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How Geographically Dispersed Team Members Learn, Adopt, and Integrate Organizational Culture

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Running head: HOW GDT MEMBERS LEARN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

How Geographically Dispersed Team Members
Learn, Adopt, and Integrate Organizational Culture

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

By

Susan K. Heidorn

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

October, 2011


UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.
We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions
required by the final examining committee have been made.

Dissertation Committee



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Date

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Dedication

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Abstract

Organizational culture is a dynamic phenomenon that is continually socially constructed through our interaction with others. It allows us to make sense of the world, influences our behavior, provides guidance to our actions and decisions, clarifies ambiguity, and sets expectations. We usually learn the culture by observing others, but learning the culture becomes more of a challenge in organizations that have geographically dispersed team members who may have very little social interaction with other members in the organization.

The purpose of this research study was to generate a theory of how organizational culture is learned by geographically dispersed team members and how they adopted and integrated the culture into their work. A grounded theory methodology was conducted using a social constructivist perspective. Data collection was completed through 22 taped interviews. The primary data analysis methods included various methods of data coding and memo writing.

This grounded theory study uncovered three key elements that affected the learning, adoption, and integration of organizational culture by geographically dispersed team members: connectors, context, and connections. My research has suggested that the stronger the connectors, context, and connections, the more likely it will be for dialog to occur which is needed for geographically dispersed team members to learn organizational culture as well as adopt and integrate the organizational culture into their work efforts.

These findings have significant implications for organizations. Using this research, organizations can be proactive in their efforts to develop an environment that creates an organizational culture in which employees can participate in the co-construction effort that results in everyone fully understanding and learning the culture.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Overview.....	1
Problem Statement.....	3
Researcher Interest.....	4
Purpose Statement and Research Questions	6
Significance of the Study.....	6
Theoretical Perspective.....	7
Definition of Terms	8
Organizational culture.	8
Geographically dispersed team members.	8
Learning.....	8
Adoption.....	9
Integration.....	9
Organization of the Study	9
Literature Review.....	11
Organizational Culture through a Social Constructionist Theoretical Framework ...	11
Geographically Dispersed Teams ... A Working Definition	12
Culture, a Definition	14
National culture	17
Organizational culture	18
Subcultures.....	19

Nomadic culture.	20
Organizational Cultural Research Perspectives.....	21
Constructing Organizational Culture.....	23
Defining Learning from a Social Constructionist Perspective	25
Learning and Adopting Organizational Culture	27
Informal learning.....	27
Formal education.....	29
Learning Challenges Encountered by Geographically Dispersed Team Members ...	29
Visual and auditory cues.	30
Strong social relationships.....	31
Communication technology.....	31
Existing Research	33
Summary	34
Method	36
Appropriateness of the Methodology	38
Participants	39
Population.....	39
Sampling.....	40
Data Collection and Analysis	43
Data collection.....	43
Recruitment	44
Interviews.	44

Interview Procedures.....	45
Data analysis.....	47
Initial Coding.....	47
Focused Coding.....	49
Memo Writing.....	50
Creating a Theory.....	50
Researcher Role.....	51
Researcher bias.....	51
Ethical Considerations.....	52
Informed consent.....	52
Confidentiality and anonymity.....	53
Data security.....	54
Limitations.....	54
Sampling.....	54
Generalizability.....	54
Researcher experience.....	55
Theoretical sensitivity.....	55
Summary.....	55
Results.....	56
Participant and Organization Demographics.....	56
Gender and previous work experience.....	57
Current job role.....	58

Years of working for current organization.	58
Part-time / full-time.	59
Main work location.....	59
Organizational demographics.	59
Data Analysis Process.....	60
Initial coding results.	60
Focused coding.....	62
Theoretical Coding	64
Culture defined	67
Analysis Results.....	68
Category One: Preconditions.....	69
Personal frames of reference.	69
Personal mental models.....	70
Past experiences.	71
Personal work competencies.	75
Category Two: Organizational Support Structures and Processes	77
Clear mission or purpose.....	77
Unclear mission or purpose.....	79
Clear work expectations and behavioral boundaries.....	80
Work expectations.....	80
Behavioral boundaries.....	81
Unclear work expectations.....	82

Strong support systems and documented processes.	82
Question and answer support systems.....	83
Formal communication process.	84
Documented information.....	86
Little or no documented information.	87
Communication technology and support.....	89
Poor communication technology and support.....	91
Formal orientation and training programs.....	92
No formalized training	93
Category Three: Contributing Factors and Barriers to Learning and Adopting the Organizational Culture.....	94
Values alignment.....	95
Misalignment of values.	97
A strong relationship with the reporting manager.....	99
Weak relationship with the reporting manager.	101
Socialization opportunities.	101
Minimal socialization.....	103
Engagement.....	104
Minimal engagement.....	107
Trusting relationships with colleagues.	109
Low trust	111
Purposeful dialog about the culture.....	113

No one talks about the culture.....	114
Category Four: Learning Techniques.....	116
Dialogic learning techniques.....	116
Coaching and mentoring.....	116
Getting feedback.....	117
Storytelling.....	119
Experiential learning techniques.....	120
Trial and error.....	120
Learning communication preferences and personality styles.....	121
Individual learning techniques.....	123
Personal observation.....	123
Listening for clues.....	124
Reading Documentation.....	126
Category Five: Adopting & Integrating Organizational Culture into Work.....	127
Changing work actions.....	127
Changing the way we communicate.....	129
Carrying the culture to other environments.....	131
Transmitting the culture to others through dialog.....	132
Summary.....	135
Discussion.....	138
Overview of the Study.....	138
Responses to Research Questions.....	139

Primary question one: How do organizational team members, who are geographically dispersed, learn the organization’s culture?..... 140

- Dialogic techniques. 140
- Experiential techniques. 141
- Individual techniques. 142

Sub-question one: What are the factors that contribute to the learning of organizational culture when team members are geographically dispersed? 142

- Values alignment. 143
- Strong relationship with the reporting manager. 143
- Socialization opportunities. 144
- Engagement. 144
- Trusting relationships with colleagues. 144
- Purposeful dialog about the culture. 145
- Enabling support structures. 145

Sub-question two: What are the obstacles in learning organizational culture to geographically dispersed team members? 145

- Misaligned values. 146
- No strong relationship with the reporting manager. 147
- Minimal interaction or socialization with others. 147
- Minimal engagement. 147
- Low trust and communication with colleagues. 147
- No one talks about the culture. 148

Speed of change. 148

Poor structural support processes and technology. 148

Primary question two and sub-question two: How do geographically dispersed team members adopt and integrate the organizational culture into their own work? 149

 Changing work actions..... 149

 Changing the way they communicate. 149

 Transferring the organizational culture to other areas of their lives. 150

Sub-question two: How do geographically dispersed team members pass on the organizational culture to others? 150

Theory..... 150

 Connectors..... 152

 Enabling technology..... 153

 Structured support processes. 154

 Structured relationship processes. 155

 Intentional dialog.....159

Context. 160

 Explicit boundaries..... 162

 Personal frames of reference 164

 Values alignment..... 168

 Contextual clues. 169

Connections..... 170

Relationship with reporting manager.	171
Relationships with trusted colleagues	173
Organization.	174
Trust.	174
Implications for Organizations and Geographically Dispersed Team Members.....	176
Implications for organizations	176
Implications for geographically dispersed team members.	179
Implications for Research	180
Final Reflection	182
Summary	184
References.....	185
Appendices.....	201

List of Tables

Table	Title	Page
Table 1	Participant and Employer Demographics.....	57
Table 2	Initial Coding by Categorical Markers.....	62
Table 3	Focused Coding: Re-categorization of Categories.....	64
Table 4	Theoretical Coding: Identification of Key Themes and Categories.....	66
Table 5	Connectors: Themes, Dimensions, and Descriptions.....	152
Table 6	Context: Themes, Dimensions, and Descriptions.....	162
Table 7	Connections: Themes, Dimensions, and Descriptions.....	171

List of Figures

Figure	Title	Page
Figure 1	Theoretical Coding: Identifying Common Themes and Patterns	65
Figure 2	Model for Optimal Learning, Adoption, and Integration of the Organizational Culture.....	151

List of Appendices

Appendix	Title	Page
Appendix A	Participant Recruitment E-Mail.....	201
Appendix B	Sample Invitation Email to Participants.....	203
Appendix C	Pre-Screening Interview Guide.....	204
Appendix D	Interview Confirmation.....	205
Appendix E	Consent Form.....	206
Appendix F	Confirm Research Understanding.....	208
Appendix G	Original Interview Guide.....	209
Appendix H	Final Interview Guide.....	211
Appendix I	Transcriber Confidentiality Statement.....	212
Appendix J	Focused Coding: Re-categorization of Categories and Codes.....	213
Appendix K	Theoretical Coding: Identification of Key Themes, Categories, and Codes.....	221

Introduction

Overview

From the minute we step foot into an organization, we encounter the organization's culture, which can be a mix of the organizational culture as well as its subcultures. Each organization has its own unique culture(s) that were socially constructed and constantly reconstructed by its members through common experiences (Martin, 1992; Schein, 2009). Organizational culture provides a set of boundaries in the form of rules, norms, and routines that guide our behavior and act as a lens to interpret the behaviors of others (Schein, 2004).

As individuals come into contact with organizations, they come into contact with dress norms, stories people tell about what goes on, the organization's formal rules and procedures, its informal codes of behavior, rituals, tasks, pay systems, jargon, and jokes only understood by insiders, and so on. These elements are some of the manifestations of organizational culture. When culture members interpret the meanings of these manifestations, their perceptions, memories, beliefs, experiences and values will vary, so interpretations will differ – even of the same phenomenon. The patterns or configurations of these interpretations, and the ways they are enacted, constitute culture. (Martin, 1992, p. 3)

Organizational culture impacts both the organization's members and the organization itself. It is the element that holds the workforce and the organization together. Organizational culture can create a sense of security, identity, and belonging for the members who belong to a particular organization (Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Dasgupta & Gupta, 2009). It provides practical meaning for people both on and off the job. "A strong culture is a powerful lever for guiding behavior; it helps employees do their jobs a little better" (Deal & Kennedy, 2000, p. 15). It can

also “serve as normative principles for employees to make day-to-day decisions in the interest of an organization” (Chiu, Hsu, & Wang, 2006, p. 246).

According to Schein (2009), organizational culture matters because it creates an “unconscious set of forces that determine both our individual and collective behavior, ways of perceiving, through patterns, and values. These cultural elements impact and help determine organizational strategies, goals, and modes of operating” (p 19).

Organizational culture not only guides the member’s behavior and performance, it can also impact other aspects of the organization such as what products get produced, what things we pay attention to, what information is significant in decision making, how people are treated, how people move up in the organization, and even customer opinion (Barney, 1986; Deal & Kennedy, 2000). According to Deal and Kennedy (2000),

Companies that have cultivated their individual identities by shaping values, making heroes, spelling out rites and rituals, and acknowledging the cultural networks have an edge. These corporations have values and beliefs to pass along – not just products. They have stories to tell – not just profits to make. (p. 15)

Organizational culture has been recognized as a key asset for organizational sustainability and competitiveness (Barney, 1986; Mulder, Swaak, & Kessler, 2004). As an asset, it becomes an enabler to key strategic organizational-wide efforts such as knowledge sharing, innovation, quality management efforts, and knowledge management. Ardichvili (2008) proposed that a supportive organizational culture was a key enabler to sharing information between communities of practice, while Bates and Khasawneh (2005) suggested that it is critical to the innovation process including the learning and generation of creative ideas as well as the ability to influence

attitudes about change, outcomes, and performance expectations in regards to innovation. A strong organizational culture was also found to facilitate quality management implementations (Yong & Pheng, 2008). In addition, a number of research studies have proposed that a strong organizational culture is needed to support effective knowledge construction, transfer, and management efforts (Ardichvili, 2008; De Long & Fahey, 2000; Fong & Chu, 2006; Janz & Prasarnphanich, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Zakaria, Amelinckx, & Wilemon, 2004).

Problem Statement

If a strong culture not only benefits the organization's members but also the organization itself, there must be opportunities for geographically dispersed team members to learn the culture (Martin, 1992; Schein, 2009). Schein (2009) noticed that: "cultures tend to grow from the interaction of co-located employees, so the question arises of what kinds of subcultures can and will form in networks of employees who are electronically connected, but may have never met each other" (p. 6).

For organizations in the 21st century, this does indeed become a dilemma. Although having geographically dispersed team members apart from the physical organization isn't new, it wasn't until the 1990s, with the advent of technology, that it became commonplace in organizations (Gibson, 2003). Where geographically dispersed team members were at one time the exception, they are now the norm in many organizations, allowing them to take advantage of top talent wherever they reside (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004). Geographically dispersed team members can generally be defined as members who are separated from their organization by time, space, and the physical organizational boundaries, and who need some type of

technological device to connect and communicate with others in the organization (Fisher & Fisher, 2001; Haywood, 1998; Hoefling, 2001; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; Warner & Witzel, 2004).

That said, learning the organizational culture becomes more of a challenge in organizations that have geographically dispersed team members who may have very little social interaction with other members in the organization (Duarte & Synder, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; Nemiro, 2004; Shein, 2004; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006; Wilson, 2008). According to Pretorius and Steyn (2005), the key elements necessary for knowledge sharing is that the team should be co-located, have a long history of working together, have developed strong relationships, and the size of the team should be relatively small. Unfortunately, since team members are dispersed among many locations, the opportunity for frequent face-to-face interactions, strong relationship development, and the chance to have small team membership with a long history is reduced.

To add even more complexity to this situation, Bosch-Sijtsema (2007) suggested that members of geographically dispersed teams were often organizationally and culturally heterogeneous, being made up of members who have very little shared history or culture and who have weak personal relationships with each other. Without social interactions and knowledge sharing, learning the culture may be extremely difficult.

Researcher Interest

I have been a consultant and trainer for over 20 years which has allowed me to observe and work with all types of organizations in various industries. Most of my time as a consultant has been spent working with project, product development, and functional teams. I have also

worked with a number of boards and professional network groups as well. When I started consulting, most of my time was spent working with “intact” teams that were co-located. Now, most of the teams I work with either have members who are geographically dispersed or do some type of telecommuting.

In the course of working with various organizations, I noticed that each organization had particular ways of working, making decisions, interpreting particular events, and determining what “appropriate” behavior was to be expected in their organization. If I continued working with the client for some length of time, I would find myself adopting and integrating their culture into my own actions. Although understanding the “rules” of the organization was always a challenge, it became more of a challenge when I worked with virtual groups. Each team member would often come to the table with different expectations and assumptions about what the group should do and what the project was about. We found it much harder to get work done because we spent most of the time explaining ourselves.

I have also observed that managers and leaders are often struggling to make their geographically dispersed team members more effective by ensuring organizational knowledge, context, and culture gets shared and understood within the team, between teams, and throughout the organization. It is through my work with frustrated clients and my own experiences with geographically dispersed teams that led me to wonder how organizational culture is learned by geographically dispersed team members and what the enablers and barriers are to that learning. In addition, I wanted to understand how team member’s adopted and integrated the organizational culture into their work actions.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this research study is to generate a theory on how organizational culture is learned by geographically dispersed team members and how they adopt and integrate the culture into their work. For this study, a grounded theory methodology was used. Grounded theory is a methodology that seeks to construct a theory about issues that are important in peoples' lives based on data that is systematically obtained and analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The central questions guiding this research were: a) how do organizational team members who are geographically dispersed, learn the organization's culture, and b) how do geographically dispersed team members adopt and integrate the organizational culture into their own work?

Using these key questions, the following topical sub-questions were also explored:

- 1) What are the factors that contribute to the learning of organizational culture when team members are geographically dispersed?
- 2) What are the obstacles to learning organizational culture for geographically dispersed team members?
- 3) How do geographically dispersed team members actively adopt and integrate organizational culture into their work actions?

Significance of the Study

In response to a call for further research in this area (Martins et al., 2004), along with my own personal interest, it is hoped that this study will bring organizations one step closer to understanding how organizational culture is learned, adopted, and integrated by organizational members who are geographically dispersed. As a result, it is anticipated that organizations may

be able to increase the strength of their support systems that will enable the social interactions needed to learn and understand the organizational culture. By maximizing the success of geographically dispersed team members, organizations may potentially be able to increase their productivity, help team members develop a stronger identity with the organization, and increase knowledge transfer throughout the organization. Further benefits to the organization may include increased flexibility, increased employee satisfaction and retention, less physical office space cost, a smaller carbon footprint, and the ability to be closer to the customers (Haywood, 1998).

Theoretical Perspective

According to Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006), in order to have a strong and solid research design, a researcher must select a research method that aligns with their beliefs about the nature of reality. Most of our underlying beliefs about how the world works are stored in our unconscious and often taken for granted. However, by examining our ontological stance and bringing it to our consciousness, we can determine the epistemological and methodological possibilities that are available to us.

Given my view of reality and the way the world works, my ontological stance tends to be a social constructionist approach in which meaning is socially constructed through language, dialog, consciousness, and shared meaning (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a; Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 2008; Goulding, 2002; Crotty, 1998). I believe we are conscious beings who actively interpret the world and act with intention, rather than just respond to stimuli. From a research perspective, this means I will consider myself part of the research endeavor rather than an objective observer (Mills, Bonner, et al., 2006).

Definition of Terms

There are a number of key terms that are critical to the understanding of this research. To ensure a conceptual understanding of these terms, the following definitions will be used for this study:

Organizational culture. Organizational culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization from another” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 282-283). It is retained both in the minds of the individual group members, as well as other stakeholders outside the organization. Organizational culture emphasizes the common beliefs, values, and assumptions of its members. Each organization has its own unique culture that is socially constructed and is constantly reconstructed by its members through common experiences and may be modeled by the leadership of the organization (Martin, 1992; Schein, 2009). It is a pattern of norms, values, attitudes, and basic assumptions about how the world operates that are agreed upon with the group members who live within the same social environment.

Geographically dispersed team members. Geographically dispersed team members are members of an organization who are separated from their organization by time, space, and organizational boundaries and need some type of technology to connect and communicate (Duarte and Snyder, 2001; Cohen & Gibson, 2003; Haywood, 1998; Hoefling, 2001; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997).

Learning. Learning is the process of accumulating knowledge. “Learning is something that takes place, not with the heads of individuals, but in the interaction between people” (Easterby-Smith, Burgoyne, & Araujo, 1999, p. 6). It is a group activity that leverages

knowledge through the process of collaboration (Martins, 2004). For the purposes of this study, learning includes the co-construction of the organizational culture and the understanding of that culture.

Adoption. For the purposes of this study, I used Collin's English Dictionary definition of adoption. Adopting organizational culture means to choose and follow the culture and take over the cultural values, norms, or concepts as if they were your own (Adoption, n.d.).

Integration. For the purposes of this study, I also used Collin's English Dictionary definition of integration. Integrating the organizational culture means to incorporate the culture into the member's personal actions (Integration, n.d.)

Organization of the Study

Chapter One, Introduction, raises the need for more research on how organizational culture gets learned by team members who are geographically dispersed and not face-to-face with other organizational members or in the physical space of the organization. The study's purpose, research questions, significance of the study, the researcher's theoretical perspective, and a glossary of terms were also included in this chapter.

Chapter Two, Literature Review, provides a brief review of my theoretical framework, the current literature's definitions of geographically dispersed teams, culture, national culture, organizational culture, subcultures, and three cultural perspectives. It also includes a literature review on how organizational culture is constructed, a definition of learning from a social constructionist perspective, methods of learning and adopting organizational culture, and the challenges geographically dispersed team members have in learning and adopting the culture.

Chapter Three, Methods, is devoted to providing a description of the methodology used in this study. Included in this chapter is a review of the key questions, a description of grounded theory, and why this method is appropriate for this study. It also describes the targeted participants, sampling techniques used, an overview of the data collection and analysis processes, an understanding of the researcher's role, ethical procedures that were followed, and an overview of research limitations and theoretical sensitivity issues.

Chapter Four, Results, describes the results of the analysis of this study based on a grounded theory approach. This chapter includes an overview of the participant and organizational demographics; an overview of the common themes identified in initial, focused, and theoretical coding; and detailed results by major themes identified during theoretical coding with participant examples.

Chapter Five, Discussion and Reflection, includes a summary of the study, a discussion of the key results, a constructed theory, and related research literature. It also includes the implications of this study, recommendations for future research, and final concluding remarks.

Literature Review

The purpose of a grounded theory study is to develop a theory from the analysis of the data, which is then confirmed by literature findings (Charmaz, 2006). In this grounded theory study, the goal of the literature review was to orient myself about the current thinking on geographically dispersed teams, organizational culture, learning from a social constructionist view point, and the learning, adoption, and integration of organizational culture. While this literature review was not meant to direct the focus of the research (Urquhart, 2007), it was used to situate the study within a theoretical framework.

Organizational Culture through a Social Constructionist Theoretical Framework

It is important for any study to be situated in the researcher's theoretical framework. For this particular study I used a social constructionist framework. According to Crotty (1998), social constructionists believe "meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p. 43). Greenwood (1994) reminded us, however, that we are talking about constructing a social phenomena and not physical phenomena.

Physical and social phenomena...differ in one essential respect. Chairs may exist independently of our knowing they do; our knowledge of the existence of chairs is not constitutive of their existence. In contrast, social phenomena do not exist independently of our knowledge of them...Social realities, therefore, are constructed and sustained by the observation of the social rules which obtain in any social situation by all the social inter-actors involved....social reality is, therefore, a function of shared meanings; it is constructed, sustained, and reproduced through social life. (p. 85)

So how does a social constructionist framework help us in the study of organizational culture? A social constructionist perceives that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essential social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). This perspective aligns with Schein’s view that culture is a dynamic phenomenon that is being constantly constructed by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behavior and the set of organizational structures, practices, rules, and norms that guide and contain behavior in a particular organization (Schein, 2004). If culture is a dynamic phenomenon being constantly constructed, it would make the most sense to study it through a social constructionist lens.

A social constructionist view also allows us to focus on meaning generation through social interaction rather than through the meaning of the object itself. By taking a social constructivist view as researchers, we attempt to socially construct the participant’s reality through asking interview questions and by socially constructing a theory about the phenomenon. Our interaction in the study is not neutral because we become part of the reality we seek to learn, co-construct, and understand.

Geographically Dispersed Teams ... A Working Definition

Although this study focused on geographically dispersed team members and not the teams as a unit, it is necessary to understand the context in which a geographically dispersed team member works. Generally, geographically dispersed teams or virtual teams can refer to any type of real or simulated organizational entity, group, or community whose team members are physically dispersed and must use technology as the primary communication vehicle (Cohen &

Gibson, 2003; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). In addition, geographically dispersed team members may also be separated by time, space, and organizational boundaries (Cohen & Gibson, 2003; Duarte and Snyder, 2001; Fisher & Fisher, 2001; Haywood, 1998; Hoefling, 2001; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997).

Fisher and Fisher (2001) further suggested that geographically dispersed team members may also be separated by different types of organizational cultures. According to Fisher and Fisher (2001), employees in organizations that have a strong homogeneous culture tend to have established patterns of behavior, clear roles and responsibilities, a shared sense of behavior, and a certain way to deal with people who don't conform to the cultural standards. On the other hand, employees in organizations that have a more heterogeneous culture tend to be more individualistic in their behavior. In a heterogeneous organizational culture, common cultural norms are not shared between members. Organizational members use their own personal cultural norms or subcultures to figure out what to do and how to respond to a situation when it arises rather than depending on the culture within their organization to give them guidance.

Generally, to be considered a team, a group of members must have a shared purpose, mission, or vision. The team members must be interdependent, must be accountable to a unit or project, committed to working together, and have shared outcomes. Their final output is a combination of group and individual contributions (Cohen & Gibson, 2003; Hoefling, 2001; Martins et al., 2004). Katzenbach and Smith (1994) suggested a more generic team definition in that "a team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (p. 45).

Saunders and Ahuja's (2006) study offered a more extensive view of teams. They identified two main categories of geographically dispersed teams, temporary and ongoing. Temporary teams are often composed of highly skilled technical people who are assigned different tasks on a project. The team members typically engage in a number of temporary, non-routine tasks in order to accomplish a goal with a specific deadline and sense of urgency. These tasks tend to be finite, concrete, and usually have a shorter time frame. Project teams and ad hoc teams brought together to solve a specific problem are two forms of a temporary team.

Unlike temporary teams that come together for a purpose and then disband, ongoing teams have recurring or repeated tasks that can accomplish numerous or repetitive goals that may either be established at inception or evolve over time. Saunders and Ahuja (2006) identified two forms of ongoing geographically dispersed teams: management and functional teams. Management teams often work on providing the overall direction of the organization, ensuring performance and allocating resources (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Saunders & Ahuja, 2006), while functional teams include members who "report and deliver primarily through a functional manager; and produce individually regardless of other ... team members' production" (Hoefling, 2001, p. 6).

For this study, I used Saunders and Ahuja (2006) broad definition of "team" and considered participants on any form of temporary or ongoing team.

Culture, a Definition

Hans Magnus Enzensberger, a German author and poet, is quoted as saying "culture is a little like dropping an Alka-Seltzer into a glass-you don't see it, but somehow it does something"

(Culture quotes, n.d.). Culture is the intricately woven fabric or foundation which impacts an individual's decisions, thought processes, and guides their actions.

Culture is both a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behavior and a set of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and contain behavior.

(Schein, 2004, p. 1)

According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), culture is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the people of one group or category of people from another” (p. 4). It is a pattern of norms, values, attitudes, and basic assumptions about how the world operates that are agreed upon with the group members who live within the same social environment. Culture is the unwritten rules and hidden scripts that guide our behavior, actions, and decisions (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2004).

Culture is also “a way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas” (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, p. 6). It not only influences behavior, but provides an explication for individual behavior (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Individuals socially construct culture so they can make sense of our world and ensure life happens in an orderly fashion, thereby reducing disorder and chaos. Culture exists “to alleviate anxiety, to control the uncontrollable, to bring predictability to the uncertain, and to clarify the ambiguous” (Martin, 1992, p. 51).

