an outsider to the organization
Advantages	*Disadvantages*
Insights for career development	May misinterpret some cultural data
Skills for "newcomer" socialization	Access to the organization
Less familiar, thus "see more"	Time outside of job to collect data
See the more obvious layers of the culture	

Connections: The Value of Reflection and Critical Insight

This workbook will have the greatest value to readers willing to shift from going through the motions of acting on stage without reflection and critical cultural insight to full engagement in the production. Competent leadership in organizations involves going backstage; that is, active reflection on the cultural forces that shape communication practices and the way our communication practices shape culture. The steps previewed in the next chapter reflect a process that we all participate in each day. For instance, we decide what and how and when to communicate in our organizations; we decide what changes in organizational practices we can and/or should encourage or discourage; and we determine what changes we believe we are empowered or powerless to introduce. Perhaps most critical of all, we make decisions whether to reflect on our communication or remain somewhat unconscious of our influence in an organization. In all, we share in common the fact that our communication behavior is based on interpretive processes that we take for granted.

These day-in and day-out taken-for-granted interpretive processes are based on our informal "data collection" about our organizations (e.g., norms, what is allowed, what is expected, how to communicate, whom to communicate with). Based on our interpretations of these data, we act and react. Before reading this workbook, you may never have considered yourself someone who collected and used cultural data or thought of yourself as an actor on an organizational stage. However, you may have heard a story about a recent firing and wondered if all the details were true. You may have read a staff development workbook and been left wondering why no one seemed to follow the suggestions on career paths in the organization. Or you may have heard during a performance evaluation that no one else was having trouble with clients like "you are," and found yourself wondering about the norm: "Am I really that bad?" When faced with the mysteries or uncertainties embedded in these types of questions, we may become more aware of unspoken or unwritten rules and values in an organization.

This workbook assumes that we can always improve the quality of the data we collect and the accuracy of our interpretations, as well as our organizational communication performances in response to these data. As you move through this workbook, we hope you will be reminded of what we observe each time we cover

this material in the classroom, in a training, or consultation—how and why we communicate in our organizations matters. To extend Shakespeare's well-worn analogy, our challenge is to be on the stage not merely as players or actors but also as co-directors and producers of the communication practices in our organizations.

> *We can always improve both the quality of the data we collect as well as our communication performances in response to these data.*

Summary

- An organizational culture involves the unique ways of doing things in an organization that are best captured by such elements of culture as the history, norms, and values of a group.

- A cultural analysis involves improving on methods we use each day in our organizations—we observe, ask questions for understanding, and read various documents such as newsletters. In the process of analysis we not only gain insight about the organization but may also improve our capacity for effective communication.

- How we define an organization is based on the boundaries of the membership. You will need to make a decision in the organization you analyze about who is considered a member, which may entail a narrow (employees, management) or a broad (customers, stakeholders, etc.) definition.

- The end goal of the process is to learn how to conduct a cultural analysis and make application of this analysis to critical aspects of organizational life such as ethics, change, and diversity.

- This workbook will help you understand the concept of culture as well as the basics of data collection, interpretation, and application. Pay attention to the key organizing features of the book: *Stage Terms*, to introduce relevant theories and concepts; *Connections*, to aid your understanding of concepts; and *Rehearsals,* both within the chapters and at the end of chapters to aid you in application.

- You should have a clear sense of how to select an organization for a cultural analysis based on the pros and cons of being an insider versus an outsider.

Rehearsal 1.4 Method Acting and Getting Real

Purpose: Reflect on your expectations concerning the process of conducting a cultural analysis in order to identify beliefs that may help or hinder your progress.

Overview: Method acting is a term that captures a major approach to training actors (Vineberg, 1991). At the core of this method is active observation of the real and genuine emotion (or mining the real experiences of the actor or actress). Strasberg (1987), the major proponent of this method in the United States,

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notes that the procedures for developing an actor's capacity are "equally, if not more, necessary for the layman" (p. 201). This activity is designed to apply method acting concepts to your own work in the cultural analysis process. In short, the more you are real with your own reactions and emotions concerning the process, the more you will be able to overcome hurdles to making it a valuable experience.

Steps:

1. Briefly list two or three of your own initial reactions to this first chapter. What was clear? Unclear? What appeared promising for your own application? What emotions, if any, did this chapter evoke in you?

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. Have you had a previous positive experience with cultural analysis in which you gained insight into what "made an organization tick" or how to be more effective in an organization? What happened? What was your reaction?

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. Have you had a previous negative or confusing experience with cultural analysis? Perhaps you discovered information about an organization that was disappointing. Or perhaps you were baffled by why something happened in an organization. What happened? What was your reaction?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. What will need to happen for you to have a positive, fulfilling experience in learning about conducting a cultural analysis? In particular, what concerns do you have? Questions?

   _____

   _____

   _____