According to Schein (2004), there are three levels of culture - artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts are the visual representation and manifestation of internal cultural norms, values, and assumptions. Artifacts include things

individuals use their senses to see, hear, and feel (Schein, 2004). Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) further refined artifacts into symbols, stories, heroes, rituals, and practices. Symbols are the most obvious and include the language we use, slang words, logos, manner of dress, hairstyles, organizational and departmental structures, and systems. Symbols also manifest through the more physical aspects of the environment such as décor, pictures on the wall, objects that have special meaning, use of space, noise levels, working environment, physical layouts of the office, or a list of values that get published and disseminated through the organization.

Artifacts also include the stories that get told, the myths that are created, and the heroes, imaginary or real, which serve as models for behavior (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2004). Observable rituals, such as greetings, paying respect to others, and celebrations for promotions, retirements, or performance are considered socially critical to good behavior, but are not necessarily done to reach a result or desired end (Deal & Kennedy, 2000; De Long & Fahey, 2000; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Practices can be formal or informal routines used to accomplish work in the organization and may include the social rules and procedures that are consistently followed by organizational members (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2004).

Although artifacts are often clearly visible, easy to observe, and can provide a lot of information about the culture of the organization, the difficulty lies in the interpretation of the meaning of the artifacts. While an outsider may not correctly interpret the meaning behind the artifact, most group members in a particular culture will be able to interpret and understand the meaning behind the artifacts correctly (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2004).

Norms, espoused beliefs, and values lie underneath the artifacts. Schein (2004) referred to norms as espoused beliefs, the component of culture that can be articulated. Norms provide

group members with a mutual understanding of what is right or wrong. They guide behavior and describe how work is or should be done either through formal means of written laws or informal means of social control (De Long & Fahey, 2000; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

Values, on the other hand, help members determine what information is important to pay attention to when making decisions and action plans. Values represent the broad tendencies of group members to prefer certain types of interactions, behavior, and organizational outcomes over others (De Long, 1997; De Long & Fahey, 2000; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Values are the most difficult to articulate and even harder to change (De Long & Fahey, 2000).

Underlying assumptions are the deepest level of cultural awareness (Schein, 2004; Schein, 2009). Assumptions are often taken for granted and no longer questioned by group members, thus they become a form of tacit information. Assumptions determine how people relate to their environment. They help individuals form mental maps of the world and determine how group members perceive, think, and feel about things (Schein, 2004).

There are generally thought to be three key cultural types - national, organizational, and subcultures (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Group members can belong to any number of these cultural groups at the same time (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

National culture. Generally, the first thing that comes to mind when people think about culture is national or regional culture. National cultures usually provide the most noticeable differences in people's thinking and behavior. National culture is the collective programming people receive by growing up in a particular region and country. Individuals develop personal

mental models on national culture during the first 10 years of their lives from their family, the environment in which they live, and school (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

National culture often instills a personal value system and embeds the deepest patterns of behavior. It becomes a person's long-term personal identity, one that cannot be readily replaced (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). National cultures may be composed of different sub-cultural groups, which may be divided by regional, ethnic, religious, or linguistic affiliation (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

Organizational culture. Even though individuals are entrenched in their national cultures from early childhood, it would be shortsighted to disregard the power of organizational cultures. According to Dubinskas (1992), most people have long professional work histories and have spent almost half their waking lives immersed in organizational cultures. Organizational culture becomes the "common sense" way of doing things within the organization. It is the natural way of looking and acting in the work world (Schein, 2004). Individuals often find out just how much they have adopted and integrated a certain organizational culture when they take on a new job. Things that made sense in their last employment may be different or not make sense at their new place of employment.

Whereas national culture is thought to be acquired in the first ten years of life, individuals learn the organizational culture when they begin working for a particular organization. Organizational culture tends to consist mainly of an organization's practices. It is retained both in the minds of the individual group members, as well as other stakeholders outside the organization. Each organization has its own unique culture and subcultures which carry different perceptions or constructions of reality and appropriate behavior. Individuals are often unaware

of their constructed reality of the organization's culture until conflict arises and they begin to notice differences either in the culture or in their perceptions of the culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2004).

According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), organizational culture is considered holistic in that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; historically determined in that culture is reflected in the history of the organization; anthropological with its rituals and symbols; socially constructed because culture is co-created and preserved by the group members who form the organization; and difficult to change.

Organizational culture can affect an organization's strategy formation and implementation as well as its ability to achieve high levels of performance. According to Duarte and Snyder (2006), organizational culture is a key determinant in organizational performance. Organizational culture also provides individuals and teams with a way to cope with the uncertainties and ambiguities of organizational life (Elron & Vigoda, 2003). Culture informs and guides ethical behavior, as well as impacts assumptions and expectations about leadership practices, work habits, and team norms (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

Subcultures. Strong subcultures may also exist within an organization (Schein, 2004). Subcultures may form around a particular functional area of the organization, professional occupation, product line, geographical location, or a member's level in the hierarchal structure of the organization (Schein, 2009). People who work in a particular subculture tend to share similar interests, educational backgrounds, educational goals, experience, and ethical orientations. As a result, they often form subcultures that determine particular practices, methods of

communication, and ways of doing things within an organizational culture (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

Organizational cultures “may affect the behavior of the team members through its impact on the culture of the team itself and through its impact on the beliefs, norms, and values that individual members bring to the team” (Elron & Vigoda-Gadot, 2003, p. 327). For example, geographically dispersed team members who work on project teams often have members from different functional subcultures within the organization, while members of functional teams may work within their own functional subculture (Saunders & Ahuja, 2006). The differences between subcultures or between a subculture and the organizational culture can become a source of tension and conflict. Each group may try to collaborate yet continue to operate under different cultural norms, values, and assumptions (Dubinskas, 1992).

Nomadic culture. Chen and Nath (2008) recently coined the term “nomadic culture” to describe the organizational culture needed for a successful “nomadic” or telecommuting environment whose members are able to work anywhere, at any time. They suggested that a nomadic culture is one that supports not only the technical capabilities needed for geographically dispersed work, but also supports the design of business processes, operational procedures, organizational structure, and reward systems for geographically dispersed workers. Chen and Nath’s (2008) study suggested that organizations with a nomadic culture hold a basic assumption that employees are trustworthy, responsible, self-directed, and that technology is an important element which has a positive impact on the organization. The assumptions and values are ultimately reflected in the artifacts of organizational support for nomadic workers.

New technologies that enable mobile work practices will inevitably have social consequences at the individual, team, and organizational levels. Individuals must redefine what social norms, work, and supervision are in this new computing-enhanced environment. (Chen and Nath, 2008, p. 43)

Organizational Cultural Research Perspectives

According to Martin (1992), practitioners and/or researchers must be aware of three different perspectives or lenses used to view and understand organizational culture: integration, differentiation, and fragmentation.

Any cultural context can be understood more fully if it is regarded, at any point in time, from all three perspectives. To exclude any of these perspectives from the domain of organizational culture research would be to limit what we could try to understand.

(Martin, 1992, p. 174)

Research studies that are conducted from an integration perspective look for consistency in the interpretations of all cultural manifestations such as actions, symbols, and content themes within the organization (Martin, 1992). Generally, it is assumed that there is organization-wide consensus, agreement, and clarity about the culture, expected behavior, and the reasons behind it by all organizational members (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1991; Martin, 1992). Integrationists believe there is a common culture that is shared by all members of the organization (Martin, 1992). In essence, most of the organizational members will understand the cultural manifestations the same way, and act accordingly. According to Schein (2004), when researchers analyze why team members behave as they do, they often look for values that govern team member behavior. However, since values are difficult to observe, researchers must infer

them through interviews with key members and by reviewing documentation. Researchers may also review team member's social interaction and their interpretation of their behavior.

Researchers from a differentiation perspective see organizational culture not as one overarching culture, but as sub-cultural manifestations within the organization that are inconsistent with each other. If there is consistency or clarity in regards to the culture of an organization, research suggested that it lies only within the subcultures of the organization. These subcultures may co-exist in harmony or be indifferent or in conflict with one another. Subcultures are most often organized around professional backgrounds and functional areas within an organization. Any ambiguities come from outside the boundaries of the subculture (Frost et al., 1991; Martin, 1992).

Research from a fragmentation perspective focuses on the expression and manifestation of ambiguity as the essence of organizational culture. From a fragmentation standpoint, there is neither consensus on nor clarity around organizational culture or sub-cultures. Consensus and dis-sensus are constantly in flux and influenced by the tasks, events, and cognitive importance given by the group members (Frost et al., 1991; Martin, 1992).

According to Martin (1992), each of these three perspectives offers a different interpretation of how culture exists and how it can be changed.

When a single organization is viewed from all three perspectives, a greater understanding emerges than if they were viewed from any single perspective. If any cultural context is studied in enough depth, some things will be consistent, clear, and generate organization-wide consensus. Simultaneously, other aspects of the culture will coalesce within sub-cultural boundaries and still other elements of culture will be fragmented, in a state of

constant flux, and infused with confusion, doubt, and paradox. For this reason, it is useful to understand the difference among the perspectives and to use a multi-perspective approach, or at least, acknowledge what is excluded when only one perspective is used.

(Martin, 1992, p. 4)

A researcher may use any or all of these perspectives to focus their study or interpret the results of their study (Frost et al., 1991). For this study, I primarily used an integration perspective; however I also considered the differentiation perspective, and its impact on the participants of this study, as a secondary view.

Constructing Organizational Culture

Schein (2006) suggested that organizational culture can be formed in two ways: through group member socialization or by a highly successful leader or leadership team who the group members agree to follow.

Culture can be constructed when unstructured groups begin forming patterns of behavior through socialization and collaboration during their work activities with people with whom they share a common history (Dubinskas, 1992; Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2004; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). According to Schein (2004):

Culture is a pattern of basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17)

If these beliefs and values can be tested and they provide a reliable solution to the situation, they are adopted by the group. Any beliefs and values that cannot be empirically

tested, but can only be confirmed by social validation, must be substantiated through the shared social experiences of the group (Schein, 2004).

Culture can also be constructed by a successful leader. Leaders embed culture in the organization by their actions (Schein, 2009). However, a group will follow the leader or their leadership team only if the leadership's views of the world results in successful action (Schein, 2004). "A leader is the source of a cultural vision that generates an organization-wide consensus, enabling the firm to maintain itself successfully, survive difficult crises, and reorient itself to change environmental circumstance" (Martin, 1992, p. 63).

Whether culture is constructed through socialization or by a strong successful leader or leadership team, once the group has adopted the beliefs and values of a particular culture, failure to adopt those beliefs and values by an organizational member may lead to excommunication by the group (Dubinskas, 1992; Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2004; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

So strong is the need for meaning, in fact, that most people will yield a fair degree of latitude or freedom to institutions that give it to them. The excellent companies are marked by very strong cultures, so strong that you either buy into their norms or get out. (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 77)

According to Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), there are three organizational structures that will impact the construction of culture in an organization: the relationship employees have with an organization; the organizational system that defines authority levels between superiors and subordinates; and the employee's personal views on the organization's mission, vision, and strategic goals and their own relationship to these goals. Once a culture has

been learned or co-constructed, it must be continually reinforced. It may be reinforced by the organization's leaders or role models who personify the values of the organization, feedback from colleagues, peer-reviews, rituals, or celebrations (Deal & Kennedy, 2000; Schein, 2004). Nevertheless, once the organizational culture is formed, it becomes difficult to change. The culture will remain even after the members of the organization leave. This stability helps provide organizational members with predictability and meaning (De Long & Fahey, 2000; Schein, 2004).

Research suggested that organizational culture is constructed through socialization and collaboration and then gets reinforced through organizational leaders, feedback, rituals, and celebrations. This makes sense when team members are co-located. However, since geographically dispersed team members do not often have opportunities to socialize or collaborate with others in the organization and rarely get involved in the rituals or celebrations of the organization, this study was developed to see if this research is still supported. I developed this study to determine if the patterns of behavior still hold true or if there are other factors influencing the geographically dispersed team member in terms of learning, adopting, and integrating the organizational culture.

Defining Learning from a Social Constructionist Perspective

Mezirow & Associates (2000) described "a defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos" (p. 3). In other words, to be human is the desire to learn so individuals don't have to repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

From a constructionist point of view, learning is an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it. According to Easterby-Smith, Burgoyne, and Araujo (1999):

Learning is something that takes place not with the heads of individuals, but in the interaction between people. It is manifest in the ways that people behave when working with others, and these patterns of behavior are normally learnt by newcomers in the community through a process of socialization (p. 6).

Schwandt (1998) suggested that all individuals are social constructionists. He proposes that

In a fairly unremarkable sense, we are all constructivists if we believe that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge. Most of us would agree that knowing is not passive – a simple imprinting of sense data on the mind – but active; mind does something with these impressions, at the very least forms abstractions of concepts. In this sense, constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in light of new experiences. (p. 237)

Contextual understanding, critical reflection on personal assumptions, and meaning validation are all key elements that allow us to co-construct our learning (Mezirow & Associates, 2000). This theoretical framework is useful in situating a review of the learning and adoption of organizational culture.

Learning and Adopting Organizational Culture

The existing culture of an organization can be learned and adopted by its members either through informal or formal learning techniques. According to Schein (2004), cultural learning through informal techniques often gets to the deeper elements of culture such as values and tacit assumptions, while formal methods tend to remain focused on surface level culture such as artifacts, norms, and practices.

Informal learning. Organizational culture may be learned through informal methods such as learning by trial and error, socialization, feedback, observation, storytelling, coaching and mentoring, or self-directed learning to name a few (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Schein, 2004; Sloan, 2006).

Trial and error is perhaps the most often used method of learning the organizational culture. When a person enters a new organization, they must decipher the operating norms and assumptions of the group they joined (Schein, 1991). As Schein (2004) explained,

One reason it takes time before one can become productive in a new organization is because so many of the norms, ways of working, and ways of thinking are unique to that organization and have to be learned by trial and error. (p. 51)

Socialization is another key method for learning and adopting organizational culture. If a strong organizational culture exists, the existing organizational members will pass the culture on to the new members and generations to come through socialization (Von Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000; Schein, 1991). The existing culture will be “taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2004, p. 17). However, cultural learning and adoption can only be successful if there is feedback from the old

members as the new member tries out new kinds of behavior within the group. If the group determines they do not have shared assumptions, new members may interact with the existing group members to co-construct a new culture.

Culture can also be learned by observing co-workers or leaders within the organization (Schein, 2009). Observing the actions of co-workers or leaders set the boundaries of appropriate behavior for the organizational member (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998; Schein, 2004; Schein 2009). To be successful, team members will try to align their actions with their leadership, boss, or co-worker actions or be ousted from the group (Dubinskas, 1992; Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2004; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Organizational members will also notice what their boss pays attention to, what gets controlled and measured, how rewards get allocated, how feedback is given, and how they “recruit, select, promote, retire, and excommunicate organizational members” (Schein, 2009, p. 131).

Storytelling is another key method for learning the organizational culture and enhancing its adoption. Organizational stories can manage or change the collective mental models of the organizational members (Jarvenpaa, 2007). Cultural adoption occurs when organizational members listen to the story and take the ideas related in the context of the story and attach their meaning to another context, thus allowing for the continued production of culture (Giaccardi, 2006). Storytelling often involves the construction of detailed narratives of past management actions, employee interactions, or key organizational events, which are then used consciously or unconsciously to disseminate organizational culture into a memorable format (Jarvenpaa, 2007; Mills, Boylstein, & Lorean, 2001; Swap, Leonard, Schields, & Abrams, 2001).

Once a culture is constructed and shared assumptions exist, the culture survives by the current members teaching it to newcomers through various techniques such as apprenticeships, mentoring, or coaching (Bokeno & Gantt, 2000; Schein, 2004; Storck & Hill, 2000). These techniques provide a safe, on-the-job learning environment that creates “a culture of relational learning where safety is an assumption of the relationships” (Bokeno & Gantt, 2000, p. 256). The techniques will also reinforce the agreed upon behavioral norms in the organization (Storck & Hill, 2000).

Self-directed learning often occurs from reading the organization’s documentation such as marketing literature, policies and procedures, employee manuals, and information on the organization’s Intranet site (Bennett, 2009; Schein, 2009). According to Bennett (2009), an organization’s Intranet can reflect its culture through its stated content as well as the symbols and language it uses and what information is shared or not shared with the organization’s members.

Formal education. Formal educational programs that promote organizational culture often are in the form of employee orientation or other skill based training (Storck & Hill, 2000). These training programs frequently focus on creating and disseminating a common vocabulary, artifacts, policies and procedures; teach communication or work skills; and provide behavioral guidelines with approved organizational rules and norms (Schein, 2004; Schein, 2009; Storck & Hill, 2000). Global organizations also conduct formal education on cross-cultural communication in an effort to improve understanding between team members from various national cultural backgrounds. Cross-cultural training usually focuses on helping group members realize that the meaning of the words and context in which they are spoken differ in various cultures (Blackburn, Furst, & Rosen, 2003).

Learning Challenges Encountered by Geographically Dispersed Team Members

No matter how culture is constructed, learned, or adopted, the key foundational pieces that are needed for successful learning and adoption are visual cues, auditory cues, the development of strong social relationships, and some type of communication technology (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 2009). Yet these are the elements that are missing or at least prove to be very challenging to members on geographically dispersed teams (Cramton & Orvis, 2003; Pretorius & Steyn, 2005; Zakaria et al., 2004).

Visual and auditory cues. Visual and auditory cues are most often used for social and cultural learning. Individuals begin to interpret and understand the culture by using their senses (particularly seeing and hearing) to identify the cultural artifacts of the organization. Most of the cultural artifacts are physical manifestations such as symbols used by the members of the organization, stories we overhear or are told to us, rituals or celebrations that are done in certain situation, the physical layout of the office, the values that get published, or behavioral norms observed in face-to-face meetings (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). According to Cramton and Orvis (2003), face-to-face interactions provide a better understanding of a member's contextual meaning, mood, background, and priorities.

Visual cues, however, are almost non-existent for team members in geographically dispersed teams since they do not often see each other face-to-face or come into the physical space of the organization (Lipnack & Stamps, 1997). Even with visual aided communication technologies such as video conferencing, visual cues are still minimal (Nemiro, 2004). According to Hinds & Weisband (2003), "face-to-face interactions provide rich social information not available through most communication technologies" (p. 29). As a result, it

becomes even more difficult to obtain the visual contextual information needed to provide clues to an organization's culture.

Even though all communication efforts occur through some type of technology, auditory cues can also be a challenge to geographically dispersed team members (Bennett, 2007; Haywood, 1998, Lipnack & Stamps, 1997). Clear communication becomes difficult because of differing time zones, levels of technology proficiency, and the different national, organizational, and sub-cultural backgrounds of each member. Add to these challenges the vast volume of electronic communication received, asynchronous communication, and delayed feedback and the result can be incomplete and unclear communication (Nemiro, 2004). Any or all of these challenges can minimize the effective construction, learning, and adoption of organizational culture by members of geographically dispersed teams.

Strong social relationships. The deeper the relationship and trust between employees, the more they will interact to share knowledge and culture (Dani, Burns, Backhouse, & Kochhar, 2006; Dasgupta & Gupta, 2009; Chou & He, 2004). "Unlike face-to-face work environments where non-work information is shared and informal relationship-building occurs naturally, spontaneous expressive communication is less common" for members in geographically dispersed teams (Zakaria et al., 2004, p. 24). As a result, team members miss the chatting at the water cooler, hearing the stories organizational members tell, and over hearing the conversations in the office that provide contextual cues to understanding organizational culture (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Hoefling, 2001).

Communication technology. Unlike face-to-face communication, some type of technology is needed to communicate with geographically dispersed team members. By

definition, geographically dispersed team members would not exist without the advent of communication technologies (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Cohen & Gibson, 2003; Haywood, 1998; Hoefling, 2001; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997). However, communication technology also creates a dichotomy. On one hand, communication technology can be a barrier to information sharing and the learning of organizational culture since it tends to eliminate many of the visual and auditory cues needed to create and learn culture (Zakaria et al., 2004). “The probability of people communicating or collaborating more than once a week drops off dramatically if they are more than the width of a basketball court apart...Increasingly, the people we work with are no longer within shouting distance” (Lipnack & Stamps, 1997, p. 6).

On the other hand, organizational culture can be shaped by the technology used and the cultural preferences of the leaders and employees (Deal & Kennedy, 2000). For example, an organization’s Intranet can be used to reinforce the cultural values of its team members (Bennett, 2007). Intranets allow the posting of social messages such as appreciation, congratulations, and employee stories. The information that gets posted is often a reflection of the culture. A study by Bennett (2009) suggested that participants learned the organization’s cultural values by reading the information found on the Intranet, modeling the communication that was posted by other team members, and observing how others in the organization used the Intranet as a vehicle for communication. “Because the Intranet was relevant to the culture, the staff was motivated to continue accessing the Intranet for new information” (Bennett, 2009, p. 370).

According to Pretorius and Steyn (2005), face-to-face conversations still convey much more visual and auditory content such as facial expressions and voice inflections than communication using some form of technology: phone, email, Intranets, or socialization

technology. Nonaka, von Krogh, & Voelpel (2006) also suggest that face-to-face socialization between employees is still the principal mechanism through which tacit knowledge and cultural learning between people occurs and gets disseminated throughout the organization. Although web-based socialization technology has been introduced over the years, most organizations are still not using the technology to assist them in communicating their work effort (El-Tayeh & Gil, 2007).

Existing Research on Organizational Culture and Geographically Dispersed Teams

I found numerous examples in my research of the impact of organizational culture on such strategic efforts as knowledge sharing, knowledge management, innovation, and quality management (Ardichvili, 2008; De Long & Fahey, 2000; Fong & Chu, 2006; Janz & Prasarnphanich, 2003; Kirschner & Van Bruggen, 2004; Nonaka et al., 2006; Sloan, 2006; Zakaria et al., 2004). There were also many examples of studies on organizational culture focusing on the observable artifacts of culture, such as an organization's stories, myths, heroes, logos, or mission, rather than the values and norms which set the stage for behavioral expectations and decision making (Martin, 1992; Barley, 1991). I did not find any significant research that directly focused on how organizational culture is socially constructed, nor how organizational culture is learned, adopted, and integrated by geographically dispersed team members.

In an effort to assess the current state of the literature on geographically dispersed teams, also known as virtual teams, and to suggest opportunities for future research, Martins et al. (2004) conducted a study of the current peer reviewed literature on virtual teams. They found that the early research focused on the differences between face-to-face teams and geographically

dispersed teams. Most of this early research was done in a lab setting. As the research progressed, studies became focused on “real life” examples. Studies on technology came in a close second in the number of peer reviewed studies conducted, followed by research on the “virtualness” of a team and team composition. Processes were another key area of study and included research on the structural processes of goal setting, information sharing, knowledge management, communication, and interpersonal processes such as dealing with conflict, member cohesiveness, group identity, trust, member satisfaction, and decision quality.

Martins et al. (2004) noted in their review that the literature did not address how organizational context is understood, how culture is learned, or the structures that affect the functioning of the geographically dispersed team and its members. It is because of this void in research on how organizational culture is learned, adopted, or integrated by geographically dispersed team members that I decided to conduct this study.

Summary

This literature review was used to situate the study within a theoretical perspective on organizational culture and framed within the context of social constructionism. Organizational culture is a dynamic phenomenon that is continually being socially constructed through interaction with others. It allows individuals to make sense of the world, influences behavior, provides guidance to actions and decisions, clarifies ambiguity, and sets expectations.

Organizational culture can be constructed through socialization or by observing the leadership in the organization. It can be learned and adopted through informal methods such as trial and error, socialization, feedback from peers or leaders, observation, storytelling, mentoring

or coaching. It can also be learned through more formal education such as employee orientation or cross-cultural training.

Research also suggested that the keys to successful learning and adoption of culture by geographically dispersed team members include visual and auditory cues, strong relationships that create a common understanding, and some type of communication technology. Research also showed, however, that auditory and visual cues, as well as strong relationship development, are a challenge in geographically dispersed team members.

Further, I suggested that there was a void in the research on learning, adopting, and integrating organization culture by geographically dispersed team members. Although I found many research studies on geographically dispersed team members and their technology usage and needs, as well as organizational culture and its impact on the strategic initiatives of the organization such as its impact on knowledge sharing, knowledge management, innovation, and quality management, none of these studies focused on how organizational culture was learned by geographically dispersed team members. There was also much research conducted on cultural artifacts such as organizational stories, myths, heroes, logos, and mission statements. However, artifacts are something geographically dispersed team members rarely observe.

Method

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to generate a theory or theories on how organizational culture is learned, adopted, and integrated by geographically dispersed organizational members. The central questions guiding this research are: a) how do organizational team members, who are geographically dispersed, learn the organization's culture, and b) how do geographically dispersed team members adopt and integrate the organizational culture into their own work? Based on these key questions, the following topical sub-questions were also explored:

- 1) What are the factors that contribute to the learning of organizational culture when team members are geographically dispersed?
- 2) What are the obstacles to learning organizational culture for geographically dispersed team members?
- 3) How do geographically dispersed team members actively adopt and integrate organizational culture into their work actions?

Grounded theory is a methodology that seeks to construct a theory about issues that are important in peoples' lives (Glaser & Strauss, 2008). The theory, according to Goulding (2002), is grounded in the "behavior, words, and actions of those under study" (p. 40). Rather than having preconceived ideas or hypotheses to prove or disprove, important issues emerge from the stories the participants tell about an area of interest they have in common with the researcher.

Grounded theory can be used from either an objectivist or socially constructionist ontology (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007c; Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002). According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007c), researchers who are grounded in a more objectivist ontology see

themselves as neutral observers who remain separate from the participants and the analysis of the data. An objectivist goal in grounded theory would be to “discover and establish the general laws that explain the studied phenomena and from which predictions can be made” (p. 609).

Conversely, Bryant and Charmaz (2007c) suggested that social constructionists assume that people create a social reality through individual and collective action. Thus, in a grounded theory study, constructionists assume that the researcher also plays a role in constructing an understanding of reality as they “enter the phenomenon, gain multiple views of it, and locate it in its web of connections and constraints” (p. 607).

Generally, most grounded theory researchers select one of the three major approaches to grounded theory based on the chief researchers who used them: Glaser, Strauss, and Charmaz (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a; Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002).

Glaser believed that “the theory should only explain the phenomenon under study” (Goulding, 2002, p. 45). He also asserted that a researcher should be allowed to remain open to different interpretations of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Glaser defined grounded theory as “a method of discovery, treated categories as emergent from the data, relied on direct and often narrow empiricism, and analyzed a basic social process” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 8).

Alternatively, Strauss moved the grounded theory method to verification and tended to favor a more analytical approach to analyzing the data using structured pre-defined categories such as causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences (Charmaz, 2006). Strauss “insists on excessive use of coding matrices to conceptualize beyond the immediate field of study” (Goulding, 2002, p. 45). Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined grounded theory as:

One that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. One does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge. Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action. (p. 12)

In contrast, Charmaz (2006) followed a social constructionist approach in which she suggested that the researcher constructs the reality, rather than “discovers” it. In her view, grounded theory is a flexible process with “a set of principles and practices, not prescriptions or packages” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 9). To Charmaz (2006), grounded theory:

Serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them... We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspective, and research practices.

(Charmaz, 2006, p.10)

For this study, I used Charmaz’ approach to grounded theory, which closely aligns not only with my personal theoretical framework, but it also fits my definition and understanding of the organizational culture as a socially constructed phenomenon.

Appropriateness of the Methodology

There were a number of reasons I believed that a qualitative study using grounded theory was appropriate for this particular study. First, grounded theory is most often used to “generate theory where little is already known or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge”

(Goulding, 2002, p. 42). As stated earlier, little research has been conducted on how organizational culture is learned or adopted in geographically dispersed team members.

Second, culture is thought to be created through the social interactions we have with others (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Schein, 2004). Although cultural studies have been conducted using a quantitative approach, these studies often focused on capturing the data on the more observable manifestations of the culture such as artifacts, rather than on understanding and interpreting the deeper meaning of culture (Martin, 1992; Schein, 2004). Since the goal of grounded theory is to create a theory that relates to a particular situation, that situation being “one in which individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 56), it seemed appropriate to use grounded theory to study how organizational culture is learned and adopted by geographically dispersed team members.

Finally, grounded theory was selected because of its close fit to the way I approach life and complex issues. Rather than making an assumption that there is one truth or reality that surrounds an issue, I believe that truth is relative and that there are multiple realities or truths based on individual perspectives. This perception fits Charmaz’ (2006) description of social constructionism and grounded theory: “rather than explaining reality, social constructionists see multiple realities and therefore ask: What do people assume is real? How do they construct and act on their view of reality? Thus, knowledge and theories are situated and located in particular positions, perspectives, and experiences” (p. 127).

Participants

Population. This research study targeted participants who: a) worked for a U.S. based organization to minimize national cultural influences; b) were geographically separated from

their team, department, division, and/or parent company so that they needed some type of technology to communicate with other organizational members and where visual and auditory cues were minimized; c) spent more than 90% of their time working away from the physical presence of the organization, department, or team to lessen their exposure to physical and visual cultural cues; d) worked more than six months at an organization to give them enough time to learn some of the culture in the organization; e) worked in an organization at the time of the interview, so they had current experience of the organizational culture and were less reliant on past memories; f) had not worked part time or full time at the parent organization's physical space in the past so the participants was less likely to have picked up the organization's culture through physical proximity; and g) could converse in English to minimize translation errors. I sought participants who worked at satellite offices, client sites, or home offices that were not part of the corporate organization's physical space in order to limit physical exposure to the corporate culture. Age, gender, nationality, race, profession, position within the company, company location, or industry type were not considered in this study. However, because national culture tends to be a stronger force on individual behavior than organizational culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), the target audience was limited to participants who resided in the United States and who have lived here more than 10 years.

Sampling. Participant sampling must remain flexible throughout the study in order to optimize the data needed to develop the theory (Hood, 2007; Morse, 2007). Grounded theory offers four levels of sampling (Hood, 2007; Morse, 2007) which can guide the research effort: convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, theoretical sampling, and theoretical group interviews.

Most of the participants for this study were selected using a convenience sampling. According to Morse (2007), a convenience sampling process takes place at the onset of the research, during which time the researcher identifies the core concepts and boundaries of the study and begins to advertise for participants who meet the study's criteria. Participants are generally "selected on the basis of their accessibility" (Morse, 2007, p. 235). My first participants came in response to an email I sent out to all the cohort members, past and present, who were part of a doctoral program at a Midwestern University. This sampling provided me with 11 participants.

Because my first sampling did not yield enough participants, I moved to a variation of a convenience sample called snowball or nominated sampling (Morse, 2007). A snowball sample is a method of asking the first set of participants to provide referrals for subsequent interviews and for those referrals to give further referrals until enough interviews have been obtained to the point of data saturation (Hood, 2007; Morse, 2007). This sampling method can be used when participants are difficult to find. This method gave me six more participants for a total of seventeen.

Following convenience sampling, I moved to purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to hone in on a particular data area or facet of study that seems critical (Morse, 2007). At this point, I could either confirm the direction of my study or interview a set of new participants in order to capture additional data for a more robust understanding of the phenomenon. If I found new data, then I might have had to recode or reconsider some of my previously identified data patterns (Morse 2007). For this study I broadened my recruitment efforts to identify participants from different professional fields. I felt the participant pool was

too heavily representing the sales profession, so I recruited from additional professional areas to add five more participants who came from the education and consulting sectors.

I did not move to a theoretical sampling or theoretical group interviews. Theoretical sampling focuses on identifying participants based on the emerging categories and the researcher's increased understanding of the developing theory (Morse, 2007). I did not feel that any additional identified participants for this study would yield anything different since I was seeing common themes across the interviews already. Theoretical group interviews are used to verify or expand on the proposed theory by bringing the participants together into small groups to review the preliminary theory (Morse, 2007). Given that the participants are geographically dispersed, getting a group together would be problematic.

Participant sampling for this study was conducted until I no longer heard any new ideas or themes and had achieved data saturation. Data saturation is achieved when no new information reveals itself in subsequent data collection (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; Goulding, 2002; Stern, 2007). Unlike random sampling in a quantitative study, participants were selected for their experience and knowledge about the topic under study. The goal of grounded theory sampling is to optimize the capture of meaningful data, so it focuses on selecting participants who have exposure to or an understanding of the topic to be studied (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; Goulding, 2002; Stern, 2007).

Additional factors used in identifying participants suggested by Hood (2007) and Morse (2007) included their willingness to participate in the study, their ability to provide the time necessary to share their information, their ability to be reflective about the phenomenon, and their ability to speak articulately about the subject.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection. Grounded theory data may be collected through participant observations by the researcher, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, videos, diaries, historical documentation, or visual images (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998). However, the primary data collection technique in a grounded theory study is one-on-one interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this study, interviewing was the only technique used in data collection.

Generally, grounded theory requires 20 to 30 interviews or enough interviews until the data reaches a “saturation point” where no new information reveals itself in subsequent interviews (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 1998; Goulding, 2002; Stern, 2007). I conducted 22 interviews for this study, at which point I felt I had achieved data saturation.

In-person interviews are often considered the most desirable form of interviews for a grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002). However, since the participants were geographically disbursed, I conducted 21 interviews over the phone, while one interview was face-to-face since the participant was local. Most interviews were 60 to 90 minutes in length. All interviews were taped using an Olympus digital recorder and were transcribed using Express Scribe version 5.06, a free downloadable transcription software. I transcribed 17 of the interviews, while five of the interviews were transcribed by a paid transcriptionist. A Transcriber Confidentiality Statement (see Appendix I) was signed by the paid transcriptionist with the terms of confidentiality.

Recruitment. To recruit the participants, I sent out an email request (see Appendix A) to the doctoral students at a large Midwestern University. I also sent email requests out to my friends and colleagues. The request included information on the study, the participant selection criteria, participant recruitment process, and my contact information. When I received a referral from someone, I emailed a formal invitation to the referral (see Appendix B) that included an overview of the study, interview and time expectations, and the benefits of the study. Once the potential participant indicated their interest, we set up a date and time for the interview. After the interview appointment was set, I sent them an interview confirmation email (see Appendix D) that included the date and time of the interview, an overview of the study, an attached list of interview questions (see Appendices G and H), a consent form (see Appendix E), instructions on what to do with the consent form, and my contact information.

Interviews. The interview in a grounded theory study should be an “in-depth exploration of a particular topic with a person who has had the relevant experiences” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). Charmaz (2006) called these “intensive” interviews since they allow the researcher to go below the surface of general conversation and have the participant describe the experience in more detail through the use of open-ended questions. The primary purpose of an intensive interview is for the researcher to understand the topic of study through the eyes of the participant who has had the actual relevant experience. Because I approached this study from a constructivist view, my open-ended interview questions focused on asking the participants to describe or reflect upon their experiences around learning the organization’s culture, barriers to learning the culture, and identification of what parts of the culture have been adopted or integrated into the participant’s work life (see Appendices G and H).

While interviews can be structured or unstructured, unstructured interviews are the most common type of interview used in a grounded theory study (Goulding, 2002). I used a semi-structured interview approach because I wanted to maintain consistency and focus in my data collection efforts by ensuring I asked the same questions of each participant. I began with a set of structured questions (see Appendix G), but allowed for the flexibility of adding probing questions that helped the participant go into more detail on a specific topic or other areas relevant to the study. My interview questions began with high level open-ended questions asking the participants to describe the general culture of their organization, followed with more detailed questions about the cultural artifacts and norms, how information is shared, how they learned the culture, and how they incorporate the culture into their work lives. I ended with a closing question that gave the participant the opportunity to provide any last thoughts or ideas before the interview ended.

I conducted the first four interviews using the first set of interview questions (see Appendix G). I then revamped the interview questions by eliminating some of the questions that were difficult to answer or seemed irrelevant to their experience. For example, the interview questions around the cultural artifacts and their meaning was the hardest for the participants to talk about since they did not have much contact with the organization's logo, mission, and marketing information. From the responses I initially heard, such artifacts were meaningless to them and did not represent the culture from their perspectives.

Interview Procedures. Before the interviews began, I made sure I had received a signed consent form (see Appendix E). If I had not received a signed consent form from the participant, I secured their verbal approval before starting the interview. I also sought their verbal consent to

audio tape the interview. Once consent had been given, I captured the demographic information about the participant (see Appendices G and H). Although demographic information such as age, gender, profession, position within the company, company location, or industry type were not considered a topic of focus in this study, the demographic information did help ensure that the pool of participants contained a well-rounded representation of gender, professions, work locations, team experience, and industries. It also ensured that the qualification criteria for the participant had been met.

I used the interview form to capture all the demographic information for each participant (see Appendix H). Once I captured the demographic information, I informed the participant that the interview would now be recorded. Although the interview questions were asked in sequence, if the participant answered some of the questions early in the interview that I had not yet asked, I did not repeat the question. I also asked probing questions to elicit more detail using the initial set of interview questions as a guide to the topics I wanted to cover. During the interviews, I took notes to capture any critical information I wanted to specifically remember and any themes I started hearing throughout the interviews.

In closing, I always finished with the question: “are there any questions that I didn’t ask that you think are important to this interview and study?” This allowed the participants to add any pertinent information that either I didn’t ask or that they had not mentioned in their answers to prior questions. Once the interview was over, I let them know the recording had stopped. Following the interview I asked them if they had any questions or concerns about the study and left them with my contact information in case they had any questions or concerns in the future. I stapled the demographic information and my notes together and labeled the interview packet

with the unique number and unique name signed to the participant. I filed the interview packets in numerical order and reviewed them during my data analysis.

Data analysis. Grounded theory encourages the researcher to continually interact with the data and to examine all potential theories that may be underlying the data (Bryant, 2007b). Unlike in other quantitative or qualitative research, data collection, analysis, and theory construction proceed concurrently in a grounded theory study. According to Wiener (2007), coding, constant data comparison methods, and memo writing begin with the first interview and continue until the research is complete and a theory has been developed.

Coding is the “process of defining what the data is about” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007a, p. 605). Codes capture the underlying patterns and themes found within the data and facilitate the grouping of various patterns of data into key categories with “evocative titles” (Lempert, 2007). Charmaz (2006) suggested that a researcher’s coding effort contain at least two phases of coding: initial coding and focused coding.

Initial Coding. I performed initial coding using a multi-step process. First, I captured any interesting concepts and repeat themes during each interview via hand-written notes. Then, as I transcribed the interviews, I captured any additional ideas, perspectives, themes, and possible theories in a notebook. This action was my first pass at memoing. After all the interviews were transcribed in a word document, I loaded the word document into Nvivo 9 by QRS International. Nvivo 9 is data analysis software that allowed me to do a more detailed analysis on each interview.

According to Charmaz (2006), during initial coding of the data, a researcher may code each word, each line, or each incident in an effort to determine the underlying messages the data

is trying to send, from whose point of view, and in what category it might fit. Word by word coding often works well for documentation review, while line-by-line coding may work better for interview data and detailed observations (Charmaz, 2006). Initial codes may be temporary and can change or be reworded as additional data is obtained. Key success criteria for initial coding includes keeping an open mind, determining the appropriate codes by identifying the participant's meaning or action, and making sure the codes fit the data rather than forcing the data to fit the codes (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 2008).

When I began the detailed coding using Nvivo 9, I started with line-by-line coding. I thought that coding each word would be a lengthy process that would not provide much value. However, I quickly discovered that coding line-by-line left out the context around the idea or concept so I moved to sentence-by-sentence coding. After coding three interviews, I reviewed the codes and again did not find them helpful, so I moved to incident-by-incident coding. According to Charmaz (2006), incident-by incident coding is similar to line-by-line coding. "You compare incident with incident, then as your ideas take hold, compare incidents to your conceptualization of incidents coded earlier. That way you can identify properties of your emerging concept" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 53). For this study I defined an incident as an individual participant event or occurrence. Thus each code represented a particular type of incident. This gave me the context I needed, yet still allowed for detailed analysis.

While I was coding, I tried to look beyond the words to discern the meaning behind each incident or statement, asking myself "what were they really trying to say?" I also tried to code each transcript as if I was seeing the data for the first time. I did not review my notes or memos at this point because I wanted to take a fresh look at the data in an attempt to avoid premature

judgments and researcher bias. The results revealed 471 different codes under 32 different categories. These categories served as categorical markers and closely resembled the essence of my interview questions so I could find the code I was looking for within the vast number of codes. Also, during this initial coding stage I captured my observations, thoughts, and potential theories in the form of memos.

Focused Coding. Focused coding represents the second phase in coding and tends to be more conceptual (Charmaz, 2006). Using the initial coding as a base, focused coding synthesizes the current codes into larger data categories that provide meaning and make analytic sense. These codes emerge through patterns found in data. Focused coding is not a linear process, but rather a cyclical process that may require the researcher to go back and review existing data, codes, or even earlier interviews to explore data patterns not previously seen or viewed from another perspective (Charmaz, 2006).

After I conducted my initial coding, I moved to focused coding. In focused coding, I discarded my high level categorical markers and reviewed all my existing codes. I started merging similar concepts and re-categorizing them into new categories. As Charmaz (2006) mentioned, this is a cyclical process. I changed and moved the codes around to different categories and renamed the categories as needed. I re-read every handwritten note and every memo to make sure I didn't miss any concepts (now that I was working on narrowing down the categories and the codes) and to make sure the codes covered all the key concepts and themes.

After focused coding, I moved to theoretical coding. Theoretical coding, or selective coding, weaves the various fractured pieces of data into a cohesive whole that ultimately ends in a proposed theory (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 1998). Theoretical coding is a more sophisticated

level of coding and focuses on the possible relationships between the categories that were created during the focused coding process (Charmaz, 2006). Given that there were so many categories as a result of the focused coding, I tried to identify the relationships between the codes and categories. I began with a theoretical viewpoint, free thinking the relationships between the codes and categories.

Memo Writing. Memo writing is also considered a key process in facilitating the generation of a theory in a grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2006; Lempert, 2007; Wiener, 2007). It begins with the first interview and continues until a theory is generated (Lempert, 2007; Wiener, 2007). Memo writing is both a methodological practice and exploratory process. Memos provide the “means for the researcher to engage in and record intellectual conversations with themselves about the data” (Lempert, 2007, p. 249).

Memos were used in this study to capture any thoughts or ideas I had during the interviews, the transcription process, and the coding process as they related to potential codes, thoughts, and feelings about the data, my understanding of a particular code or phenomenon, the relationships or patterns I found between codes and categories, the potential significance of my observations and perspectives, and any questions I had about earlier observations. Memos that were hand written during the interview process were kept with the interview packet for each participant. Memos captured during transcription were kept in a notebook and memos captured during coding were documented in Nvivo 9 software. All of the memos were reviewed multiple times during the coding process.

Creating a Theory. The outcome of initial and focused coding, memo writing, and theoretical coding was a proposed theory. A theory “is a way of revealing the obvious, the

implicit, the unrecognized, and the unknown” (Goulding, 2002, p. 21). According to Charmaz (2006), a theory is defined differently depending on a person’s ontological viewpoint. A theory from a positivistic viewpoint “seeks causes, favors deterministic explanations, and emphasizes generality and universality” (p. 126) while a theory from an interpretivist viewpoint assumes “emergent, multiple realities; indeterminacy; facts and values as linked; truth as provisional; and social life a processual” (p. 126). The resulting theory of this study provides “the best comprehensive, coherent, and simplest model for linking diverse and unrelated facts in a useful and pragmatic way” (Goulding, 2002, p. 21).

Researcher Role

Because I assumed a social constructivist stance for this study, it is my belief that my presence in the interview and the act of asking questions affected the answers provided by the participants. In addition, I believe that the findings of this study are a result of my interpretation of the data and only represent my personal understanding and construction of reality (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007c). Although I was not a purely neutral party in the data collection or analysis, I tried to interview enough participants to meet the data saturation point to strengthen the validity of the findings. I trust that using the various types of coding processes, looking at the data from different angles, and reviewing the findings with various colleagues for feedback, I was able to minimize my personal biases on the outcome of the study.

Researcher bias. “None of us is free from bias. Our predilections show up in how we ask questions, in what we leave out of our studies, and in how we interpret our results” (Bryant, 2003 p. 108). However, it is critical that a researcher understand their own biases so they can attempt to set aside any preconceived notions, theories, or ideas they might have about the data

or the results so the theory may emerge as untainted and as unbiased as possible (Creswell, 1998).

Some of my personal biases that may have had an impact on the results would be my past experience working with and learning about different organizational cultures and my experience working with geographically dispersed team members. During an interview, I occasionally caught myself thinking, “oh yeah, I have had that experience” and had to force myself to stay in the moment with the participant rather than thinking about my own personal experience. My personality style, educational background, and upbringing in a Midwestern culture also may have affected my interpretation and understanding. Although I cannot separate myself from my personal communication style, experiences, family, and regional culture since it forms who I am and how I think, perceive, and understand, I did make sure I was listening to what they were saying about their experiences, rather than put my own experiential interpretations to the interviews experience. Although I believe that I can never fully understand what it is like to walk in the participant’s shoes, I tried to listen to the participant’s responses without judgment and immediate interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

This research study was compliant with all IRB regulations.

Informed consent. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary and any volunteer could opt out of the study at any point in time. There were no travel or personal expenses associated with this study, nor were there any financial rewards for participating. Further, there were no coercive or punitive actions for any individual who decided not to participate in this study.

All participants were emailed a consent form (see Appendix E) prior to the interview. Although the participants were asked to email or mail back a signed copy of the consent form before their interview, only seven participants returned their consent form. To ensure I had consent from those participants who did not return their signed consent form, I received verbal approval from them before starting the interview. The date and time of the approval were captured on a spreadsheet with the participant's name, and the date and time of the interview.

Before the interview began, I asked each participant the following questions to ensure they had a full understanding of the study, the risks involved, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the study (see Appendix F).

1. Tell me what this study about?
2. Explain what you will be asked to do in this study?
3. Please explain the risks involved in the study.
4. How will your information be kept confidential?
5. What is your understanding of the voluntary nature of this study?
6. What are your concerns about participating in the study?

If the participant was unable to answer any of the questions, I reviewed the information found in the consent form regarding that question. I also mentioned that they could opt out of answering any question they felt uncomfortable answering or did not feel they could answer and that the entirety of the interview would be taped and transcribed verbatim. Further, participants were given my contact information so they could contact me on future needs or concerns.

Confidentiality and anonymity. In order to protect the confidentiality and identification of the research participants, each participant was given a unique four digit randomly computer

generated number, as well as a randomly generated name. The randomly generated names were assigned to the participants by gender and used when providing examples and quotes in the findings and discussion chapters of this document. A list linking the participant's real name and identity to a unique identification number and name was kept on my laptop and was password protected. Once a unique identification number and name was assigned to each participant, it became their only identifier throughout the rest of the study. All personal identifiers were removed from the documentation, including any references to their real name, their company or competitor's name, manager's name, and any additional information that could be a possible identifier.

Data security. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. The actual audio tapes and my handwritten notes, created during the interview, were secured in a locked file cabinet when not in use. All electronic data is housed on my laptop and on a backup hard drive with password protection.

Limitations

Sampling. This study was limited to participants who voluntarily agreed to be interviewed. Because of the nature of a volunteer participant sample, the pool of 22 participants might not be representative of other geographically dispersed team members in other organizations around the country.

Generalizability. Another limitation in grounded theory is inherent in an inductive approach. A researcher "has no certainty that generalizing from these observations produces a valid conclusion" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007c, p. 45). Because I was interpreting the participant's understanding and interpretation of organizational culture, I have no certainty that

any generalizations created from this study are valid. The result of this study only reflects what 22 participants had to say on the issue.

Researcher experience. Data analysis can be a challenge in a grounded theory study. “Excessive data is an impediment to analysis, and the investigator will be swamped scanning rather than cognitively processing the vast number of transcripts, unable to see the forest for the trees or the trees for the forest” (Morse, 2007, p. 233). There were a number of things I tried to do to avoid this becoming an issue for me in analyzing the data. First, I battled fatigue and data overload by walking away and taking a number of breaks. Second, I consistently asked myself questions around the data, such as what is the person trying to really say, beyond what the words were on a page. And finally, once the data were coded, I continued to revisit my understanding and tried to look at the data from various angles to see what themes I may have missed.

Theoretical sensitivity. To successfully conduct a grounded theory research study, the researcher should begin the research with as few preconceived ideas and theories as possible (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007b; Kelle, 2007). To this end, I endeavored not to jump to conclusions but to work with the data until the patterns and themes revealed themselves.

Summary

This grounded theory study was conducted using a social constructivist perspective. Data collection was completed through 22 audio taped interviews which were transcribed using transcription software then loaded into Nvivo 9 data analysis software to facilitate the coding and manipulation of large amounts of data. The primary data analysis methods were initial coding, focused coding, followed by theoretical coding, and memo writing. The outcomes of the data analysis are presented in the results chapter.

Results

The primary purpose of this grounded theory study, using a social constructionist lens, was to understand how people learn, adopt, and integrate the organizational culture in their work actions when they are geographically separated from the physical location of the corporate organization. This chapter includes an overview of the participants' demographic data, the analysis techniques and tools used in the data analysis effort, and the key themes that emerged from the analysis of 22 interviews based on the three sub-questions: (1) what are the factors that contribute to the learning of organizational culture when team members are geographically dispersed, (2) what are the obstacles in learning organizational culture to geographically dispersed team members, and (3) how do geographically dispersed team members actively adopt and integrate organizational culture into their work actions?

Participant and Organization Demographics

A total of 22 people participated in this study. Table 1 presents the demographic information collected on each participant. Demographics collected included: gender, past work experience, current job role, length of employment with their organization, part time or full time work status, and main work location. Organizational information captured was industry type and number of employees.

Table 1

Participant and Employer Demographics

Element	Demographic	Number
Gender	Male	11
	Female	11
Previous work experience	Yes	22
	No	0
Current job role	Educator / trainer	4
	Sales	7
	Consultant	6
	Operations / Regional Manager	2
	Program / Project Manager	2
	Technical support	1
Years working for current organization	0-4	9
	5-9	10
	10-14	3
	15 over	0
Part time / full time work status	Part time	5
	Full time	17
Main work location	Personal home office	18
	Satellite office	4
	Client site	0
Industry type	Consulting	6
	Education	5
	Manufacturing	3
	Financial	8
Number of employees	0-24	7
	25-99	1
	100-499	5
	500-999	1
	1000-9,999	5
	10,000 over	3

Gender and previous work experience. Gender and previous work experience were two demographic factors that I had not planned to capture or even consider as selection criteria. It was by happenstance that I had 11 males and 11 females which I determined was an even representation for this study. Previous work experience was another demographic I had not

initially planned to capture or use as selection criteria, but during the interview process it was identified as a key component to being successful in a geographically dispersed environment by all the participants. I will cover the impact of their previous work experience on learning the organizational culture later in this chapter.

Current job role. Current job role was a demographic criterion I used to ensure professional job role diversity. I did not want all the participants coming from the same profession because I felt it would skew the results of the study to only one profession. My goal was to get a diverse set of job roles in order to increase the perspective of this study.

For this study I had four participants who were university faculty members and educational trainers, two of these participants worked full time, while two worked part time; seven were sales professionals; six were consultants who consulted in areas of quality assurance, service management, change management, and process improvement; two participants were operational or regional managers; two worked as program and project managers; and one participant provided off-site technical support.

Years of working for current organization. Participants were required to have at least six months of work experience with their organization to ensure there was time to experience the organizational culture. Ten participants had six months to four years of work experience with their organization; nine participants worked five to nine years with their organization; while only three participants had 10-14 years of work experience with their current organization. No participant had over 15 years. The years of experience gave many participants ample time to learn, adopt, and integrate the organizational culture.

Part-time / full-time. Part-time or full-time employment was captured to make sure each participant had adequate time to learn, adopt, and integrate the organizational culture. There were only five participants who worked part-time. Of the part-time employees, three had one to four years of work experience and two had six years of work experience. Full-time employees were represented by six participants who worked six months to four years, eight who had five to nine years work experience, and three who had 10 to 14 years of work experience. I did not notice any difference in the reported results of part time or full time participants.

Main work location. The primary work location was captured to ensure that each participant was geographically dispersed from the corporate headquarters. Eighteen participants worked from a personal home office, while four worked from a satellite office. All the participants in this study who worked in a satellite office stated their office had a distinctly different culture than the organizational culture at the corporate headquarters. This was important to note because my goal was how geographically dispersed workers learn the organizational culture of the corporate office if they worked in a satellite or home office.

Organizational demographics. Two demographic elements were captured regarding the participant's organization: industry type and number of employees. I wanted to make sure that the industries and company size were well represented by the participants to decrease the impact or influence that company industry or size might have on the results of the data analysis.

Six of the participants worked for a consulting organization; five worked in education, which included universities and educational providers; three came from the manufacturing sector which included security systems and medical systems; and eight came from the financial sector including various insurance organizations and banking. The financial sector was the most

heavily represented, but I think I had enough people from the other industry sectors to offset any bias found in the financial sector. The participants came from organizations ranging in size from less than 24 employees to over 10,000 employees.

Data Analysis Process

The data were analyzed to capture the common themes and patterns regarding factors that contributed to the learning of the organizational culture, the obstacles that prevented or interrupted the learning of organizational culture, and how the organizational culture was adopted into their own work actions. Twenty-two hours of interviews were transcribed into 207 pages of data, which were then loaded in Nvivo 9 software for data analysis.

Initial coding results. Because of the large amount of data, I decided to begin my coding efforts by using line-by-line coding suggested by Charmaz (2006). During initial coding, the researcher only looks at small bits of data and interprets their meaning. “Line-by-line coding keeps researchers open to fresh ideas and thus reduces any inclinations to force the data into preconceived categories” (Lewis-Beck & Bryman, 2004, p. 442). I quickly realized, however, that line-by-line coding was separating the line data from the context of the situation, making the codes I used meaningless. Thus, I moved to incident-by-incident coding.

During the coding process, I also recognized that I needed to use some type of categorization system to be able to identify and reuse codes because the codes were becoming too numerous to find and track. Because of this, I started to create categorical markers that would represent a group of codes by their context. For example, if the interviewee talked about barriers, I would code the specific incident and place the code under a category labeled “barriers.” I knew there might be duplication of codes between categories but I wanted to make

sure that new patterns could be revealed when I reorganized the codes to find common themes. After the first round of coding, I had 471 separate codes grouped under 32 categorical markers (see Table 2).

Table 2
Initial Coding by Categorical Markers

Categorical Markers
Barriers to learning corporate culture
Being the culture
Boundaries
Characteristics of successful team members
Collaborating
Communication
Corporate culture
Developing strong relationships
Enabling organizational structures
Experiential learning
Feeling part of the organization
Forming the organizational culture
Getting feedback
Getting rewarded
Influencing culture
Integrating the culture
Learning through dialog
Looking for clues
Mission
Organizational status updates
Other cultures over the corporate culture
Providing for the needs of the individual
Providing value to self
Providing value to the client
Providing value to the organization
Size of organization
Taking initiative for learning
Transferring the culture
Understanding context
Values alignment
Working with others

Focused coding. Focused coding is informed by initial coding. In focused coding the researcher reviews the initial codes and identifies the most frequent codes that may provide a conceptual look at what might be happening in the data. (Lewis-Beck & Bryman, 2004). I

began my focused coding effort by comparing the incident codes within each categorical marker to each other, looking for similar concepts. As a result, I collapsed the number of codes in each category by merging similar codes together. For example, “listening” and “listening for clues” codes represented similar concepts so these codes were combined.

Next I reviewed the category names to see if they best represented the grouping of codes. If the categorical labels no longer provided a good representation of the codes, I renamed that category. Thus, the “boundaries” category became “behavioral boundaries” which better exemplified the codes in that category.

Finally, I either merged the categories or moved the codes to the category that best represented that code. For example, the codes “personal values”, “organizational values”, “client values” and “customer values” were scattered among categories. I combined these codes under one category called “values alignment”. I now had 221 codes captured under 20 key categories (see Table 3). For a detailed listing of categories and codes from the focused coding effort refer to Appendix J.

Table 3

Focused Coding: Re-categorization of Categories

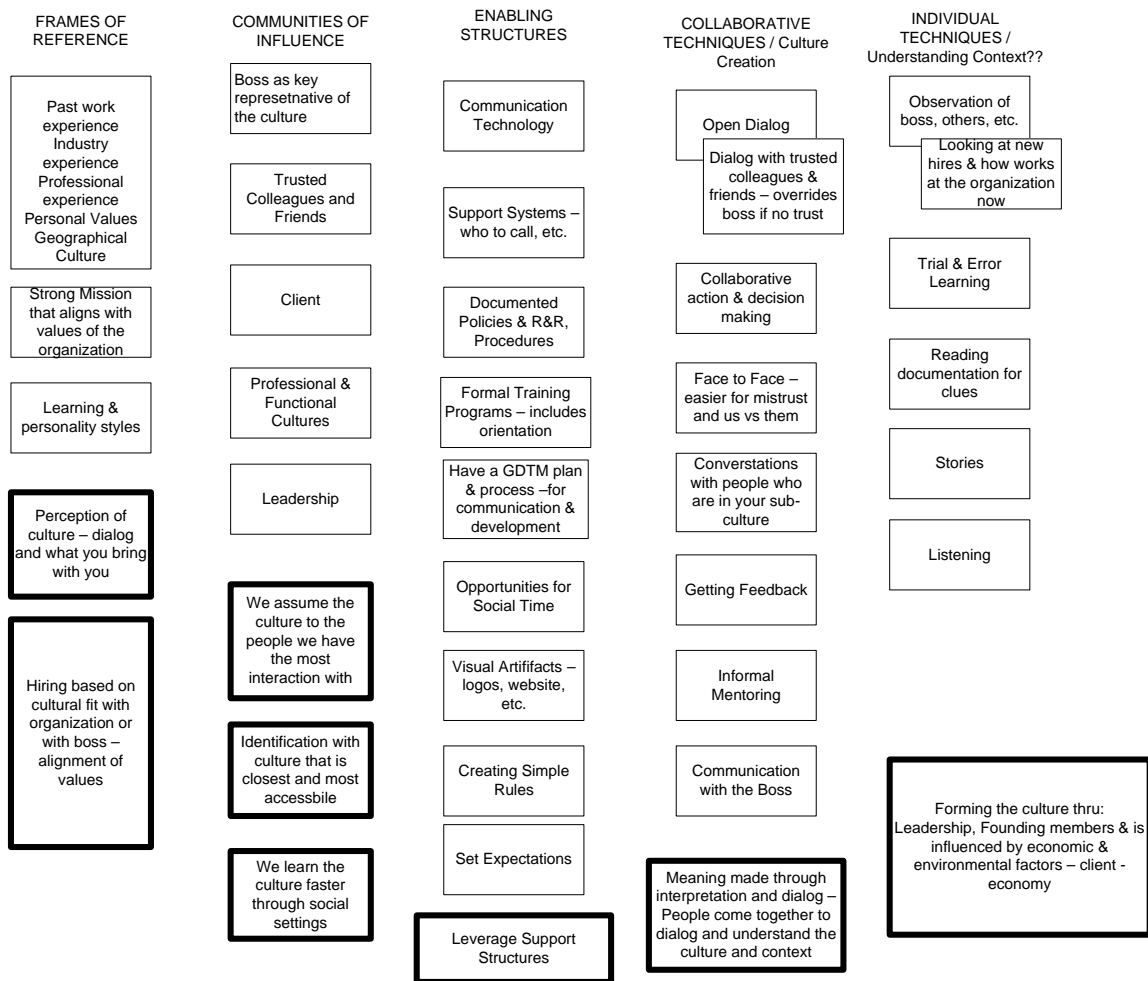
Category
Barriers to learning the culture
Behavioral boundaries
Characteristics of a successful employee
Collaborating with others
Communication types
Developing strong relationships
Dialog between other people
Experiential learning
Forming the organizational culture
Getting feedback from others
Getting rewarded for special behaviors
Integrating the culture into participant's work life
Taking initiative to learn the culture
Looking for clues about the culture
Mission as a key component of the organizational culture
Other subcultures that influence the participant
Providing for the needs of the individual
Organizational structures
Transference vehicles
Values alignment

Theoretical Coding. After focused coding, I moved to theoretical coding. Theoretical coding or selective coding weaves the various fractured pieces of data into a cohesive whole that ultimately ends in a proposed theory (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 1998). Theoretical coding is a more sophisticated level of coding and focuses on the possible relationships between the categories that were created during the focused coding process (Charmaz, 2006). As I began theoretical coding, I entered the key categories in Microsoft's Visio software and started moving each category around until I found patterns and common themes in the groupings. I put any additional observations or ideas I had during this exercise in a box with a bold line so I could

distinguish between my ideas and the actual categories (See figure 1). Using this technique allowed me to move the categories around until I started seeing higher level patterns and themes. For a list of theoretical codes by key themes, categories, and detailed codes, refer to Appendix K.

Figure 1

Theoretical Coding: Identifying Common Themes and Patterns



After this exercise, I reorganized the data in Nvivo 9 by the key categories from the previous exercise, followed by the sub-categories within each category and finally, when needed, more detailed codes within each sub-category. The result of this effort can be viewed in Table 4.

Table 4

Theoretical Coding: Identification of Key Themes and Categories

Category	Sub-Category
Preconditions	Personal frames of reference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal mental models ▪ Past experiences Personal work competencies
Supporting processes and structures	Clear mission and purpose Clear work expectations and behavioral norms Strong support systems and documented processes Communication technology and support Formal orientation and training programs
Contributing factors to learning and adoption	Values alignment Relationship with the reporting manager Socialization opportunities Engagement opportunities Trusting relationships Dialog about the culture
Learning techniques	Dialogic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coaching & mentoring ▪ Feedback ▪ Storytelling Experiential <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Trial and error ▪ Understanding personalities Individual <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Observation ▪ Listening ▪ Reading documentation
Adopting the organizational culture	Changing the way we work Changing the way we communicate

Carry the culture to other environments
Passing the organizational culture to others

Culture Defined

For the first participants I interviewed, I provided a quick definition of “organizational culture”. My definition included a brief overview of culture as exemplified through artifacts such as logos, mission statements, or a website layout; behavioral norms including how people do their work, make decisions, and how they interact with each other; and personal values. Although some of the participants could readily talk about all aspects of the organizational culture, I found that more of the participants were confused by the definitions in that they told me they were not sure they could answer my interview questions around organizational culture.

It appeared from my perspective that the participants were trying too hard to conform their answers to my definitions of culture. The dialog with some of the participants became stilted, short, non-productive, and did not provide for the richness of data until I used more probing questions. As a result, I stopped providing a specific definition of culture to the participants. I let the participants talk about culture from their own perspective. This led to better dialog, richer data, and more detailed responses to the interview questions. I also noted that most of their observations of culture focused on cultural norms or organizational behaviors they would learn through dialog, personal experience, or observation. However, as noted earlier, the participants had a difficult time talking about artifacts, so I no longer asked them to describe and apply meaning to their organization’s cultural artifacts.

Analysis Results

The sub-questions around this study focused on: 1) what are the factors that contribute to the learning of organizational culture when team members are geographically dispersed, 2) what are the obstacles to learning organizational culture for geographically dispersed team members, and 3) how do geographically dispersed team members actively adopt and integrate organizational culture into their work actions? Based on the outcomes of the theoretical coding process, five high-level categories emerged on learning, adopting, and integrating the culture:

- Category One: Pre-conditions that contributed to learning the organizational culture: personal frames of reference and personal work competencies
- Category Two: Supporting organizational structures and processes needed to support organizational cultural learning
- Category Three: Contributing factors and barriers to learning the organizational culture, including relationship with the boss, socialization opportunities, engagement, relationships with colleagues, and dialog about the culture
- Category Four: Key learning techniques used by the participants to learn the organizational culture including dialogic, experiential, and individualistic techniques
- Category Five: Adopting and integrating organizational culture into work actions and conveying the organizational culture to others

Each category was broken down into sub-categories. For each sub-category I provided a sampling of participant quotes that would best exemplify that sub-category. When a participant's quote contained personal references that could identify the participant or their organization, I changed the wording to maintain confidentiality. In addition, if I added

information for clarification or changed the actual quote to protect the identity of the participant, I noted those changes in brackets within the quote.

Category One: Preconditions

During theoretical analysis, I identified two elements the participants brought with them to the organization: personal frames of reference and personal work competencies. I referred to these two elements as “preconditions”. Preconditions are those things that must come before something else can start (preconditions, n.d.). For this study, I found that personal frames of reference and work competencies existed prior to learning the organizational culture at a particular organization. Personal frames of reference became lenses the participants used to understand and learn the organizational culture, while personal work competencies assisted them in being a successful geographically dispersed team member.

Personal frames of reference. Before I focused on the contributors and barriers to learning the organizational culture, I wanted to get a contextual understanding of the participants’ perceptions of their organizational culture. I did this by asking each participant a few high-level context questions at the beginning of their interview: 1) What does it mean to work for your company? 2) How would you characterize the culture of your organization? 3) When you began to work for this organization, what surprised you about the way things worked? By asking those initial context questions, I discovered that each participant brought their own frames of reference to use as a lens to understand and learn the culture in their organization. According to Mezirow (2000), frames of reference assist us in interpreting our experiences. Each of us has our own personal mental models and past experiences that provide us with a

frame of reference that helps us understand context and apply meaning to the information we receive in order to understand the actions of others and learn the culture.

Personal mental models. Mental models “are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (Senge, 1990, p.8). Jill provided an example of how she came into her new organization with a preconceived mental model about the culture at a non-profit organization. She had thought the organizational culture at a non-profit would be slow, plodding, and somewhat backward. What she found was almost the opposite; it was a fast, vibrant, innovative, and professional organization.

I was actually surprised because this was the first non-profit I ever worked for and first company of this size being so small. My previous organizations were in excess of 15,000 in the financial services industry. When I came to work for this little non-profit I actually had in my head, well maybe I will be coming to a sleepy organization, where things are very relaxed and slower paced. I was very surprised when I started that was not the case at all. It was very much like my past companies who had the same sense of urgency and innovation that I had in the larger organizations. The office itself is actually, initially, it wasn't what I expected – again when I thought of it being a non-profit I thought it was going to be very casual and laid back and maybe a little place in the corner kind of thing, but the office itself is in a nice building and the floor space is very nice, it has a nice big conference room, with open windows, a view to a lake, so it is not what I expected from a non-profit. I thought non-profits didn't have any money, you know, everybody is kind of working bare bones, but we actually have good support systems in place for technology and process and things like that. Even the physical space is a nice working environment. (Jill)

Bob mentioned that he expected the organizational culture in his company to be family oriented and conservative because of the niche market the organization served. Bob's mental models or expectations were also reinforced during a four-week training program.

I think it was an expectation originally based upon the niche that we work in but that was reinforced very early in the interview process and then it was also reinforced even more fully in the initial four-week training program that I attended at our corporate headquarters. (Bob)

When Randy described the culture of his organization, he interpreted that culture through his personal mental model of what it means to work for an organization that is 150 years old, based in a small Midwestern town with a unique customer base.

A deep seated culture, the company is 150 years old; the organization is headquartered in a small town in [Midwest] and tends to have some thinking that's around that small town setting. Company is a niche company, which means we kind of have a unique customer base which I think influences the culture. (Randy).

Further, Todd provided an example of how he used his mental model about various regional cultures to help him understand and learn the cultural differences at his company. He talked about his personal experience of being born and raised in a Midwest culture and how he used this mental model to compare and contrast the culture in other regions.

One of the biggest differences, and I will have to find a way to describe this – because our company is an east coast based company, I felt it was very different from what I am used to in the Midwest...yeah we follow the rules out here in the Midwest but we are just not so uptight about how we approach things. I really believe that, I really do. Being a Midwestern person, spending all my time in [a Midwest state], I grew up here and went to school here, when I go up to our home office and meet some of these people, they are different. You know they [east coast people] are not jerks; they are nice, but very, very proper and scared, if that makes sense. (Todd)

Jill, Bob, Randy, and Todd all provided examples of how they used their mental models and preconceived assumptions as an initial starting point to understand and learn their organization's culture.

Past experiences. In addition to personal mental models, I found past experiences to be another precondition to learning the culture. When I moved from context questions to asking the participants how they learned their organization's culture, many of the participants suggested their previous work experiences, previous working relationships with colleagues or bosses, and their past experience with the organization gave them clues to understanding and learning the

culture. Past experience is a precondition because it was collected by the participant through previous work experiences before they came into their current organizations. Past experience was also used as a lens to interpret and learn the organizational culture.

Previous industry experience. Previous industry experience was frequently reported by the participants as a factor that enabled them to successfully learn the culture of their new organization. As mentioned before, all of the participants in this study were seasoned professionals and came to their organization with years of work experience. When asked what barriers or challenges he encountered in learning the culture, Ray stated there were really no barriers. He thought learning the organizational culture of this current employer was no big deal because it was the same type of business he had been doing for years.

The only challenge or barrier is being limited to one [client], but that is just part of working for my company. That's the top-down piece and that is who they have a relationship with now. Other than that, no [reported barriers], because it is the same business that I have been working in for a long time. (Ray)

Todd confirmed Ray's observations that many insurance companies have similar cultures. Because Todd was familiar with this type of industry, he stated he was pretty comfortable and familiar with the organizational culture in his current organization.

Well, even before I came to this company, I worked for [xyz] insurance with their financial services division and because that is regulated, I was pretty comfortable and familiar with it. So I would say from that aspect it wasn't – it was a pretty similar culture from that standpoint of very conservative communication between us and our clients and with each other. But I would tell you that having worked at some other organizations – both my experience at [xyz] and my experience with this company – they have very similar cultures. (Todd)

Previous experience working with colleagues. In addition to past work experience in a particular industry, previous experience working with a colleague or boss also gave the participant clues to the organizational culture. When I asked some of the participants what

helped them learn the culture, Stella, Margie, and Jill suggested it was their previous experience working with particular people that helped them learn the culture. Stella talked about knowing the owners before she started working with her organization, so she knew their idiosyncrasies ahead of time and knew how to deal with them.

I also had prior knowledge – I knew both of the owners before I started working with them and I knew that one of them in particular was to be handled gingerly and the other was pretty set in their ways as well, but not as much. I also learned that they don't talk to each other. (Stella)

Margie mentioned that the culture in her current organization did not surprise her because she had worked with the same people in a previous organization. Because she had known the owner from a previous organization, she knew what to expect when he asked her to join his new company. In addition, she had previously worked with other members of the senior team which gave her additional understanding about the culture in the organization.

I should give you a bit of background. For many years I was an independent consultant and 12 years ago I got a phone call from a gentlemen who had a small company and they were looking for somebody to totally design and put together their leadership, learning, and development program. It was a small company. They only had a few sites and I said well, you know I have been a consultant so long and to make a long story short, I started working with him and his team. Again it was a smaller company. That company became very successful and was bought by a much larger company for its [processes and services] including its leadership, learning, and development. Then that company was bought by another company. It became so huge and so large by that time I was running huge virtual teams around the world and it had become very ponderous. So the guy who originally recruited me left to start this company and about five months later I followed him. I have worked with the guy who was the president and the other people on senior team for a lot of years so I wasn't surprised [about the culture]. (Margie)

Jill talked about a similar experience she had in her organization. When I asked her what helped her learn the culture so quickly, she suggested that it was her previous experience with her boss that gave her clues into the organization's culture.

Well, I think I actually was lucky in the sense of I was brought up into the organization by a person who I used to work for and she just recently retired, but when I was brought into the organization, she recruited me and I used to work for her so I knew her personally how she worked, and she, again, always worked at a very high level of integrity, she was always very direct in her communication style and never beat around the bush, and so when I started, I knew that was the type of person and what I found in the organization in very short order is that was the organization, the people I worked with were the same way, she had a built a team of the same mind set. So in addition to knowing her style at work, it was by quick observation the [same with] other people who were in the organization. (Jill)

Previous experience with the organization. Beyond past work experience and having previous work experiences with key people in the organization, a number of participants stated that having a previous experience with the organization also assisted them in learning the culture quickly. Ben exemplified this when he talked about how he started as a student working on his master's degree and then was asked to be part of the faculty. He stated his biggest challenge in learning the culture was getting used to the nuances of being a member of the faculty rather than a member of the student body.

I had no surprises [when I joined this organization] because I had just gone two years of being a student, so I knew how things worked. I just took those expectations I had as a student and conveyed them into the classes I was teaching. So I knew, I knew how they worked and how they operated, so it wasn't like I taught in a community college and now I am an online teacher, or I worked for this university and I came over to this organization and I would expect the culture and standard operating procedures and all that would be different and there is a learning curve. However being a student and then coming in as a faculty member, most of that is all gone. Because I knew the expectations, I knew what was expected. The only adjustment I had to make was trying to get the students to give good answers to their questions. So there were no surprises. I knew what to expect from the students and I knew what was expected from me. (Ben)

Ben found the culture of his organization easy to learn because of his previous experience with his organization. He had already been immersed in the culture while he completed his Master's degree.

Personal work competencies. In addition to a participant's previous experiences with a particular industry, organization, or work colleagues, I also identified personal work competencies as a precondition to learning the culture. In the interview, I asked the participants to talk about the characteristics and behaviors they thought their organization valued the most. My reason for asking this question was to understand the participants' perception of the behavior their organization valued and to understand how they learned this information. Although I identified how the participants learned what behaviors were valued or not valued in their organization, I also realized that many of the participants identified personal work competencies that were critical to the success of working as a geographically dispersed team member in their organization. Personal work competencies, like frames of reference, emerged as a precondition to learning the culture. A number of the participants talked about how they came to their organization with certain skill sets or competencies needed for success as a geographically dispersed team member.

The most common characteristics mentioned by the participants included being professional, the ability to work independently, being adaptable, self-disciplined, ethical, and having the ability to ask for help. Margie provided an example of these key elements as she talked about the need for intrinsic motivation, self-discipline, and being comfortable asking for help when needed. She also stated that working in a geographically dispersed team, apart from others in the organization, is not for everyone.

I think the culture is one that is heavily dependent on people having a high level of intrinsic motivation. I mean, if you are used to working at a place where you are used to going to the office and seeing people all day long and then you go home, and now you are in your office at home and the only person you are going to see is the cat or the rest of the family when they come home and yet you are expected to be disciplined, motivated, get stuff done, and ask for help when you need it. There are some people who are not

comfortable doing that or asking for help and then they get themselves in trouble. Then somebody has to bail them out. They are just not comfortable with that. Not everybody is OK with the autonomy that is expected in this company. (Margie)

Clara further talked about needing certain characteristics to be successful in her organizational culture. Her strength was her ability to network and build relationships. She also referred to her ability to use influence to get people to do work, rather than “because I said so.” She suggested that people who don’t possess these characteristics will have a harder time working in the organization and understanding the cultural norms.

I think my strength is being able to network and build relationships so I can work very well in this culture, but I will see other people come into the company from like say [xyz] company where it is very much they tell you what to do at the top and you go out and drive it and execute it. And those people I think struggle a lot, because they don’t understand why people aren’t doing what they are supposed to do. (Clara)

Howard talked about the ability to work independently, be a self-starter, and be comfortable making one’s own decisions. As an organizational member who was geographically dispersed, he found that there was very little direction coming from corporate headquarters with the result that he had to figure out how to work on his own. Howard also mentioned that if a person is not self-disciplined, they can get themselves into trouble.

If one were to say they would like to take my job or to do work like I do they would have to be very self-directed, because they would not get a whole lot of direction from the home office. They have to be comfortable making their own decisions and not checking everything by someone - so I don’t think that would work. When I started I had a hard time with it. I started with another organization and I really had a hard time billing 20 hours a week, there were just too many distractions. Especially if there is no one saying I need these units of work Monday and these units of work Tuesday – it is really wide open and there is a tendency to let other things distract you and get in the way. So it really is a learned discipline to work apart from every one, by yourself, and in your home environment. (Howard)

Rich and Jesse worked in a sales organization. For them, the key characteristics needed to successfully work in a geographically dispersed sales culture were to be a self-starter and be

achievement driven. Jesse added that having integrity was also a critical success factor in his organization that must be brought to the table.

I would describe the culture of our company as being sales driven and achievement driven as most of us are sales people. The kind of folks that are going to gravitate towards this type of job or to be of that mindset want to achieve and want to build something out of nothing, what have you. (Rich)

Clearly anyone in my position would be what you call a self-starter. It's a sales organization so our expectations [are] of bringing in a certain amount of dollars in sales, in a period of time. The rules are quite strict on what we can and what we cannot do. And, so you have to be somewhat entrepreneurial to be able to go out and do that... They're looking for people that are highly competitive, people that are goal oriented, people that certainly have integrity. (Jesse)

Category Two: Organizational Support Structures and Processes

Because team members are geographically dispersed, it is often necessary to have organizational structures and support processes in place to facilitate learning the organizational culture. Enabling organizational structures suggested by the participants included a clear mission or purpose, clear and documented work expectations, clear behavioral boundaries, strong support systems, appropriate technology and technology support, documented processes, and formal training programs.

Clear mission or purpose. A clear mission or purpose assisted the participants in understanding the direction of the organization and provided context to learning the culture. Margie and Jill gave examples of how their organization's mission or purpose affected not only how they communicated with each other, but also how they worked with their clients. It provided the meaning behind their work and guided their behavior. Margie talked about how her organization created "xyz dialog", a strategic communication philosophy that guided all their

work effort and their conversations together, as well as the conversations with their clients. They even had a graphic to exemplify the dialog concept to their employees as well as to their clients.

There is a whole concept of what are we talking about when we say [xyz] dialog. What are we after, we are really after engagement with others and that discussion, a three-prong discussion is a model that we have where engagement is at the center and then these three elements, you heard me talk about two of them, one is intrinsic motivation and the other is autonomy, but the third is continuous learning. So there is a graphic that depicts that and when you say the name [xyz] dialog to me, that is the image that pops up into my head. I want engagement whether it is just you and me or whether me and a team or me and the client or what I am going to create in the organization. It's kind of the molecule, if you will, of engagement with these other three pieces which are components of that and have to be addressed. That permeates from my example of how I put together training or any kind of development work with any of the leaders ...to look at each one of those pieces. Let's say I am doing a training analysis, are those pieces there? Create the environment in the organization we are working with that we want to have happen, so that serves as the basis of artifacts for me to identify both as the internal person, but also serves as the artifacts to identify in terms of how do I structure what it is I am doing for others. (Margie)

Similarly, Jill talked about how her organization's mission and purpose were conveyed during the first discussions she had with people in her organization. As she continued to work for this organization, its mission and purpose was always at the forefront of her mind and guided her behavior. The organization's mission is exemplified in its cultural values.

Well as discussions with the person who hired me and my other teammates at the time, you know [mission was] very much talked about with first and foremost the importance of our customers. And that people who call [our organization need help] and that is the thing we always have to remember and keep in mind. And so from the very first few days and then getting into the work itself, it was something I always kept in the forefront – you know – the people who call us [need help], we can't forget that... There is always an alternative and all who work for the organization live and breathe those values and that meaning. (Jill)

According to a number of participants, their organization's mission and purpose was also reinforced through continued conversations, consistent messages, fun games, and even memorized in elevator speeches. Diane and Ray talked about how their organizations have

consistent, repeated messages around the mission of the organization. Diane mentioned that her organization is very “firm and clear about what it is they want and [they are] being very smart in ramming it home over and over again.” Ray stated that not only did they have to memorize their organization’s mission so they could articulate it to their clients, they also had to dissect it into all of its components, to know what each word meant and the reasons behind each word.

That was actually something we had to memorize when we came to our training class. So we knew there was really emphasis on that and we dissected it piece by piece of why the words were what they were. You know, [abc], [def] and [ghi], all those things – [xyz]. That the words were just not picked – there was a reason behind them. (Ray)

Bill talked about how his company’s mission, captured in their logo, was also incorporated into all their communication messages to their clients.

It [the mission] is part of our logo ... then it was built in to all of our written messages. It was also the elevator speech that everyone was supposed to recite for some time. It would show up visually in everything we did, so when somebody would start a presentation...slide 1 was the title, slide 2 was the legal document, and slide 3 was here is what I do. So they did a great job at drilling it into us. (Bill)

Clara mentioned that her organization even created a trivia game with prizes for people to re-remember the mission of their organization.

This is just an example, this year for the 50th anniversary of the mission ... every week or so they will send out a trivia question around the mission statement. If you answer it you are put in a drawing to win money. The question has one of our leaders on a video so they will teach you something about the mission and then they will ask the question on that. (Clara)

Unclear mission or purpose. On the other hand, Todd talked about not being able to articulate the mission. However, he did not see it as a big concern because he believed that it was just a matter of people figuring it out for themselves through the work they did. He was more concerned with what people in the field said about what they did and the value they provided.

We have been in existence for a year and... I couldn't tell you what our mission statement is or what our logo is, but it doesn't really matter that much, it is much more so you know us out in the field saying this is what we do. Hopefully that is a simple thing for them to figure out. (Todd)

Clear work expectations and behavioral boundaries. Beyond the mission and purpose of the organization, other identified support structures included clear work expectations and behavioral boundaries. When I asked the participants how they learned their performance expectations and what boundaries they must not cross, many of them talked about the need for clear, articulated, or documented guidelines to govern their behavior.

Work expectations. There was a lot of commonality in the responses I received from the participants who worked in sales organizations regarding their work expectations. They said clear work expectations helped them know the performance criteria that must be met. Todd mentioned that his performance expectations were very clear. He was given "specific sales targets and specific activities (e.g., how many clients are we touching each week either by phone or in person, how many meetings are we doing), but we are directly measured on sales." (Todd)

Melody stated that her organization was very specific and explicit about what they expected from their faculty members, leaving very little doubt about how to perform to the organization's expectations. To support the understanding of these expectations, they provided online practice simulations based on real life examples that provided feedback on appropriate behaviors and expectations.

Number one, they expected us to work. We needed to be in the course room three times a week and we needed to be able to contact learners by phone or through email to get them constant feedback on what was going on. Here are the resources, here is what you can expect at the library, here is what you can expect if you have a student who is doing research, here is the place you go about this, and that and the other thing. And so all that was kind of laid out and they gave us little scenarios that we practiced on. So what would you do if this happened, and they would take us through an online simulation and

we would make our choices and say – really, that is good, but you really need to do this or that is exactly the way we would expect you to handle things. (Melody)

Similar to Melody's organization, Margie stated her organization clearly articulated their expectations to their consultants to ensure behavioral guidelines were very clear. When a consultant joined their group, they had a dialog with that consultant about why they were important and how their work and behavior impacted the entire project and those people around them.

I think in interacting with some of the consultants, because each of the key players has consultants that they pull in. It's a different universe because these are not full time people, they are brought in on a project basis and so some of them have different approaches, but it is made quite clear – this is how we do work and these are what the expectations are, so that why I think it is pretty consistent. And the very first thing we talk about is why do you matter? Why you are so important and what you do and the impact it has. One person has huge impact not only on the success or failure of certain business, but also for the people we work with and therefore what you are going to do is going to impact a lot of people, some of whom you never realize ripples into – so there is a strong discussion around the fact – yes, we are going to give you autonomy and we depend on your intrinsic motivation to be there, but do remember that you really impact other people, you are a professional, we expect that you always have the best possible relationships with clients and so forth. So it's pretty clear how people are expected to behave. (Margie)

Behavioral boundaries. A number of the participants talked about how knowing the boundaries of the organization provided parameters around acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Some of the boundaries came in the form of stated expectations as mentioned above, while other boundaries were learned through industry best practices and regulations. For example, Todd worked at an organization that must comply with federal and state regulations. His comments exemplified the boundaries he had to live within.

First and foremost because of [regulatory compliance] we have to abide by [xyz] guidelines and so it is very important. Our culture is, I would say, is very tight from the standpoint of the rules we have as far as communication—email, correspondence, and

even interaction amongst ourselves. Our conversations via email are very strict because of that. (Todd)

Jesse also talked about the behavioral boundaries that were in place in his organization.

“The rules are quite strict on what we can and what we cannot do. You must follow the rules or you’ll lose your job.”

Unclear work expectations. As previously mentioned, clear expectations and behavioral boundaries support cultural learning. Yet, the participants also noted that unclear work expectations created a barrier to understanding work and behavioral expectations. Sean talked about the mixed expectations and signals he got from his organization and the confusion that it created.

Yeah, at one point they even told us that there was a document out there where we had to start recording our [customer] visits to all the sites four times a year. I just never bothered to go out there to fill it in. I would tell him [my boss] that, I just don’t have the time. He said well don’t worry about it – just keep focused on the fires we have to put out today and don’t worry about visiting the customers that often. So it’s truly a mixed message coming down. (Sean)

Kristina and Paula talked about how their work deadlines and expectations were not clear. Thus, they had to spend most of their time guessing at what was needed and when it was needed.

My first thought was to say mostly it is meeting deadlines [when talking about what behavior gets rewarded], but then the deadlines are never clear. When I first get a list I always have to ask my manager/supervisor - when do you want this by because it is very self-paced. (Kristina)

Pretty much what came about was – I had to learn who I am not supposed to talk to and even if the company makes a mistake and does it wrong ... I haven’t got a lot of direction on what I am or not supposed to do. (Paula)

Strong support systems and documented processes. When asked what could be in place to make the culture easier to learn, almost unanimously the participants mentioned the need

for strong support systems and documented processes. Support systems and processes mentioned by the participants include having some type of question and answer support system, formal communication processes, and easily assessable documented information. They also reported that little or no documented processes or information was a barrier to learning the culture.

Question and answer support systems. A number of the participants talked about how important it was to have someone or some group of people they could call to ask questions and get answers. Unlike team members who were co-located, geographically dispersed team members were unable to walk to the next cube to ask someone a question. Sally gave an example of how she had a lot of support from the Project Management Office in her organization. As a project manager, she moved around a lot in the organization. Even though the processes changed quickly, there was always someone to answer her questions. Sally knew the organization would support her efforts so she could be successful as a project manager and work effectively in the organizational culture.

I moved around a lot inside [my organization], so there was always somebody there to support you through the project management office. There were some instances, I just moved around so fast and the processes changed so fast, it was just trial and error. Double checking myself all the time, but I did have everything I needed, overall I've got to tell you they've got a great PMO office. Whenever you've got a question there's at least two, three, four people you can go to try to get the answer you need. In this instance, now that they're going to be changing all the processes, all the artifacts, they have something they called the [xyz] training services. They've been holding classes each week, sometimes twice a week, going over the documents, going over them again and again and going over them in great detail. Exactly what they are, why they are, how to find out more information, where they are on SharePoint. Who it is you can call if you have questions, just a tremendous amount of support is always out there, you've just got to know where to find it. (Sally)

Bob and Ben both worked for organizations that provided strong support structures. They mentioned they were comfortable picking up the phone, talking to anyone in the organization, and they knew they would get a response to their question(s). They found this structure very reliable.

I could pick up the phone and ask for virtually anyone and if I couldn't talk to them directly at the time that individual would call me back or respond to my email. It wasn't delegated to someone else to take care of that job. (Bob)

I can say that response time to phone calls and emails like that is like a next minute type of deal. They monitor those pretty heavy especially if they come from a faculty member and they respond pretty quickly. (Ben)

Doris's talked about how her organization provided an email blast structure that employees would use to send out their questions and share their knowledge with people all over the different time zones. She talked about how she could send a question in an email and receive excellent, in-depth, meaningful answers within an hour at any time of the day.

The name of the company was [xyz] and they had something called "[xyz] blast" so if you had a question you would send it in email to the company, because it's geographically dispersed, people working with customers 24/7 and all different time zones and everybody had their blackberry so you could read it immediately. So we would send out a xyz blast when you needed help with something, "Hey, does anyone have a template for a xyz with a focus on blah, blah," "Has anybody done this, or here's the situation, you know calling for opinions - what would you do?" You would send that out and literally everybody on that [xyz] blast would give you some sort of response within an hour and they were in-depth, thoughtful, meaningful responses. And then you'd have a couple people follow up with you when they'd have a moment, did you get what you need, should we put some time on the calendar to really do a deeper dive into this, that sort of thing. (Doris)

Formal communication process. A formal communication process supports the planned, intentional communication between organizational members as well as between the organization and its members. These processes may include regularly scheduled meetings, newsletters, email blasts, or any other type of scheduled, intentional communication. Formal communication

processes are critical for geographically dispersed team members. Sometimes it is the only time they communicate with anyone in the organization and it may be the only way they get their information. Without communication and information sharing, the organizational culture would be impossible to learn.

Sally talked about how her organization provides “town hall meetings. They also make sure that they [attendees] are heard loud and clear during the executive briefing meeting.” Sally also stated they had meetings almost daily to ensure everyone is on track-sharing information and continually dialoging with each other.

We have meetings almost every day of the week. We have meetings with the product team on Monday, we have our project plan review call on Tuesday, we don't have any meetings on Wednesday, we have the leads meetings on Thursday, and then we have a real quick touch base on Friday: Is there anything we need to think about on the weekend, reflect on the [past] week before we leave for the weekend and startup on Monday, is there anything hanging out there? (Sally)

Diane provided an example of how her organization's weekly scheduled meetings became a time to dialog, share information, and take care of any misunderstandings.

Monday morning ... whoever's in the company at the time gets on the phone and has a conversation. I mean the fact that we have the standard Monday call, that always happens, means there's a place to have that [conversation], if someone is confused by the email trail or feels like they've been misunderstood that can trigger a “let's talk about that on Monday.” (Diane)

Rich further suggested that all the employees could benefit from talking to one another and sharing ideas. If it were not for the scheduled weekly and quarterly calls that force people to collaborate and share their ideas and success stories, Rich suspected there would be very little conversation and sharing of information between people. The information that was shared would be limited to those people he knew and trusted.

It would be best practices where we would all benefit from talking to one another more often and sharing ideas and collaborating. We have that set up to some extent. We have weekly calls with one group, we have quarterly calls with the marketing committee, and we have a couple of ongoing things that force us to collaborate or come together, share ideas, share success stories. But if it wasn't for that structure to be put in place we would probably have very little if any [conversations]. You would almost be limited to relationships from people who are friendly and talking to each other once in a while. That is still inefficient and spotty. (Rich)

Documented information. All of the participants mentioned how important documented processes were to someone who was geographically dispersed. Documented process were said to help guide the participants in expected behavior, help them do their work, and provide clues to the organization's culture. Debra provided an example of how she had access to a vast number of resources, so if she couldn't find someone to answer her question, she could refer to the documented resources.

There are also an enormous amount of resources as far as handbooks, guidebooks, screenshots, those kind of things, so that if we do have a question we don't necessarily find someone who could help us, but there is something out there already prepared. (Debra)

Diane talked about how a group of people in her organization created a cookbook that covered different aspects of the job and tools that could be used to advance ideas. In addition, the partners wrote a number of books that acted as the "Bible" for the organizational culture.

A group of people created the xyz "cookbook;" it was a series of pieces on a disk of different aspects and different tools that we would use to advance our ideas. I should add there were also several books that our partners have written that are our "Bible" so that's also part of the culture transfer, people read the book. (Diane)

Jill also talked about receiving an employee handbook and a book on the history and background of the organization on her first day to help her understand the mission and culture of the organization.

I did have some materials in writing, so on my first day I was handed an employee handbook and another book about the organization... from day one reading the background and history of the organization, how it came to be, and what we strived to do to help the [customers]. (Jill)

Since geographically dispersed team members do not have a lot of contact with other people in the organization, their access to documented processes may be critical to their work success, as well as helpful in providing clues to the organization's culture, such as history, values, and behavioral norms.

Little or no documented information. Without strong support structures in place, participants were left to their own devices to figure out what to do, how to do it, and how to make their own decisions. Little or no documented information was reported to be a critical obstacle to learning the culture. These obstacles were revealed when I asked the participants two sub-questions: 1) What are the key barriers to learning the organizational culture, and 2) What could be in place to make learning the culture easier? In response, most of the participants talked about needing documented policies, procedures, and processes. Stella replied that any type of documentation would be nice. This was a common theme for many of the participants.

If they had some kind of consultant guidebook, you know policies and procedures written down and any of that. I recall at one point hearing that they were writing up this new process and they do talk about we need to improve this process and they talk about somebody working on the process and then we don't see anything written and come of it. (Stella)

Sean pointed out that when he started with his organization, there was very little communication and he did not receive any documentation, training, or support. He mentioned that he "just had to wing it" and "guess his best" as to performance expectations.

When I started I thought that when they handed me the entire factory it would at least come with a manual, if not trained individuals and a support structure that [would] assist me in being successful at being the manager at that point in time. What I discovered very

quickly is that they had poorly trained the employees and barely gave them any knowledge on what they had to do. There was absolutely no documentation and there was very little support for the effort out here. It was a huge million dollar dump and that was a very rude awakening for me. As a result I had to guess what the expectations were because there were no policies written down. (Sean)

Rich revealed that his organization does not have a published code of ethics to help people align to the culture. After taking a course on ethics, he suggested that by not having a published code of ethics the organization may inadvertently provide employees with a false sense of security. In essence, if the organization didn't say not to do it, it must be okay. Rich believed that a published code of ethics, covering the ethical conduct of the employees, would be valuable in communicating expected behavioral norms of the organization.

I am actually going through, a course [xyz]. One of the major parts is ethics and there is some talk in there that makes a recommendation that every organization should have a published code of ethics for the employees, so everyone stays aligned in the same culture and not having – in the absence of having a code of ethics, there is a certain false sense of security I think. If they are not telling me I can't do this, then it must not be bad. Well at least to have it is a first step. At least you can go on record [that] this is what we stand for in writing. I was actually thinking about making that recommendation because ever since we shifted over to the new firm about a year ago, and they created this new subgroup for us, we don't have our own published code of ethics, at least not one I have been made aware of. So I was going to suggest that we do that and maybe do that as a launching off point for some of the culture coming in. Add that to the [xyz orientation] meeting and remind people along the way somehow, someday, that hey guys; this is our code of conduct and publish it a couple of times a year. I don't think that would hurt. Taking that and building on it would be an improvement. (Rich)

The participants suggested that a strong support system and documented processes were critical to creating the environment in which learning the culture could occur. Support systems mentioned by the participants included having some type of question and answer support system, a formal communication process, and documented information and processes. Alternatively, having little or no documented processes or information was reported as a barrier to learning the culture.

Communication technology and support. Communication technology is one of the critical structures that needs to be in place for geographically dispersed team members since it is their only means of communication. As I interviewed the participants, I noticed that the majority of the participants still used the phone as the main medium for communicating with others in the organization. Email communication was next, followed by all the other technologies such as instant messaging, SharePoint, websites, Intranet sites, or NetMeeting. According to the 22 participants of this study, only a few participants graduated to the use of some type of web conferencing tool, instant messaging, or text messaging as a frequent means of communication, even when these other options were available for use.

Many of the participants suggested it would be helpful to have the communication technology available for new team members. Margie explained that in her organization each new member would receive a “company email address, so they have an email; we make sure they get on instant messaging when they are on a project.” (Margie)

When asked about how they communicated information or received information, Stella and Ray stated that almost all communication in their organization was completed through the use of email or the phone.

Most of the other communication is email or phone, so scheduling is almost all done via the phone or email. Documents are sent through the mail or emailed. (Stella)

Mostly phone. We only have email communications on a macro level from the company, but then as I say, weekly, at least twice weekly you are talking to our peers and my boss, reporting on where we are and what we are doing based on our goals, that type thing. Mostly phone. (Ray)

A few of the participants used instant messaging or texting, although this type of technology was not as prevalent as email or phone even within the organizations that used this

technology. Sally talked about how she had numerous Instant Messaging links open at any one time. She felt instant messaging was a faster way to communicate than by email. It also allowed her to try to bypass the massive amount of email everyone in the company received.

It's a big mix. I'd say a large part of my communication is instant messaging. I have no less than 10 to 15 instant messaging windows open every day. And I like to do that as opposed to email because people's email boxes get full and sometimes I'm looking for a quick answer and I can get in and out [of] somebody's face virtually really quickly. We do communicate via email now but not very much. (Sally)

Jill talked about how a few people in her organization used text messaging, but noted most people in the organization were not comfortable with the technology. They also conducted a lot of conference calls.

Most of our communication happens via email and then for a few of us, we use our texting features, because we all have blackberries and so a lot of it is via quick text message. We do have some people who are not real comfortable texting. So a few of us we communicate via text and then we do have a lot of conference calls. (Jill)

A number of the participants mentioned that their organization's website provided them with their first view of the organization's culture. It was often reported that they would use their organizations' website to find out how the organization presented itself to the public, their reported mission, company background, and products or services they sold. Randy's quote is representative of many of the participant's comments. He provided an example of how he saw his organization's website as the public front which provided information on their mission and history, products, and policies, while the Intranet site was used for their day-to-day working area. Randy suggested that the Intranet site was a result of the organization's culture, rather than functioning to provide information about the culture.

We have an Internet site that is public and a means for us to communicate with our customers and whoever else. The Internet site gives our mission, and provides the benefits and features of our products. It would connect the public with the individuals

who could provide them with the information they are looking for, provide them with a place to make payments, policies, so it's clearly oriented in a way that presents our product to the public, but there is also a section of it that would give our history and our mission.

We also have a fairly sophisticated Intranet site that is accessible by corporate people. The Intranet site is the day to day working area. The Intranet site has sections with human resources and sections regarding corporate communications. It is fairly broad. Within that there is also an area for disseminating new policies and procedures. The media site within the Intranet is a place where people would be focused on where the organization is going, procedures, and policies. It would be a result of our culture rather than stating it. (Randy)

Poor communication technology and support. Poor communication technology was reported as a barrier by the participants. If the technology did not work well, or the participants do not know how to use, then it ceased to be a vehicle for communication. Clara provided an example of how her organization had documented processes posted on their website. However, it was so cumbersome to navigate, that it was not as useful as it could be. "A lot now is even website based. The tricky thing is you need to know what websites to be plugged into to get the information, so there is really not a good way of navigating through that." (Clara)

Todd talked about his frustration with the Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection to his organization's Intranet site. Most people in his organization found the site too cumbersome and time consuming to use, so they either didn't use it or they got someone else to use it for them. As a result, the organization had ceased to put anything on the Intranet site that was relevant.

We have an Intranet site, but in order to get to it we have to go through a special VPN connection which everyone thinks is a pain in the butt. They really don't post information out there and we really don't go to it. We probably have it saved as a favorite, but unless I am going to order marketing materials or something - that is a time I would go through it. So rather than go through it, I have my internal assistant do it for me. So no, that is not a very useful portal for us to use and so they know it - our corporate office knows that, and so they don't use it. (Todd)

In addition to communication technology, some participants suggested there was a need for technology training and support. According to Melody, there should be a proactive process in place that provided people not only with the technology they need to do their work, but also provided the training and support so it could be used effectively.

Well, I think when I talked before when they are adding new technologies and new ways of doing things, I think there needs to be more of a recognition that everyone that uses the system, not just those that are on site, have to have the training. And so they need to be more proactive in understanding the breadth of the system and make sure all constituents are up to speed. And that would really help because I know some of us feel like – hello there – that is the thing I think they need to improve the most. (Melody)

Formal orientation and training programs. In addition to communication technology being accessible and usable (and being trained how to use the technology), participants suggested formal orientation and training programs were helpful. Not only did orientation programs provide a personal welcome, but participants reported that it was a time to engage with others from the organization and provided an opportunity to understand the mission and purpose of the organization and learn its culture. Debra talked about the welcome and support she felt as a new member of her team, which she had not encountered in her previous work experience with other organizations.

I also have a full time position and I have been at several universities in the past and none of the places I have been before have provided the training or the welcome I received with this organization. Also, just the tone, well the tone of the meetings we do have and the fact that we have them so often, those kinds of things. Primarily, the training and the welcome support that I received as a new member of the team. (Debra)

Clara's organization provided orientation in the first two weeks of her employment.

During the orientation, the organization made a point of communicating the mission, the history

of the organization, and its culture. This gave Clara her first opportunity to learn the organizational culture and provide a good foundation on which to build future understanding.

Well, my company does a really good job. Your first day of employment, I should not say first day, but in the first two weeks, they operate these classes every two weeks, new employee orientation and they do a pretty job of communicating mission and how the company was founded and the importance of that. They give each employee a medallion, with part of the mission statement on it. They present it and they have the leader come in and present them to you, so they really put a big importance on that piece of it. (Clara)

No formalized training. When I asked Ben what would have made the culture easier to learn, while he mentioned that his organization does not have a formal orientation program at their headquarters, he believed it would be very beneficial in learning the culture, getting to know people, and putting faces to names.

I think they should pay for a week, pay expenses for a week to go to the corporate office, like orientation, meet the people, meet people you would be corresponding with and maybe have a get together, you can do everyone at once, I mean you can take everybody, but if you are a new person, you should go through an orientation period like that. So you can see what the office looks like, I can only picture it...but I have never seen it. But I think that would help with the cultural change, especially if you are coming from a different [company] and you have already some cultural – maybe different culture and when you come to ours, it is totally different than what you are probably used to...But I think if they did that at least you would get to meet a couple of people, although those people might be staff members, that may not be there in a week, but at least let you meet the people who you are dealing with, meet your boss, meet his bosses' boss and things like that, or at least get introduced to the president and get a little bit of orientation. That may have helped a lot. (Ben)

Tony provided an example, stating that it would be nice to have a formal training program to address the culture, where the culture was not only taught, but provided a venue where he could talk to people who have been around the organization for a while. However, from a practical standpoint, he believed that he learned the culture from just doing his job and being told how to do his work. To Tony, it is the actual work which accurately reflected the culture of the organization.

Let me answer this question in two ways, one is theory and one is practice. In theory I want to say “yes,” they should have put together a training program to address culture, our culture and present it to you from, maybe something to read, and then have a session, a one-hour session or half-an-hour session, with new people who have joined the organization. And meet with people in the organization, who have been there new [people], one to three years, three to five years, and another group that’s [been there] longer so you can talk about culture. From a practical point of view I don’t know if anything could really be done or can’t be done in general within this organization. At the time, maybe just, at least with management describing ... learning of the work of being a [role] and how [role] interacted with the rest of the organization. Having those conversations describing what needs to be done. In our culture this is how we want to do it vs. this is the work of a [role] in general and these are just things you need to do. There was always an on the job aspect of what you were doing, you were being told how to do things that were reflective of the culture. And that would mean going back to that description of that Schein article that came out a week ago about solving problems both small and large in an organization. And that what you were being taught was culture. (Tony)

Category Three: Contributing Factors and Barriers to Learning and Adopting the Organizational Culture

The focus of this study was on understanding the contributors and barriers to learning and adopting the organizational culture. During the analysis phase I identified six contributing factors, which could also become barriers to learning or adopting the culture if they are not optimized or do not exist. These six factors are:

- Values alignment: Values alignment covers the participants identified need to have personal values align with the organization’s cultural values.
- A strong relationship with the reporting manager: For many participants, the reporting manager represents and embodies the organizational culture.
- Socialization opportunities: Socialization opportunities may be face-to-face or virtual. They provide an opportunity for existing members to help new members

learn the organizational culture and adopt it into their personal work through collaboration and dialog.

- **Engagement:** Active engagement in the organization can assist in the learning and adoption of the organizational culture.
- **Trusting relationships with colleagues:** Learning and adopting the culture often happens through dialog with trusted colleagues.
- **Purposeful dialog about the culture:** Having authentic dialog about the culture facilitates learning the culture, just as not talking about the culture tends to interfere with that learning.

Each of these contributing factors and barriers are described in detail in the following sections.

Values alignment. Values alignment was the first theme I identified to be a contributing factor in the learning and adoption of the organizational culture. Values are deeply held convictions that inform individuals what to think and feel. The participants' personal values were revealed throughout the interviews, although they were made more explicit with answers to two key interview questions: (1) Think about your place of work, its history and traditions, how do they relate to your own values and ways of doing things; and (2) What key characteristics and behaviors does your organization value most?

Many of the participants talked about how important it was to them to work for an organization that aligned with their personal values. Diane gave an example on how her values closely aligned with her organization's values. In fact if her values did not align with the organization's values, she stated she would not be working for this organization.

I wouldn't have stuck with it this long if it didn't align very closely with my values both around what needs to happen with government and my value in valuing government. This is not a group that trashes government, we just want change so that we can get better value and people will appreciate government more. So the fact that we are promoters of government and not trashers of government is important to me. I really like the egalitarian, personable support that comes with it. When I first joined [xyz] I asked what the vacation policy was and it was basically whatever you need. We pay health benefits for everybody and family members. It's just very generous of how people are treated in terms of support. And that aligns with my philosophy too. (Diane)

Diane's quote demonstrates how important it is to her that government be valued and appreciated. She also values the way people get treated in her organization, which also aligns with her values.

Jill, like Diane, also believes her values align well with the organization. Because of that alignment, she has been able to bring new ideas and changes into the culture, such as more formality around standards. When Jill was asked how she felt about being a part of the culture, she responded:

I think in large part because the culture is more complementary to my own values, they are in alignment which is obviously very good and so I have been able to support the existing culture. In the time I have been with the company, what I have brought to the organization and the culture is starting a sense of a little more formality around our standards. So even though we all strive for high quality, the organization, being its size, didn't always know how to support the notion of high quality. So bringing in a little more formalization from a process standpoint and a little bit of maturity to say we need to start thinking about continuous process improvement and how do we do that and how we support it. So that's where I think I helped to start to change the culture a little bit. The value is still the same high quality, but the "how" part is what I am starting to bring to the organization. (Jill)

A number of participants talked about the passion they have around their work, making a difference to others, and staying true to what they believe. Melody believed this organization was the best job fit she has ever had. It provided her with an opportunity to use her strengths and get appreciated for it. She felt she could make a difference.

I really have a strong work ethic, when I go to work, I want to work and I want it to be good and I want to be appreciated for it. And this organization supports that. I feel this is the best fit job for me that I ever had. I don't have to be somebody I am not, I don't have to play politics to get something done, well, actually I have to play a little bit of politics, but not the way I use to have to play politics. I do feel that I can make a difference and my work makes a difference and that to me makes me want to come back. If I felt I was just a body filling in online and you know, nobody really cared about what I did, I would have quit a long time ago. I am pretty independent. I like working at home. And I don't have to get involved in all of the petty dramas that working in [this type of organization] always brings out. So I think this is a pretty good fit for me. I think my values are pretty close to this organization's in almost every way. (Melody)

Debra's quote exemplifies her values as she talks about what drew her to this organization and the strong passion she has about distance learning since she was from a rural area where there was very little opportunity to get a higher education.

Well primarily because it is so student centered, that is one of the things that really drew me to this organization, but also I am very passionate about distance learning...because I come from a rural area where there is not a lot of opportunity for higher education without driving 90 miles or so. So I feel very strongly about providing opportunities to those who might not otherwise have that opportunity or making it [higher education] a little friendlier to them. (Debra)

Misalignment of values. Some of the participant's reported that there was a misalignment of values, in which their personal values did not fit with the values of the organization. A number of the participants stated that they joined their organization because of the organization's espoused values. However, after working in the organization, they found the real values of the organization to be very different from its espoused values. This misalignment seemed to create some disengagement on the part of the participant in the culture of the organization.

Kristina gave an example of how she joined her company because she believed in their mission and in their services. She felt she was bringing value to the clients and the organization offered services she could embrace because they matched her values.

What they stand for if you look at their website definitely fits my values and what I believe can be helpful to organizations. So that's a fit and I did check that out before I took the job. (Kristina)

However, Kristina was surprised that once she began working for this company she found that, although her company was in business to help other companies retain their employees, they didn't walk the talk with their own employees.

I think the biggest surprise for me is that they put together all this research, the survey and analyzed it and sold this [information] to improve retention. But they don't practice that in their interactions - at least with my colleague and with me in terms of what you might do to retain an employee and to keep them happy. (Kristina)

Because of this misalignment between the espoused values and the real values of the organization, Kristina reported that she has disengaged herself from the organization and only does the work needed to still get a paycheck. "Right now I don't have a lot of vested interest in it [the organization]" (Kristina).

Bill also talked about the mismatch in messages and the difference in his values versus the organizational values. He believed in what the company espouses, which aligns with his personal values, but he found the company's real values were very different.

I would say the message, and I don't know if this will make sense, I would say the message they want to portray is the way I feel I want to do this job – it is very close to being the ideal company I would want to work for. The message they actually portray is not close to me at all. To be really honest at this point, it is a pay check and it's an ability to support my family. I don't really have the tie or the enjoyment of representing the company as I did in the past. (Bill)

Bill provided another example in which he found it very difficult to reconcile what he heard his organization articulate they wanted in a good sales person from the behavior they were really rewarding.

When I went to a national meeting, it has always been one of those things when we went to a meeting there was always a panel that was put together [to present]. That panel of

people who were highly thought of changed dramatically. The way some of them did business was a way I could never do business. My fear was that if this was what is respected, then what they are telling me they want and what they are rewarding isn't the same thing. (Bill)

Bill's frustration with the situation became apparent as he talked about the differences between what his organization espouses and their actual actions. He later stated in his interview that his engagement in the culture has been "pretty much avoidance and much more looking for a different opportunity." (Bill)

Clara gave an example of how she believed it is important to have her personal values align with the organizational values. She mentioned that she left her previous organization because it did not align with her personal values. It was a mission and culture she could not personally endorse. She reported she now feels her values are much more aligned with her new organization's mission and products.

I think it relates very well to, I mean I like very much what I do as far as the end product. I know before I got in medical I was in defense and it just never sat right with me. Like one time I remember seeing the manager getting excited that there was potentially going to be a war. It meant more money for them, and I really didn't like that. So I think from a perspective of that, I think the work we do is very important and I think the same way my company operates. (Clara)

A strong relationship with the reporting manager. According to the participants' comments, their reporting manager is probably one of the most important contributing factors to learning the culture. Many of the participants stated they only knew the organization's culture through the eyes of their boss, since their boss was often the only person they had contact with as a geographically dispersed team member. Their reporting manager often represented the culture in the eyes of the participant.

Todd provided a description of how he sees his boss as an extension of the culture when he compared his experience with his different bosses at the same organization. Each boss managed in a different style, but Todd suggested that each boss had created a different organizational culture, or at least a different aspect of the organizational culture. As he thought about his experiences, he concluded that geographically dispersed workers will assume the culture of the person they have the most interaction with and that person's interpretation of the organizational culture.

I would say I had different bosses and they have been different extensions of the corporate culture. My boss is very straight and incapable and he needs to follow the rules a little bit more because he doesn't know what else to do. So I think he is much straighter line extension of the corporate culture. Whereas my former boss who lived... and has worked for a lot of different companies and is very sharp and brought a lot to the table. He was much more like us and almost to a fault, where he was not quite a reliable but yet, he would be like, hey get these reports in or hey, I know this is happening so – he would sometimes give us ideas in that grey area. The boss I had before them, was a little bit of a blend, had a little more tie to the home office, although he lived in [a state]. He was in the home office more frequently; he had been a field guy that had done the job so he knew what it took. But quite frankly now that I think about it, he kind of created his own culture with us. He – we had to follow the rules and everything else, but it was kind of – we are going to do things his way, which still fit the corporate culture. I worked for [this person] and then for [this person] and even those two managers held the same job, I think they each created different cultures for me or different aspects of the corporate culture. So I guess overall my sense would be, being a geographically displaced worker, we are more likely assume the culture of the person we have the most interaction with or the person we are reporting to and what their beliefs and ties are to the home office. (Todd)

Paula shared Todd's perspective in that she only knows her organization's culture through her past three supervisors. Because her supervisors have been the only people she has communicated with in her organization, her supervisors have become the manifestation of the organizational culture.

I only know of the corporate culture from the two to three people. The three supervisors I had for a long period of time and that I talked over the phone because I think you can say different things over the phone and share different things you would never share via

email. You would never write them down. So I think that was part of it. Of course the people that were my supervisors all three left, that is why I have this new one, so you know, we discussed lots of things and I got to know these people quite well. I know the culture is very different in that corporate world. Like I would never want to talk to the president of this company – CEO or whatever, I would not want to work with him. I know that just from knowing what happened to the people who were supervisors of mine. So my relationship with this company is strictly with my supervisor. (Paula)

Weak relationship with the reporting manager. A couple of the participants reported that they did not have a strong relationship with their reporting manager. Paula's comments are representative of this withdrawal. She reports that she really doesn't share information with her boss, since she has not met her and senses that her reporting manager does not care to have a personal connection since they only communicate via email. As a result, Paula has not cared to have any further communication with her boss, who is her only connection to the organization.

Well I don't share anything with my new supervisor, because I don't know her. I have never met her; I have met all the other ones [previous bosses]. The first two [bosses] I knew. Then, the one I didn't know was from another country, he took us to dinner one night to meet us. So he went out of his way to meet us and to do things like that. This one I don't know. This supervisor, I guess I don't share a lot because it is email and things are read differently than if I say them. I certainly don't share any problems I have unless I need her help. (Paula)

Socialization opportunities. Having an opportunity to socialize with others in the organization was identified by some of the participants to be an important facilitating factor in learning and adopting the organizational culture. Socialization is where existing members collaborate, communicate, and dialog with new members to help them learn the culture (Von Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000; Schein, 1991). Socialization can be difficult for geographically dispersed team members since there are not as many opportunities to socialize (Zakaria et al., 2004).

Melody reported that she learned some of the organizational culture through other faculty members at the colloquia. Colloquies' provided a time for faculty to share information about the organization and learn the culture through face-to-face conversation and observation.

We talked about programs and talked about the way things are. We have colloquia where we meet our doctoral students for a week and work with them for wherever they are in their program. I used to attend those and there I met other faculty members and other people in the team. It was always a very positive experience. (Melody)

Clara talked about the opportunities to socialize when she was on business trips. She found she learned a lot about the culture when she grabbed a beer or had dinner with others in the organization and she really had a chance to talk informally to people. She believed she learned more that way, then when she was just focused on work activities.

I see them a lot when traveling because a lot of times I will be with someone else from another business unit so we are on a trip together. So I think you end up learning a lot about culture even at dinner. After we are done with a supplier, you know, grabbing a beer afterwards, so that's when I think you really learn a lot of what is happening, more than when you are doing just the work. (Clara)

Diane agreed with Clara's perception and provided an example of how she became familiar with the culture because she worked on a project team. She learned the culture by listening to how they talked about "stuff" and interacting with the team members through their work.

One of my first projects was this very larger project with the [organization] which had me going to [a state for] three weeks a month for several days. That's a way I became familiar with the culture because we had a team of people in there working. I caught on to how they talked about stuff and I still learn that way. (Diane)

She also talked about how important it was to socialize with others on the team. She suggested that spending some time with people, going out to eat with them, getting to know each other, and hanging out is when she really learned the organizational culture.

If you're on a team with them you spend time with them, you go out to eat with them, you spend time talking, and you really get to know each other. I think that's one way that we kind of bond, is through those experiences of hanging out at some city where you're working you learn the culture. (Diane)

Minimal socialization. According to some of the participants, socialization opportunities with others in the organization assisted them in learning the culture. At the same time, almost all the participants felt that a key obstacle that got in their way of learning the organizational culture was the fact that they were not co-located and had fewer opportunities to engage in social conversation. Rich was very explicit as he talked about this barrier. He also suggested that because work was so busy, most of the geographically dispersed employees were working more like an independent entrepreneur, rather than an employee who was part of the organization.

The biggest barrier [to learning the culture] is that we work remote. There is no water cooler talk, there is very little interaction between people even if they are on the same team, even if they are in the same geographic region, because we are all so busy doing our thing independently. It is almost that we are all mini business owners doing our own thing in our local market place so we don't really have a true need to talk to each other. And unless you are burning up the email and you are just chatty on communicating to people all the time, which I am not, then you just sort of live in a little silo and you come out when there is a call, you come out when there is a meeting, maybe you get an off call from a colleague or a peer asking to run an idea by you or who knows, for whatever reason. Maybe you make a random call once in a while, but ... if there was not for the team calls we have, I might initiate three to four phone calls a year to those people. It's not a lot, once in a blue moon and so. (Rich)

Diane talked about the fortunate ones who worked in the office and were able to hear each other and have side conversations. Because she was not co-located in the office, she spent extra time reading emails to get a gist of what was going on in the office and looking for clues that exemplified the culture. She suggested that because of the geographical distance, it has taken her longer to learn the organizational culture.

Those who are in the corporate office are overhearing each other, the office has an open architectural design, they're all hearing each other, having side conversation so I figured

if we keep up with what's going on, especially the owners, I've got to read what comes in the mail. So, I'm very efficient. I skim over everything. Well this was an issue that took me a little longer to learn what's going on than someone at [the corporate office]. (Diane)

Stella described the value of being in the office and proposed that if she had been physically in the office she would have picked up on the culture a lot faster, rather than in bits and pieces and through trial and error.

Well certainly being away from the office [is a barrier]. If I had been in the office a lot more in the beginning I would have learned [the culture] a lot sooner. But you know there are a certain amount of challenges with communication and when we are all traveling or all teaching and we need to communicate with each other quickly, we know we can't pick up the phone if we are teaching a class, so that is probably the biggest challenge. The other challenge is that there is probably more communication going on with them in the office that we are not privy to, but we're expected to know. Like all those unwritten processes and norms and things. (Stella)

Sean also suggested that geographical separation was an obstacle to learning the organizational culture. He also added the perspective that geographically dispersed workers may spend more time with their clients than they do with their employer.

The biggest one [barrier to learning culture] is obviously not being there [in the office]. Being around and immersed with people who are going through the same thing. So in a sense, the biggest barrier is just lack of communication, where ... 80% of my day is focused on my customers which are the people who pay our contracts. They are not the internal culture or internal people I need to deal with to make our customers happy. (Sean)

Engagement. Engagement emerged as another contributing factor in facilitating not only the learning of organizational culture, but also its adoption. Even though the participants were geographically dispersed, those who had the opportunity to participate in various events, activities, or processes within their organization were reported to feel like part of the organization. They also felt they had the ability to voice their ideas, make a difference in the organization, and help co-construct the culture.

Ben provided an example of how his organization does a good job engaging the participant in various events and activities. Even if he was unable to attend, he was always informed of the events. Just getting invited allowed him to feel part of the organization, even though he sometimes still felt like an island onto himself.

We get emails all the time and now we actually are getting a phone number because we are part time. They are changing this whole structure where we even get a school phone number. We will be getting business cards. If they have something, like a promotion or something, I get that in the mail - like I just got a baseball cap and poster for one of their promotions. So I do feel part of the organization, although I don't know personally that I could point anybody out that probably works in the corporate office. I may know their names but like any office, people change positions, they change jobs. I don't really know about that until I get an email from somebody that says I am new in this position, here is what I do, this is what needs to be done or something like that. I feel that I can go to anybody in the organization and they will help me out. The president of the college and vice president of the college, they are always sending updates. At least we are getting updated on what is going on and things like that. I think they try as best as possible to communicate to [role] out in the field part of the organization. We get invited to all the parties and things like that. Of course, a lot of us don't go. But when they are in our local area, like the colloquia, things like that, we know where they are at and we can go. We are offered to come to their happy hour to meet people and stuff. They do the trade shows, so when there are trade shows in the area, they let you know. Sometimes we get discounts and things to go meet them in the booth and things like that. So I do feel part of the organization, although sometimes you know, like anything you feel like you are an island. But I can say that response time to phone calls and emails is like next minute type of deal. They monitor those pretty heavy especially if they come from a [role] member and they respond pretty quickly. (Ben)

Ben further talked about how he had opportunities to get involved in organizational process efforts. In this example, Ben was able to help the school with its accreditation efforts. It made him feel good that he was able to participate in various processes even if he was not co-located.

I know they involve us in things – we can help them with, like I got an email about your dissertation, I volunteered. I know that our group or school is going through accreditation. I was selected to be interviewed by these people. Outside interviewees and I contributed a lot...I recommended students to talk to, and so they didn't hide that kind of thing. They do ask for our feedback and stuff. The [xyz] accreditation was pretty

intense and they are still going through it and putting it together and they won't even know about it until next year sometime if they got it. What does it mean for the school? Well if they don't get it, then an organization pulls all of their students out. And it is a big deal. So to be one of the faculty members to be interviewed was a big deal. And to be involved in the whole process – of course we had to submit some of our students' course work, with authorization from the student. They wanted to know that we knew what the competencies were for our course and what the major discussion questions were. What were the major outcomes of our projects and courses and they had specific courses and things like that. You know, that makes you feel good too, that you are involved, you are able to be involved in that process even though you are not there. (Ben)

Jill was able to participate in co-constructing her organization's culture including its vision, mission, brand, and future business plans. She was also involved in developing the processes, roles, and responsibilities needed to carry out the mission of the organization, allowing her to be engaged in clear, open dialog with other team members.

We recently returned from a management retreat where we talked about not only our vision, our mission, our brand, we talked about our future business plans, where do we want to be and we also talked about functional areas, responsibilities, who is doing what, how are we are going to carry out the mission. Then ...we all participated in this exercise where we gave each other personal feedback on what things we are doing well, what things we expect from one another, and what we should continue to start and stop doing in a very constructive way to be able to convey to one another what we expected. During that exercise, I conveyed to our management team what we have been doing [that] has worked up to this point. But we are really talking about our next evolution and so to do that we can't just come up with new products and be innovative if we don't have a supporting structure around process so we can get to the next level of maturity ...otherwise we are working in a very chaotic environment and that's not conducive to our growth. So I was able to express that through a face-to-face management retreat. (Jill).

When I asked Clara how she impacted culture, she said it was through her projects and being able to teach people how to repeat processes on their own. She used her teaching as an opportunity to engage with others to create a successful organization.

Through the projects and results and that - you know when I work on a project, usually my angle is whatever we are trying to get done I am teaching the person, I am co-leading with someone so I am trying to teach them how to repeat that process. So I am a little less concerned about the end result even though I know they will be there and that is what

people care about, but I am caring more about making sure somebody who has just gone through that process can do that again. (Clara)

Debra and Melody talked about how easy it was to get engaged in their organizations.

Debra's organization made sure that everyone was on the agenda and able to "chime" in with their opinions. Participation and engagement in the conversation is seen as a welcome feedback and not a disruption.

Everyone is on the agenda in some shape, form, or fashion whether it is formal or informal and then throughout each part of the meeting everyone has the opportunity to chime in. There is no - it is not uncommon for that to happen and for the tone to be so laid back that is not seen as an interruption, but as welcome feedback. (Debra)

When I further asked what the tone of meetings were in her organization, Debra talked about how she saw her culture as having a non-intimidating atmosphere, very laid back, encouraging with the attitude that all ideas were appreciated.

In the way they conduct the meetings, just the overall tone and the response that is provided to faculty and also from aside of the person that is the supervisor. Everyone contributes equally during the meetings... Everyone is fully asking questions, providing comments or providing assistance to colleague during the meeting, so it is just not a top down thing. I guess less intimidating would be the best way to describe it. Very laid back, there are no bad questions, that kind of attitude that everyone contributes and everyone feels appreciated, whereas I have been at places where that is not the case. (Debra)

Melody talked about how her people care about their work and are very eager to do extra work. Her organization leveraged that passion and provided opportunities for members to participate in the organization.

This is a very – oh how should I say it, up and eager organization, the people there really care about their work and their jobs, they are people who agree readily to do extra work and they are always looking for something new and innovative. (Melody)

Minimal engagement. As previously reported, many of the participants were delighted to participate in the organization, to make a difference and help co-construct the culture.

However, some of the organizations did not provide opportunities for the participant to become engaged in the organization, nor did they consider how their actions might impact the geographically dispersed team members. A couple of participants felt that their organization had a tendency to forget about them in an “out of sight and out of mind” mindset.

Sean described what it feels like to get the company newsletter that talks about all the fun everyone had at the Christmas party, yet the only people who could attend and who were invited, were people who were located close to the corporate headquarters.

Now there is a company newsletter, it theoretically comes out once a month. We usually see it four times a year and it’s not really related to [what we do]. They want it to be, you know disseminating out to [us] and all this stuff. But when [we] don’t get involved or get invited to the Christmas party and you put up a newsletter in January with all these photos about how much fun the Christmas party was, that kind of goes against the culture of valuing all your employees. It’s a mixed message - you know they want it to be – hey look how much fun we had, well great, those of us [out here] really don’t care. (Sean)

Diane talked about how easy it was to forget people or ignore them when she was not able to see them. “If they weren’t on the Monday morning call - we might ignore them for a long time.” (Diane)

Jill mentioned how difficult it was to keep up on current information and know what she should do when everyone in the company who is co-located has already discussed a topic but forgot she was not in on the discussion.

[During] a formal status call and you know something will come up and everyone knows about it but me. Then if I have to get up to speed on what happened, what does that mean, oh now I have to incorporate that into my work product. Sometimes various staff members will say, oh we had this discussion and you know what, we should have included you and we didn’t. (Jill)

Bill gave an example of how he tried to have open discussions with the people in his organization just as he had with his previous organization. He offered to participate and tried to

find ways to fit into the organization. Unfortunately, as a result of negative feedback and very little interest from the organization, he halted any further attempts to be part of the culture or to adopt it. He even began to distance himself from the organization.

You know that I think the first few times we had meetings I probably tried to create - again maybe it was my wrong way of trying - I tried to figure out ways to fit in with the new [culture] and I also felt that we were so new and in the past we had a fairly open culture so in the beginning I tried to share ideas or when there was an assignment that you didn't agree with to try to have an open discussion or dialog of why that occurred to get a reason. After a few times of trying, and finding out that it really is frowned upon or being told that was great but to see that nothing was really changed and there were no explanations. My way of dealing with the culture now is just to avoid the culture. I just try to avoid contact with people. If I see my boss is calling right now, my old one I probably would ask you if you minded if we paused this for a minute while I take the call, because if it was him calling it probably was something very important. The new boss...I don't think I ever answered my phone when I saw he was calling me. I felt it was better that he felt I was busy and I would call him back when I felt I wanted to deal with him. I think pretty much avoidance has been it. (Bill)

Trusting relationships with colleagues. Participants reported that a trusting relationship with colleagues was another contributing factor to learning the organizational culture. Many of the participants stated that they learned the organizational culture through dialog with other trusted colleagues in the organization. However, the participants also reported that they usually needed to have a strong relationship with that colleague, or time to build trust, for them to reach out and contact that colleague in order to share information about the culture.

Melody gave an example of how she learned the culture through interaction with her colleagues. She first described how she developed her relationships with other colleagues by sharing students or doing committee work. She made a special point, when the opportunity presented itself, to meet that person face to face.

We are really a tight knit group. And some of us have never met. But we share doctoral students, we share committee work, so we send each other goofy stuff and when we do meet, all of us go out to dinner. If ten of us come into a meeting from all over the

university, ten of us go out to dinner. So we really do have a sense that we can work with each other. And if there is a problem, we can go to each other. We have each other's backs. (Melody)

I asked Melody how she learned that people would help each other and have her back.

She revealed that they would call her for advice and would share information in the meeting.

Through this dialog, she also described how they gently reinforced the "appropriate" behavior that was acceptable in her organization.

People would start calling me. Hi, I have a problem, what can I do here? Then again, through meetings where people would say, can I talk to you about that? And I can say the same thing to them. I am having a problem with this; can I talk to you about that? I have to say at our last Chair meeting, I was griping about my course this quarter. And people don't do that [in this organization], so I was way out of line. And one of the other Chairs said I hope nobody talked about me as a student like that. No, no, no, this is just a unique case, but there was this subtle, bringing me back in line. You know. That is not the way we talk about things here. This is what – you actually have respect for your students. Keep this to yourself.

Sean and Jill supported the concept that they tend to only contact people they trust. Sean looked to a small number of people he felt comfortable enough calling to find out what was going on in the organization, as well as an opportunity to share information around performance expectations.

The only other thing, on the phone, is actually calling people up and finding things out. In any corporation, there is always a good rumor mill – I probably have 2 or 3 people out there that I know that I call and say what's going on about this – or I heard this was going on – and they will go, oh yeah, this is what I heard about that because the folks out there, obviously at the corporate headquarters are much more in tuned with the ebb and flow of what's going on a daily basis. You know one VP got fired, what one just got hired, what are their expectations for performance back out here in the field. (Sean)

Bill talked about how he got some his information about the culture through colleagues with whom he built up strong personal relationship. He would then confirm the information he

received from those colleagues and would ensure his understanding by talking to other members of management.

[I get my information] almost always [from] colleagues that – I wouldn't say that we are members of a team, but through time and going to meetings you find certain individuals you have things in common with – whether it be personal or just the way you approach the business-that you build relationships with. I would say I stay in touch with four to five people and have fairly good contact with in different parts of the country. Normally its coming from one of them and then it is going to management to verify what you are actually hearing is correct and if the way you are reading it is the way you should be reading it. (Bill)

Jill stated that she had a couple of people she felt comfortable confiding in because she had built up trust with them. However, she noted that was not true for others in the organization.

There are some people more so than others – like any other organization, there are a couple of people who I have come to trust for real personal matters – when it is something very close to me – I know there are a couple of people I can confide in and I wouldn't necessarily do that with everyone on staff. (Jill)

Low trust. A number of participants suggested that a barrier to learning and adopting the organizational culture may be a lack of trust. If the participant did not know the person on the other end or know what that person would do with the information they provided, their communication became very guarded.

Todd provided an example of how low trust resulted in guarded communication. He mentioned that he felt more comfortable talking to his colleagues and having an open conversation with them, but did not trust the people from the corporate office. Because he did not know what the people in the corporate office would do with his information, his communication became very guarded.

We [referring to colleagues] feel comfortable talking to each other openly. If we are talking to somebody from our home office, we have to be very guarded in what we are saying because we don't know where it [the shared information] is going to go. (Todd)

Todd also reported that he both limits his conversation with people and reduces how he passes on the culture when he feels he does not have a strong trusting relationship with them.

When I asked Todd about the reason he felt less comfortable talking over the phone to people, he explained:

I don't really have a tie to them, and I don't know what they will say to other people, because I haven't met them. I haven't sized them up. I haven't really been able to spend time with them. Frankly I really don't know if I care about them. You know, if they come out and spent time with me and we develop a rapport and I go - this is someone that I am going to be able to have a conversation with and work with, I want them to know a little bit about how I do things. So we can tighten up that relationship a little bit. But like there was one guy I remember from [a state] that came out and traveled with me and I told him some stuff, but I didn't share a lot with him, because quite frankly I didn't think he was going to work out well long term and I just knew he wasn't going to be very good and he wasn't. So I didn't spend a whole lot of time you know trying to shape our culture, I still helped him but...I just didn't invest much time on him at all. (Todd)

Todd also talked about how there was a free flow of information from the organization and now there were many guarded secrets. As a result, Todd stated that there had been a buildup of mistrust between the team members and the organization.

Recently we have had a lot of people leaving and they are not sharing that information where in the past it was very common knowledge. Hey you know so and so is leaving, we wish them well, they have served us well, etc. Good luck. There have been so many lately, we kind of find out from each other. So there has been quite a bit of mistrust that is developing because of that - you know - hey - what is really happening - especially since we are a global start-up division, only a year old. When we hear about things like that we get concerned that things are not working the way we wanted it to, when we talked to other people who are in our division [we find out] things aren't going well, but we hear from our bosses' boss, "on no, things are going fine." Then there is quite a bit of distrust that builds up in that. (Todd)

Bill mentioned that in the past his organization had been much more open with communication, but he has now learned to be cautious because he has received negative feedback. He pointed out that if he asks questions it gets him put on a watch list. He reports that

he is now very wary sharing information with anyone he doesn't know and no longer asks questions.

Yes, they were actually people I was close with before the company changed. And I still trust them; I think we still have the same values. We still want things, maybe it is just our idyllic way, we are all equally untrusting of upper management, so when I tell them something, I don't have to say by the way, this just between you and I. We understand that. There are some other people that were on a different part of the business before – I don't know if what I say to them is going to go straight to management – I think this, or I think that. I am very careful about what I say to anybody. I try to say what I think they want me to say, instead of what I actually think. And that is way different. I was much more comfortable to let management know what I thought. And if it didn't agree with the culture, they would let me know why. I understand why you might feel this way, but here is what we are trying to do. And I think now, well, we will take that under advisement and that just puts you on a watch list. (Bill)

Purposeful dialog about the culture. Another reported contributor to learning and adopting the culture, according to the participants, was being able to talk about the organizational culture. Clara described how she and her colleagues discuss the organizational culture in the various business units to try to understand whom they need to influence and with whom to build relationships. She suggested that not all business unit cultures are the same, nor are the influencers in each unit.

Because, I guess that is one of the biggest things I've learned is, we talk about the different cultures in the different business units. But it is not a matter of oh, if I can just talk to a senior director from [this department] and convince them this the right thing to do, it will happen. It really is a matter of every organization has a different key person you need to influence and change and get on board and so I think what is really key is building up the relationships to be able to understand who the right people are in their [business unit]. (Clara)

Margie talked about how people in her organization dialoged about the culture and co-constructed the organizational culture through that dialog. She stated that they often discuss the philosophical topics of what matters.

We [colleagues] had all done enough work in enough different kinds of organizations to sift through and say this is what works and we would have conversations – and we will frequently have conversations about what is seemingly philosophical – it is really just a sort of discussion about – you know we really believe this is what matters – that is how we actually came up with the engagement model. We had a number of conversations, all of us saying, you know in my experience this is one of the things that has to happen – intrinsic motivation. In my experience, if you don't have that pure human spirit commitment in an individual then you won't get results, you're just not [going to get the commitment]. By tapping into that person's head the intellectual piece of the commitment and the emotional commitment and when you now blend those, by telling stories about why you matter, by being clear about what the objectives are, about expectations, all that stuff, then I know I have tapped into the intrinsic motivation. You do it because you know what you do matters and you are going to make a difference on how the day goes for somebody that you have spoken to or that you interacted with. (Margie)

No one talks about the culture. While intentional dialog about the culture was reported to contribute to learning the culture, the lack of intentional dialog has been reported by the participants to be an obstacle to learning the organizational culture. I found that a number of participants who felt that a huge obstacle to learning the organizational culture was that conversations about the culture in their organization never happen. Tony noted that everyone was supposed to know about the culture and they speak in generalities about the culture, but no one really understands it or can articulate it clearly to others.

Nobody talks about culture and people don't understand culture. What little is out there on culture is academic and obscure and when people do talk about culture, people just don't understand what culture is. You've got the blind leading the blind in the dark through hill and dale and over the mountains. They just don't understand it, people just don't understand culture. They don't [understand culture] because nobody actually talks about it, it's one of those topics. This is how I would say it, culture is like sex, everybody is supposed to know about it but nobody really knows what to do. And so culture is, everybody thinks they know about it, and it's an unreflective discipline within any organization that everybody thinks they know about it, but in reality nobody really knows. And so, it's like the keystone cops, culture and how people interact within an organization, but their understanding of what they believe is culture is like the keystone cops running around trying to solve problems. And nothing ever gets done. (Tony)

Randy and Ben represented numerous participants who felt they were unable to articulate the culture of their organization either because the organization never talked about the culture or because there was very little interaction with people at the corporate headquarters. Randy reiterated Tony's point about the culture not being articulated saying he believed that most people in an organization would be hard pressed to describe the culture. He assumed the culture in the organization was an expression of the leadership and since the leadership probably does not have time to articulate and disseminate the cultural message, it must be observed and then absorbed.

I don't know, maybe I am a skeptic here, I am not sure that every organization even knows what its culture is. It just is. Whether someone could explain it to the satisfaction to everybody else in the organization could be a challenge. I suppose the CEO is the one I would look to for an expression of what the culture is and therefore I don't think the CEO is going to take time to orient everybody who comes in, so unless the CEO is willing to put together a cultural dogma that gets presented to everyone who comes in and that's the standard, I think it has to be observed and absorbed. (Randy)

Ben admitted he doesn't think he knows the culture. He can only describe the culture in terms of expectations, and some emails and updates from the organization, or through the few problem-solving conversations he has had with a few key contacts.

I really don't know the culture as a person who works out of the house. I know what is expected of me. I don't interact too much with anyone at the organization except if I need support or there is a problem. Other than that I get some emails that keep me posted and updated on things that are happening around the organization. The culture, you know we are independent. We do work for the organization and we are part time with the organization itself. But I don't know what the real culture is. When I saw that question - that is I didn't really know how to answer it because I don't - like I said I know what they expect from me, I know when my [work] starts, I've signed a form that says I will accept the [work] and that is where it hangs. (Ben)

Category Four: Learning Techniques.

Through my analysis I grouped the various learning techniques into three different groupings based on the key vehicle used for learning: dialogic, experiential, and individualistic.

Dialogic learning techniques. Dialogic learning techniques occur through daily interactions, socialization, conversations, and dialog with others. Common techniques reported by the participants included coaching and mentoring, getting feedback, and storytelling.

Coaching and mentoring. When I asked participants to talk about how they learned the culture, a majority of them said coaching and mentoring was the most desirable technique used to learn the culture. A coach or mentor allowed the participant to learn the culture through frequent dialog and feedback. The participants suggested it took less time to learn the organizational culture using a coach or mentor than through any other learning technique. Jesse talked about how his first boss helped him learn how to maneuver the landscape to get things done. “My very first boss here at this organization was very good at coaching me on how to interact with people in our company to get what we needed done.” (Jesse) Randy talked about the opportunity he had to work alongside his boss, learning the culture as they worked side by side.

Well, in reality I had the opportunity to walk along side my boss who was transferring to a parallel position in another part of the country. So I did have an informal mentor in that regard. And I think that was helpful. I don't know if every division manager has that. I did. So it was not a formalized thing. The mentoring I think was a very good tool.
(Randy)

Finally, Melody provided a description of her experience learning the culture in her organization. She mentioned how her mentor made the culture in her organization easy to learn.

I had a good mentor, she was wonderful. She took such good care of me. If I had been working for somebody else, I may not have gotten that [the culture] as immediately, but

right from the start, she adopted me and showed me the ins and outs of the system. She would just call me to see how I was. If I had a question she was there for me; we emailed back and forth at least once a week. We met every two weeks with other faculty. She was just always on top of everything. (Melody)

Getting feedback. Feedback is another technique that allowed participants to learn the culture. Feedback, whether positive or negative, provides information to the participant regarding what behavior is acceptable in the organization and what behavior is frowned upon. Positive feedback encourages people to continue doing some type of action because there is a reward to doing so. The reward might be monetary, but most often the rewards are intangible such as kudos, a thank you, or an atta-boy/girl. Margie talked about how feedback worked well in her organization because they had laid the foundation for feedback by emphasizing that no one in the organization is perfect. Her organization saw feedback as a necessary vehicle to provide information that would help the member improve. Yet, they also ensured that all feedback was given in a manner that saved face for that individual.

So the feedback comes from clients, but feedback also comes from colleagues on what is going well and what you might want to think about ... I think one of the assumptions that we all abide by is that you often have to give feedback that isn't wonderful - nobody is wonderful or perfect, but [the] underpinning is that you help that person save face by saying it in a way that it is clear - you know that let's just think about this as opposed to here is where you screwed up or here is what you did wrong and it's the whole face saving, which is not just something that you know people just associate with the eastern cultures, that is very predominant in sometimes or appallingly absent in U.S. business - that you do your best to not make that person feel bad, because they did something wrong, your goal is to help them fix it. It doesn't mean you hold back the feedback, it means that you help them fix it. For example, if I am putting together something I will shoot it out to everybody, maybe it's the people on my team, or maybe it's the senior team - say, "take a look at this, what do you think needs to be changed, what about this, what about that." And they do the same for me. (Margie)

This feedback reflected the culture of Margie's organization and was a vehicle for dialog to learn the culture. Todd agreed that feedback is critical and it helped him learn the culture in

his organization. He gained knowledge through the feedback he received on his sales effort and reflecting on the process of how that the feedback presented.

Once I started to submit some business, making some sales, I learned the culture from how it was recognized in a positive way, you know, did my boss even know what was happening. Did he know I was making sales, did anybody know I was making sales. And /or when or how frequently I would hear from my manager on why I wasn't making sales. Or not necessarily making sales, but what I needed help with to make more sales. So that would come from my manager and I think part of the culture shaping interactions [would] be how frequent would it be, how strong would it be, was he really paying attention or was he all of sudden looking at the sales report and saying hey... why weren't you selling anything the last 3 weeks. Or was it more consistently you know, ok it's Monday, let's review your sales, and I think that was a big tell to what type of culture we had. Was it really tight or was it more laid back and loose...in addition to finding out how they were going to support me. (Todd)

In Diane's organization, ad hoc lessons learned meetings were conducted with the group whenever they encountered a major issue or difficulty. This feedback provided her with the opportunity to learn how she was expected to perform and what she could do better.

When we would run into certain kinds of things, we will have learning sessions on them, so there are many opportunities to kind of learn how to approach things and what you're supposed to do and how you can do it better. (Diane)

Negative feedback also provided a vehicle to learn the culture. However, instead of receiving positive reinforcement that focused on desired behavior, negative reinforcement usually focused on fixing unacceptable behavior or ensuring the employee's behavior stayed within the boundaries of the organization. Learning the culture through negative feedback can occur quickly for three reasons-the participant wants to avoid the pain, doesn't want to be labeled a trouble maker, and doesn't want to be fired. Bill learned that news travels fast after he was talking informally to a new colleague at a meeting. Later he received an email from the head of the company asking why he would say such a thing. From this action, Bill realized that in his culture he really had to be careful of what he said to whom.

I mentioned something to a new colleague and then I got an email from upper management asking why I had said something. We had a meeting in [city] and it was one of those - the meeting is done and we are just hanging out at the bar, talking over things which we have been doing for years and one of the conversations, and I didn't even think it was unusual what I had said. All of sudden I get an email from the head of the entire company asking why I would say such a thing. This made me think that news travels very quickly and the people that hear it are very paranoid. So I learned to just keep my mouth shut. (Bill)

Paula was surprised to learn that the company she worked for, whose mission it was to help other organizations retain talent, did not do a good job of walking their talk. Rather than being proactive and communicative about organizational policies, as they advised their clients to do, employees were not informed until they did something wrong.

I guess the surprise is that...the company is about retaining people – it was a center for talent retention at that time and they were not doing the policies that they were looking for other companies to do. Do you know what I mean? They were not explaining things to you up front. They were waiting for you to do something that they didn't want you to do and then they would tell you. (Paula)

Bob talked about his experience understanding how his organization dealt with questions on topics they didn't want to discuss. When Bob asked a question his organization did not want to answer, they would either not reply at all or explicitly tell him he did not need to know the answer, sometimes in a very forceful manner.

I'm making an inquiry and I don't get a response back at all and I've been told that ... I don't need to know that. So there's been some of that which has been very explicit and normal, after all this not a hyper aggressive company so I haven't been slapped away from the table, it is just we're on a need-to-know basis and you don't need to know that kind of thing. And on the other side of it, and this has been the most surprising, where I have made some inquiries into some things and the response has been violent, and I've learned that that's how they deal with questions that you don't need an answer to. (Bob)

Storytelling. Culture can also be learned through stories about people in the organization, from the organization itself, or its customers. As the listener hears the story, they use their own understanding to interpret its meaning. They learn the culture through storytelling

as the person identifies with the people in the story. Tony realized that the culture in his organization was shared through personal stories that experienced people would tell the new team members.

Basically with... the first group that I remember wanting to influence from a cultural point of view would be new sales people. And I think culture is shared whether people realize it or not in stories and how you tell a story. (Tony)

Clara talked about people in her organization who told stories about how their products help people. The stories exemplified to organizational members how important their work was by providing real life examples of how their products touched people's lives.

Well, actually I should say there are a lot of stories they tell. Once a year, too, they bring in the patients of our products to come in and talk about how that has impacted their lives and how important is the work that we do. So that is entirely all storytelling. (Clara)

Margie mentioned the challenges of being geographically dispersed and how she had to spend a lot of time talking on the phone. To get her point across she used stories that mimic the dialog needed to ensure accurate communication and understanding.

Now that being said, because of the fact we had luxury and opportunity to do that – one of the challenges because we are virtual is that that means you have to spend time talking with people to make sure they understand what you are saying, because they weren't in on it if you will, the mixing of the cake or the culture, so sometimes you talk a lot and you have to tell stories and it isn't just to hear yourself talk, it's because you want to set up and mimic that dialog that you had so the person truly understands and any time, as you know, you get into communication, know you got all the things that get in the way of accurate communication and so it takes time to get people on board. (Margie)

Experiential learning techniques. Experiential techniques focus on learning through doing. Common techniques reported by the participants included learning through trial and error and learning to work with different types of personalities.

Trial and error. Although trial and error can be active or passive and often includes dialog with others, it can also be done individually. Rich provided an example of how, in his

opinion, life is the best teacher. He suggested that individuals learn through the school of hard knocks and people change what they need to change.

Experience, in my opinion, is the best teacher is life. You go out there and you will learn what to do and not to do, kind of get your nose bloodied once in a while and it's good and healthy. I may have had an experience where I said something over the phone and they took it really badly – if I was just there I probably could smooth this thing over a little better so – you pick that up and file it away and you try to improve as you go along, definitely experience. (Rich)

Paula talked about her learning experience in her organization. She thought when she joined her organization there would be clearly formed work processes in place. She found out later that the processes were not in place and she had to learn on her own through trial and error.

They were working [processes] out as we went along, so that was kind of a surprise because that was not told to me that I would be kind of experimenting, you know, with this. ... if I did an interview and I didn't know someone fired and I started asking questions.. [like] did that have a high or low impact on your decision to leave? Well if they were fired, they would tell me I was asked to leave – so that – and there were some other compromising situations where it was a mutual agreement. I would be in a middle of a phone call – what was I supposed to do - so I might spend 15 minutes with this person on the phone doing an interview and then find out that I was not supposed to have done that because blah blah blah. So it was, you know, trial and error and it [took] more time than I thought to do this and they thought [completing the interviews] would be a shorter amount of time. So there were a lot of growing pains at the beginning. It all came about during that trial and error period at the beginning. (Paula)

Todd suggested that he learned the culture of his organization when he tried to solve a problem in his organization.

You know what really shapes our culture is when we have a problem and how do you find the person who can help you with the problem? No one seems willing to take a risk. It's only the interactions we have by email, but even more so by phone trying to solve something – I think that really gives me a strong definition of what is going on in [a state]. Everybody is afraid of everybody else and so and so needs to check with this person or that person. So I think that give me a pretty strong handle on it as well. (Todd)

Learning communication preferences and personality styles. According to a number of interview participants, understanding how to work with various people was an added bonus to

learning and understanding the culture. Understanding different personality styles can provide the participant with clues to learning the culture. It helps them separate the personality style from the culture.

Tony gave us an example of how his understanding of personality styles helped him understand the context of the information other people provided, as well as the communication method they might prefer.

Understanding people's personality and the kind of information they're looking for... You can look back to Meyers-Briggs: Are they an introvert or are they an extrovert; are they sensing or are they intuitive; are they thinking or feeling; you know the whole INST/P issues using that as a model. Learning about them at a higher level; are they a matter-of-fact person; do they like to talk; are they an extrovert; are they an introvert? (Tony)

Sally tried to figure out the personalities of the key people she worked with by using her previous experience working with them so she could make adjustments in her communication style.

Through experience I've had in the past and then just understanding the type of people that I'm working with now...So it's a constant adjustment based on knowing the people that I'm working with. (Sally)

Jill, like Sally, tried to figure out the personalities of the key people she worked with so she could make adjustments in her communication style as well as improve her interpretation of information shared in their conversations.

Well for the team members, as we brought people on, it was initially seeing and observing how they interacted with other team members and then determining whether or not I could joke around with them for example. For example, our CEO is really funny and jokes around with everyone and when I first met him, I wasn't sure how to read him and then after a couple of interactions I realized his style. I [now] have a sense of his personality and his style. (Jill)

Tony summed up this section well and noted that learning how to communicate with people so they remain open to dialog and stay positive takes a lifetime of learning.

And another thing that I learned over time is that it's more valuable to ask somebody a question than let somebody else answer instead of telling them information and seeing how they respond to that information. So it's also just learning how to communicate and over the years and lifetime of learning how to communicate with people, what they need to know, what they don't need to know, how to present it to them so they stay open and positive. (Tony)

Individual learning techniques. Individual learning techniques focused on the participant looking for clues about the organizational culture through personal observation, listening, and reading documentation.

Personal observation. Personal observation was another technique used by the participants to learn the culture. Although the participants often did not have the opportunity to physically observe others, they did take advantage of the face-to-face opportunities. Ray talked about when he first moved to his new division and the process of getting all his paperwork in place and attending the first training sessions.

The people I saw when I was getting all my paperwork and stuff for moving over to that division, just the no no-nonsense of the ladies I was talking to on the phone that were helping me with my paperwork and transition. Then when I went to the first training group, I was impressed with the people, everybody was busy doing what they should be doing, everybody would come in and here is what we do, here is what I do and here is how we will help you get here and there and whether it be marketing or whether it be human resources, or training or support, technology, that type of thing. You could just see that everybody was very efficient in what they were doing and it was from observation that would be the answer to the question. Nobody said we are an efficient organization, I just observed that the people were very competent and that it was running very smoothly. (Ray)

For a geographically dispersed team member, observation often comes through hearing about what happened to other people in a certain situation. It could be positive or negative, but in most cases it was negative. Doris observed that if individuals didn't do a good job, customers were not happy with an individual, or if an individual did not produce quality work, then "they" had a conversation with you. If things did not change, the individual was fired.

Anything that threatens their reputation they took really swift action on. So if there was a consultant that customers didn't absolutely love, and/or they were seen as non-responsive internally, they first have a conversation with them, a swift conversation, and if it happened a second time you'd be laid off. (Doris).

Tony also learned that if people in the organization were not respectful or they challenged authority, they would disappear.

Yes, there were people that were not successful in a home office and ultimately left because they weren't open, they weren't respectful. They challenged others and probably challenged them irrespective of how people wanted to be talked to. You also became aware of how, if someone left, how people talked about them or about the reason why they left were usually couched in, well they didn't fit in, they weren't open to the culture, they pushed people or they pushed the system more than what needed to be, for a situation they took out of context, kind of like the importance of what someone was really trying to get at, they offended someone meaning they challenged their understanding, knowledge, or experience, at both the other person's level of knowledge of [xyz], the company, or the industry. (Tony)

Listening for clues. Since geographically dispersed team members are physically separated from people, effective listening becomes an important learning technique. Sean provided an example of how he believed people really have to listen on the phone to get the subtle cues about the context of conversations.

The big one is direct phone contact. Obviously when you can meet these people in person, that's best – but you and I would not be talking if I got that much more frequently. Otherwise, on the phone you have to get very good at being able to listen to the person at the other end of the phone. Are they distracted and bored at what you want to bring to them. Are they focused and really trying to help you – all those and in a sense it should not be subtle, but it is. There is a lot of subtle things that go into that, did they come into the office that day – they are having a bad day, so you are working with them on an issue and that's going fine, but you can feel there is an underlying issue, problem that they have brought to work that they are having to deal with right before [they] are on the phone. The better you can be at understanding, being able to hear it in the voice and not get the non-verbal clues of being in their presence, the better you can get at that, the better you can be an offsite person - particularly a manager, managing people in [a state] or up in [a state] or whatever. (Sean)

Sally talked about how she listened to the feedback she was getting from others and made sure she took extra effort to talk to her team when needed..

Being virtual does make it a little bit more difficult because you're not in there with the team interacting with them. You don't have the facial expressions. I've worked with virtual teams...ninety-nine percent of the time it's very rare that I ever get to see my team face to face unless I travel. So it's learning to understand key subtleties, listening for inflections in people's voices, watching and looking/reading between the lines. And IM's and emails...checking the responses I'm getting from my email and always making and taking the extra efforts to really talk to other teams. "How's it going," "Any issues," listening to the feedback I'm getting and then watching the work. Are we getting slowdowns in certain areas, are we having more errors occurring in a certain code, and are some time frames not being met? Those type of things will give me indicators that something is going on and proactively looking for that on an ongoing basis helps me to understand if there's an issue. Because in talking with [xyz], if there is one person on the team that I always got real quick IM's back and who always not only answered the question but added a little social flavor to it as well; and I noticed for a day or two that I was getting shortened responses, I wasn't quite getting information that I wanted. So I asked [xyz] "hey, is something going on here? Something's a little bit off here." And just really understanding the subtle changes, you have to really look for that when you don't have the opportunity to meet physically with people. (Sally)

Jill also talked about picking up clues through listening when you can't see the person. She suggested looking at the person, personality styles, and the situation. She also talked about how important it is to reflect before saying something.

We talked about how I work, I would say maybe the only other thing is and I don't know if this is maybe more – clearly personal thing or personal style, but being remote – it is sometimes difficult when I am frustrated with something to – who do I tell – when you are sitting in an office and something comes up you can usually tell when you are sitting across the cube or on the same floor from someone – you can usually pick up on physical behaviors – gosh that person is kind of upset – I want to help them and figure out how to support them because I know that was upsetting to them. Being here by myself I don't have the benefit of knowing either way...when something is disturbing to me, I don't have anyone to necessarily convey that to right away and when someone else in the office is possibly upset about something and it could be something I said, I might be able to pick up on a cue here verbally, but sometimes I wonder – oh my gosh, you know I will need to call that person and make sure what I said didn't offend them. And when you are in the same location you sometimes can tell more quickly – you can see it right away. That is something to learn to adapt to – how do I know when or what cues do I pick up on and a lot of that is just learning people's personalities over time, knowing certain key

words or behaviors will upset one person and not another and you have to do that if you are in the same location or not – how to work and what are their styles or work styles, so that is just through observation over time. But I think it is easier when you are in the same physical location and so that is something I struggle with a little more in the beginning and it's not so much now, but the one thing I would say now that I struggle with is – if I need to vent to someone – I have dogs - I have to talk to my dogs and try – I don't know maybe it's good in a way...if I were in the same location you sometimes you go – oh I probably shouldn't have said that – well I really don't have that – that usually doesn't happen for me – I usually have time to reflect and then when I think about it and reflect I realize OK that really wasn't a big deal and I don't need to say something or discuss it. If I were in the same location, maybe I would have just said something – just as a reaction – you know – then I would have to work through it, so I think [there are] pros and cons to it. (Jill)

Reading Documentation. The participants also reported that they learned the culture by reading documentation. Documentation is critical to geographically dispersed team members because often written documentation (guidelines, policies, and procedures) is a primary communication method that can provide clues to the culture and behavioral norms of the organization. Kristina initially looked at her organization's website to get clues about its culture and ensure it was a fit with her values. She also mentioned that she has very little contact with the people who do the work, so to her, any information is better than no information.

If you look at their website it definitely fits my values and what I believe can be helpful to organizations. So that's a fit and I did check that out before I took the job. Sometimes I think if this was my company and I was operating something like this – I think I would have at least some contact with the people who were doing the work and supporting your research and consulting. (Kristina)

Debra stated that there is a whole resource section available to her that provides information about the organization and events going on within the organization. This site gave Debra a lot of insight into the culture of the organization.

We have a resource center with a section for faculty and a section for learners and everything we need is there and there is also a just resource page that has all the information about the organization itself and things that are going on there,

announcements...different departments in the organization also send us announcements about various thing that are coming up through our email. (Debra)

Bill has a unique experience with his organization's documentation. He received taped sample interviews and PowerPoint presentations that exemplified the sales behavior the organization was looking for in their sales force. This allowed members who were geographically dispersed to understand what behavioral characteristics the organization was looking for in a sales consultant.

Verbal interviews were taped and sent out as a PowerPoint presentation that you could review. Here is an interview with Jeff who is doing a good job, or an interview with Tammy who is meeting expectations, those types of things. (Bill)

Category Five: Adopting and Integrating Organizational Culture into Work Actions

Influenced by the contributing factors to learning and adopting organizational culture, the participants identified three key areas in which they adopted and integrated the organizational culture into their work actions-changing the way they worked, changing the way they communicated, and transferring what they learned in their organization to other facets of their lives.

Changing work actions. Many of the participants mentioned they changed some of their work practices because of the organizational culture. For the most part, the participants made changes to their work to align with the culture because they found either that it added value or they had received positive feedback for their work practices. Stella talked about how she improved her administrative efforts working with her current organization, which used to be much more lax. She adopted this norm both because she found value in it and because it was reinforced by the accountant at her current organization.

I am learning to be better at the administrative side of things. I am not a pencil pusher, formality, signing documents, and contracts like that. Sending in invoices is something I really worked hard at this year, because I know their accountant is waiting for them because he sent me reminders. So you know I would probably say paying more attention to the administrative side of things, to the business side of things, is something that I have adopted. (Stella)

Debra has focused on giving better student feedback, realizing it is necessary for clear communication between faculty and students as well as setting core behavioral expectations.

I think that is probably being more conscientious about my student feedback and also just about time and organization and how much feedback is necessary for clear communication between students and instructors. Those are just things that I already knew, but just have been honed a little bit since I have added this extra duty to my schedule. (Debra)

Stella, Clara, and Bill made their work changes based on negative feedback. Stella learned to be more diplomatic when speaking to others. “I think I have learned to be more diplomatic, through necessity.” (Stella) She had learned through observation or personal experience that she had to be careful of what she said to whom.

Clara took any opportunity she had to meet people face to face and she made sure that she prioritized those opportunities because she knew if she didn’t it would come back to haunt her.

I would say definitely if there is an opportunity to do a face to face I take it and I know if I am not there or not available to kind of continue those relationships it is going to hurt me. So I think it changes what I do from a perspective of prioritizing face to face opportunities. (Clara)

Bill described how he changed some of his work habits in this new organization because of the feedback he received in the past and what information his boss pays attention to.

I would say from the old culture to the new culture I document more than I did in the past. I think I worry about reporting, more than I worry about what I feel is getting the job done. If I had my choice this afternoon to go to two meetings with a [client] or to get a report done – in the old days, I would have done the meetings, called my boss and

explained why my report was going to be late. In this culture, I would do the report and explain to the [client] why I couldn't help them. I think I worry more about what I need to do to keep my job than what I could do to make the company and my job better. I think that is probably the biggest difference. (Bill)

Jill talked about changing the way she worked, having to adapt to different time zones and her struggle with family and work life balance.

I think another way I adapted is in time zone differences. When I am working from home, I start working at 6:00 a.m. – so I can meet 8:00 for the majority of our offices and 9:00 for DC. So I start my day earlier so I can at least be available when the majority of staff is available. What I find myself doing though is just because I start at 6:00 a.m. here it doesn't mean that I end at 3:00. I usually will start at 6:00 a.m. – you know if I do remember it's time to eat lunch then I just grab something and bring it into my office – my home office, eat at my desk. I rarely go out when I am working from home. I don't go for a walk on a nice day or just take a breather – pretty much stay at my desk and then because all the conference calls happen during the core hours, you know – the conference calls are for specific purposes and so when I need to get other work done I find that I do that after the core hours – so I often work 6-4 or 5 Pacific time – have dinner with my family and then go back to working again... It's hard to break away, I found, and separate my work life from my home life because they are in the same physical location and so – I have to make sure I have dinner with my family when I am here, but often I will go back to work because it is so convenient...I am not driving to work and having to even change my clothes – I can walk down the hallway in my pajamas and start working. I find that when you do that I don't do a very good job separating my work from my personal life. Which is new to me because in my other places of employment I always drove to a physical location and when I was done [I was done] for the most part. At other companies I had access to the network via VPN, so I was able to log in to get work done and so I did do that to some extent, but you know more so in this job and this culture than I ever have at any other place. (Jill)

Changing the way we communicate. After making changes around work habits, changing the way the participants communicated with others was next on the list. Melody talked about adopting the way people talk with one another in her organization. She now thanks people for their time and effort, listens to people, and focuses on respectful behavior and communication.

Well it is funny; there is a way people in the organization talk when they are in meetings. It is very respectful and I have adopted that. I use that now on my own. The way I

respond to people has changed...which I think makes me a better person. And I still have a good mentor, I still have good people, with the modeling they do, I pick up things without even knowing it. So the way I run my meetings is different than I used to run faculty meetings in the past. The way I send emails is different because I have learned how to be. I am a very blunt person and I have learned how to be respectful in the corporate culture and it has helped me quite a bit. And it has changed the way I talk to people on the outside as well. I do things differently because I am part of this system. I don't confront, which was the way you had to [do things to] get something done at the places I worked before. And I am very careful to thank people for their time and to thank people for their efforts and to make sure that I let people know that in a meeting everybody has a voice and I am going to listen to everybody. And everybody is going to listen to everybody which is something that I would not have done before. Yeah, even an old person can learn. (Melody)

Howard mentioned that he now adds a personal touch to his emails based on the way he observed how his boss responded to customer emails.

This is a pretty simple example – but I think it is indicative – we sell a lot of piecemeal products to students at Universities – you know we will sell single issues of products we provide instead of a classroom setting. And when we sell those, we license them. And we go through a licensing email mechanism which requires an email from the purchaser and an email from us. And sometimes several other emails if they have a problem, but the basic is two emails – they send us one and we send one back. When I started I was sending emails back with just the facts – you know here's what you need – thank you. I noticed that my boss, when he sent the emails back he was a lot more homey. He would say – good luck – have fun – this type of thing. I said OK that's the way he wants to be perceived so I'll do the same thing. So now whenever I send them out I have the basic information but I also will say – good luck and have fun. Which would not be my style – you know I wouldn't necessarily do it that way because to me it's not that it's not professional, it's just a little more personal than I would have chosen to do. And so I probably – him being the business he is in is probably high value. So I adopted that. (Howard)

Todd stated that he is more cautious in his communication because he wants to fly under the radar due to negative feedback he had received in the past.

Definitely, it has caused me to be a little more careful and a little more cautious. I think through decisions more, because of the corporate culture. I may check on something before I proceed, where I may not do that with other another company. Sometimes too, I do some check-ins like that to show them that I am compliant and so I feel that if I communicate with home office more, less questions are going to come back to me in the future. Those have been behavioral changes for me because of our culture. (Todd)

Tony changed the way he communicated with people. Rather than saying, “I already gave you this information,” he made sure his communication was clear, simple, and to the point.

Making sure I was open to people and communicated openly and was less reactive when asked about getting certain information and say when, “I already gave you that information” or “this is where it is,” to making sure I really understood what was being asked and keeping things short, simple, and to the point. Making sure people knew who I was and was interacting with them as clearly as I could. (Tony)

Carrying the culture to other environments. Some of the participants have taken some of the behaviors and norms from their organizations and used them in other environments.

Debra worked for a number of organizations and has carried the cultural norm of responding in 24 hours to her other environment.

I think it has been more that I like the organizations’ [templates and tools] and I [use] those tools on a daily basis in my full time position. And also because there are certain requirements on us, like the 4 days for grading, and 24 hour response time...I always respond in 24 hours and always try anyway to get things graded in a week, it is just more of a reminder how important [it is]...especially with distance learning that immediate feedback is for the students and I think that the fact that they have set those guidelines for us is just is a reminder of what the culture and expectations are for the instructors. So I have taken that and used it at my other job. (Debra)

When prompted, Ben talked about how he brings the organizational culture into his other work:

I just never thought about that. Yeah, we are always looking for the outcome and that is what this is, it is all about outcomes, what are you going to get out of this class. When I do a risk assessment, what am I going to get out of this risk assessment and what is the business unit going to get besides a lot of work... Some of the things I actually bring into my consulting work is just – you were talking about – even asking questions – what do you hope to gain from this, what behaviors do you want people to change and I don’t think I would have done that if I had not taught courses. I would not ask them those questions. (Ben)

Transmitting the culture to others through dialog.

The question of transferring the organizational culture to others was difficult for many of the participants to answer since many of them felt that they were basically individual contributors and often did not interact with many people. The participants often mentioned they spent more time with their clients than with others in the organization. However, a few of the participants noted that they now encourage communication, conduct more formal meetings, coach and mentor others, provide opportunities for participation, and provide for informal training.

Randy stated that he passed on the culture through work: “From my point of view I think I pass it on here by the way we do things. I don’t necessarily know that we state it as a culture.” (Randy) He also mentioned that he doesn’t have a formalized approach, but he does describe the organization and the leadership to the new recruit. He also tried to spend time with other team members formally and informally and tried to describe to them how the organization works.

I don’t have a formalized approach; I will describe the organization and some of the leadership. I try to spend time with my people both formally and informally and some of the formal settings which would be division-wide meetings. There will be agenda items that will relate to how we as an organization are pursuing a particular project or topic. I don’t know if it is ever framed in terms “of our culture dictates this,” so I don’t think it is formal, I think it is informal. (Randy)

Clara passed on networking information and mentored new team members to help them identify the right person to talk to; she made introductions that would allow team members to start understanding the undercurrents of the culture.

I definitely only hired somebody from the outside, I would say I encourage them to be communicating with particular people in their organization, like I tend to know who the right person is that they need to be communicating with, and so I would pass that information along. Or introduce or make the right connections for them... ‘cause they won’t be able to pull that off an org chart.

Clara also talked about providing Black Belt training which includes opportunities to discuss and share the culture.

I am also in charge of our black belt training. I try to make sure anyone new to the organization in the function that I am in, I put them in that training as soon as I can. Because I think that there is a lot of culture taught on the week of training. That week of training is really about setting strategies for doing certain things and there is a lot of culture based in that week. (Clara)

Sally focused on clear communication. She felt no one should be blindsided about behavioral and work expectations.

What I like to try to focus on is excellent communication, nobody should ever be wondering what's my job, what's expected of me. None of the managers that I support should ever be blindsided by any issues; I should be on top of every issue. I should be proactively communicating with them, engaging them when appropriate, and also ensuring that our internal customers, in this instance our product partners, feel that we're doing a good job, that they have confidence in the team, that they don't get blindsided as well. And they're in agreement with everything we're doing every step along the way. In other words, I don't want to be getting ready to roll out the project, excuse me the product for the project, and then have product look at us and say "Wait a minute this isn't quite what I wanted." (Sally)

Melody adopted her mentor's approach to helping people understand how to work in her organization's culture. She checked into their course rooms, had frequent check-ins, asked questions, practiced clear communication, and respected her employees' opinions and work efforts. She tried focus on communication and participation, acting more as a guide and mentor than a bureaucratic boss.

I have adopted my mentor's approach. I check into their course rooms, I am online with them checking in, "how are you doing, any problems?" We have phone calls twice a month where just individually we go over what is going on in their courses and what they need to know and all those other kinds of things. I do the same thing with the people who have been there awhile. How is it going? Any issues, any concerns? What is going on here? Anything you need to know? And so for example, we were supposed to have a faculty meeting last Monday, and it was just the busiest time, it was the Monday of the last week of classes and nobody could attend. So I put my agenda on a PowerPoint and

then wrote notes and said here is what we were going to talk about and I sent it out to everybody and said, give me your feedback on this, I need to know this, and you need to tell me how you are doing with this and everybody got back to me within a day. So we are a pretty tight group. ...the thing that I do differently than my predecessor – she did everything, she developed the courses, she developed the forms, she did everything – I think the way I differ is I let my faculty do that. We just went through reorganization, a revision to meet new accreditation standards and what my predecessor would have done is to rewrite all the courses herself. I had the people who teach those courses rewrite the courses and got paid for it. And I put them in teams so they could work with other people and they could divide it up any way they wanted and I had weekly check-in meetings with them. Is there something you need to know? I just let them go and let them do what they needed to do. And they are the best courses we ever had. So I think that showing them that they matter and they can contribute intellectually to the program and that there is a part of them in the program, I think it bring us closer together. So I don't really see myself as their boss, I am just the person in line that kind of tells them what they need to know and we get along really well. (Melody)

Todd indoctrinated new team members by building relationships with them, spending time in person, showing team members how things work, and letting them know what behavior is acceptable and not acceptable in his organization.

For quite some time in my old role almost every new employee would come and travel with me. We had some pretty good success here and so I think my boss decided that I did a good job when he had somebody travel with me, so pretty early on I was kind of the field trainer, so I would very much tell them like it is. I would introduce them to the subculture right away and kind of treat them the way I wanted to be treated and almost always it was received very appreciatively. I built an alliance with them right away and I felt comfortable doing that because even if they weren't comfortable with the subculture piece of it, what are they going to do, they are a brand new employee. I have been there for four years and I am the number one sales person. So I felt comfortable with that, but I would introduce them to that right away and I would tell them – here is what you want to do, here is what you don't want to do and here is what you can do and here is what you can't do. SO I took a very active role and even now I just got a new internal support person – new to our company and we had a pretty similar conversation. I said hey, here is the deal; I don't do everything the way the company wants me to do it. I don't do anything wrong, and if do, I want you to feel comfortable to say something if you are not comfortable with something but yet you need to know that I kind of do my own thing. I have my own way of doing things out here and I need you to be comfortable with that. So early on at the outset and again I will tell him, here is what you don't want to do or be caught doing – so don't even go down that road. (Todd)

Sean shared his cultural experience through personal example, either in person or picking up the phone and talking to them.

I do it very slowly, mostly by example and every chance I get, I only go to email if absolutely desperate. I pick up the phone and talk to them, so an example of you having combined and at least having part of my states – from the previous – from my other company they really didn't have to get involved or take much responsibility besides going to fixing a specific machine on a specific site. So I spend my time on the phone basically gradually giving them one thing after another. So OK, I need this project done and lately I have crossed borders stuff. I got guys in Illinois helping me with problems in Ohio now, but it started slow with "OK guys, we have problems in Illinois we need to address. Let's get together to see what we can do about this or do about that." (Sean)

Summary

In this chapter I described the participants and organizational demographics, the data analysis process, and the results of this study in terms of five main categories, each with sub-categories that were supported by the participant's data. The main categories included pre-conditions, supporting structures and processes, contributing factors and barriers to learning the organizational culture, key learning techniques, and the ways organizational culture was adopted and integrated into the participant's work efforts.

Category one included personal frames of reference and personal work competencies which are the precondition identified by the participants. Personal frames of reference included previous industry experience, previous work experience with colleagues or a boss, and previous experience with the organization. Personal work competencies focused on the specific characteristics needed to be a successful geographically dispersed team member. Both of these preconditions were brought to each organization by the participants and were suggested to be a key factor in interpreting, understanding, and learning the culture of their organization.

Category two included support processes and structures provided by the organization to support communication between team members and others in the organization. Support structures included a clear mission or purpose, clear work expectations and behavioral boundaries, communication technology. Support processes included strong developed support systems, technology support, and documented work processes. Strong support structures and processes provided the foundation needed to learn the organizational culture. If these structures and support processes were not in place or very limited, they became a barrier to learning the organizational culture.

Category three included contributors and barriers that impacted the learning of the organizational culture, as well as the adoption and integration of the organization's culture into the participant's work efforts. Contributory factors included a strong values alignment between the team member and the organization, a strong relationship with the participant's reporting manager, socialization and engagement opportunities, trusting relationships with other colleagues, and intentional dialog about the culture. If these contributory factors were weak, they reportedly became barriers to learning, adopting, and integrating the organizational culture.

Category four included various learning techniques the participants used to learn the organizational culture. Learning techniques were divided into three categories: dialogic, experiential, and individual. Dialogic techniques included coaching and mentoring, feedback, and storytelling. Experiential learning techniques included learning through trial and error and learning how to work with different communication preferences and personality styles. Individual techniques included observation, listening, and reading documentation. All of these techniques contributed to learning the organizational culture.

Category five included the cultural elements the participants adopted into their work efforts and how they passed on the organizational culture to others. Participants reported that they changed the way they worked, the way they communicated, and tended to carry the organizational culture to other environments. If the contributory factors to learning were strong and the culture provided value and an advantage to the participant, they would pass the organizational culture to others inside and outside the organization.

In the next chapter I will integrate these results into a comprehensive model that explains how these elements fit together; I will also discuss the implications for theory and practice.

Discussion

This chapter includes a brief overview of the study, followed by a summary of the results organized by each research question. I then introduce my interpretive theory with a detailed discussion on the three key elements which impact the learning, adoption, and integration of the organizational culture. This chapter also includes a section on the implications for action by organizations and current or future members of geographically dispersed teams, recommendations for future research, final reflections, and a chapter summary.

Overview of the Study

My underlying assumptions for this study were: 1) organizational culture guides team member's behaviors and performance and 2) learning organizational culture is often created in the context of having a physical presence and personal dialog, both of which are minimized when team members are geographically dispersed. Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand how people learn, adopt, and integrate the organizational culture in their work actions when they are geographically separated from the physical location of the corporate organization.

A grounded theory methodology was used, using a social constructionist lens. Twenty two volunteer participants were interviewed for this study, via phone, using open ended questions. The participants were required to work for a U.S. based organization for at least six months and be geographically separated from the physical presence of the organization so they needed to use some form of technology to communicate with others in the organization.

All the data was analyzed using Nvivo 9 and common themes were developed through the process of initial, focused, and theoretical coding. Five key themes emerged as a result of the analysis process: pre-conditions, support processes and structures, contributing factors and

barriers, learning techniques, and adopting and integrating the culture into work actions. Each key theme had a number of additional sub-themes or categories further detailing the contents of each theme.

Responses to Research Questions

Two core questions were investigated in this study. The first core question asked how organizational team members, who are geographically dispersed, learn the organization's culture. Based on this primary question, two sub-questions were also explored:

1. What are the factors that contribute to the learning of organizational culture when team members are geographically dispersed?
2. What are the obstacles to learning organizational culture for geographically dispersed team members?

The second core question focused on how do geographically dispersed team members adopt and integrate the organizational culture into their own work. Based on this primary question, the following sub-questions were also explored:

3. How do geographically dispersed team members actively adopt and integrate organizational culture into their work actions?
4. Although not an original research question, this sub-question emerged as an additional discovery on how learning organizational culture is adopted and integrated. How do geographically dispersed team members convey the organizational culture to others?

Following are the responses to the two primary research questions and the four sub-questions.

Primary question one: How do organizational team members, who are geographically dispersed, learn the organization's culture? The results of this research suggested that geographically dispersed team members used some of the same techniques to learn the organizational culture as those who are co-located in the organization. However, it took them longer to learn the culture because they were not often face-to-face with their boss or colleagues. The key learning techniques used by the participants can be categorized into three main groups: dialogic, experiential, and individual techniques.

Dialogic techniques. Dialogic techniques focused on the dialog either between the participant and others in the organization or between the team member and the organization as part of a formal communiqué. Dialog provided an opportunity for the team member to learn the culture through conversations with others in the organization. Even though communication was somewhat limited for geographically dispersed team members, the use of dialogic techniques to learn the organizational culture was the preferred method. Dialogic techniques to learn the culture most often occurred between the reporting manager and the participant, followed by dialog with trusted colleagues, and then co-workers.

Dialogic techniques used by the participants in this study included coaching or mentoring, getting verbal feedback, and storytelling. Of these three techniques, coaching and mentoring was the preferred method, yet very few team members actually received coaching and mentoring from their reporting manager or others in the organization. If coaching and mentoring was received by the team member, it was generally informal and dependent on the reporting manager. Some reporting managers would take an in depth interest in their employees and

would actively coach and mentor their employees, while other reporting managers left it to the employee to ask questions or learn through feedback and experiential learning.

Feedback was another strong dialogic technique for learning the culture and was one of the most frequent techniques used to learn the organizational culture. Most of the feedback focused on appropriate behavioral norms and performance expectations within the organization. Although negative feedback was used most often by the reporting managers to keep the team member's behavior in line, it did not encourage continued dialog with the team member. On the flip side, when positive feedback was provided by the reporting manager, dialog was encouraged and became more frequent.

A third dialogic technique used to learn the organizational culture was storytelling. Storytelling provided a way for reporting managers, colleagues, and the organization to share an understanding of the acceptable behavioral norms, as well as the mission and vision of the organization. Storytelling often consisted of informal stories shared between colleagues, the reporting manager, and team member. Informal storytelling generally focused on what behaviors would be rewarded or punished in the organization, while more formal storytelling was developed by organizations to communicate their mission and vision. Organizational stories were generally disseminated during employ orientation, but could also be disseminated during special celebrations and organizational milestones.

Experiential techniques. Experiential learning techniques used by geographically dispersed team members included learning through trial and error, and personal experience working with different personality styles. Trial and error learning generally occurred through doing the work and getting feedback on that work. After dialog, trial and error was the second

most used technique to learn the organizational culture. Learning how to work with people with differing personalities and communication styles improved the likelihood of understanding the communication and developing a shared understanding of the organizational culture.

Individual techniques. Individual techniques were used by the participants to look for clues about the organizational culture in addition to or in the absence of dialog. Individual techniques included observation and looking for clues. Although observation sounds like a visual exercise, from a geographically dispersed team member's perspective it is in the hearing of stories about what happens in the organization or what happens to others the organization or the tone of the conversation.

Geographically dispersed team members also looked for clues to the organizational culture by reading the mission and vision on the organization's website, using the organization's Intranet site to read personnel policies, organizational newsletters, or reading emails in a way as to ascertain the context of the message. Team members would also look at other organizational documentation such as processes, procedures, or any other support documentation that was available and provide clues as to work expectations, behavioral norms overall organizational culture.

Sub-question one: What are the factors that contribute to the learning of organizational culture when team members are geographically dispersed? As a result of the analysis, I identified six contributing factors that enhanced the probability of learning and adopting the organizational culture. These factors included: personal and organizational values alignment, a strong trusting relationship with the reporting manager and other colleagues, the

opportunity to socialize and get engaged in the organization, purposeful dialog about the culture and strong support structures.

Values alignment. One identified contributor was the need for personal values of the team member to be aligned to the values of the organization. Values alignment included the alignment of personal values of the team member to the values of the organization, stated or in use; values of the customer; or values within the team member's subcultures. The stronger the alignment of team member and organizational values, the more involved the team member would be in learning the culture and the more likely they were to adopt and integrate that culture into their work efforts.

Strong relationship with the reporting manager. To a geographically dispersed team member, the reporting manager represents the organizational culture. Often the boss or reporting manager was the only person the team member had contact with in the organization. Thus, the boss or manager became the manifestation or representative of the organizational culture to the team member. The reporting manager set the culture with the geographically dispersed team member in terms of communication, tone, behavior, and expectations. If the relationship between the team member and the reporting manager was good, the employees thought well of the culture and were more apt to learn the culture. However, this perception of the culture via the reporting manager could be overridden if there were other personal connections to the culture besides the boss. For example, participants would report that they would learn the culture from their boss, and if they had other close, trusted colleagues they could talk to, they would confirm their understanding of the culture through these people.

Socialization opportunities. Socialization opportunities focused on socializing with others in the organization. Geographically dispersed team members tended to learn the organizational culture faster when they had time to get to know other members of the organization in an informal setting. Although socialization sometime happened as a byproduct of working with others on a team or project, team members found it easier to pick up the organizational culture through opportunities that provided just socialization time. From a face to face perspective, this meant having a drink or dinner after work or visiting the corporate office so they had an opportunity to meet people face to face. In lieu of face to face opportunities, some organizations would carve out time to socialize with team members through dedicated socialization time or personal one on one time using some type of technology.

Engagement. Engagement provided the team members with a chance to participate on special projects in the organization or provided a venue to provide input and ideas. Engagement or participation opportunities created a stronger desire to learn the organizational culture. The more opportunity the team member had to be engaged in the organization, the more active they were in learning the organizational culture and in adopting and integrating it into their work effort.

Trusting relationships with colleagues. Another key contributor to learning the organizational culture was the development of trusting relationships with colleagues. Generally, team members preferred to build those trusting relationships through face to face encounters. However, building trust via the phone was not impossible; it was just a slower method than face-to-face. Trust provided the foundation for knowledge sharing. The more trust team members had with others in the organization, the more information was shared, including organizational

culture. If a strong trusting relationship was not developed, team members were more guarded in their conversations and were less willing to share information with others.

Purposeful dialog about the culture. Intentional dialog about the organizational culture generally did not occur for the geographically dispersed team member. If culture was discussed, it was normally discussed during some type of employee orientation when they first joined the organization. However, there were frequent discussions about “how we do things around here” with the team member’s reporting manager and others in the organization. Very few organizations actually spent time talking about the organizational culture and creating the organization’s culture through dialog. When those discussions occurred, the focus was on behavioral norms, understanding of the mission and purpose of the organization, and job expectations.

Enabling support structures. Without communication technology and supporting structures such as clear mission or purpose, documented or clear work expectations, behavioral boundaries, strong support systems, and documented processes, the team member would not have the tools needed for communicating with others in the organization, as well as the support infrastructure needed to learn the organizational culture. Team members of organizations that had strong, well developed support structures for geographically dispersed team members and appropriate technology with training and support had an easier time learning the organizational culture.

Sub-question two: What are the obstacles to learning organizational culture for geographically dispersed team members? The participants were asked to identify the obstacle or obstacles that prevented them from learning organizational culture while being geographically

dispersed from the physical presence of the corporate headquarters. The barriers or obstacles that were reported were almost the antithesis of the contributing factors. If the contributing factors were not in existence or were minimal in their existence, the participant would either not learn the organizational culture or take much longer to learn the organizational culture. If they learned the organizational culture in spite of the barriers, they often reported that they did not actively adopt or integrate the culture into their work life.

The resulting observations from the participants point to seven key obstacles to learning the organizational culture: misaligned values, no strong relationship with the reporting manager, minimal interaction or socialization with others, minimal engagement, low trust and communication, no one talks about the culture, the speed of change, and poor structural support systems such as unclear purpose or expectations, little or no documentation, poor communication technology and technology support, and little or no formalized training.

Misaligned values. Misaligned values between the team member and the organization was a barrier to learning, adopting, and integrating the organizational culture. If the personal values of the team member did not align with the culture or their organization they became frustrated, would disengage in the organizational culture, and only do the minimal amount of work needed to understand and adhere to the organizational culture. In addition, some team members created their own subculture within their group of friends or colleagues or aligned with the organizational culture of their client organizations. Overall the team members seem to pick up the organizational values and adopt them only if those values were aligned with their own personal values.

No strong relationship with the reporting manager. Not having a strong relationship with the reporting manager was also a barrier to learning the organizational culture.

Geographically dispersed team members were not interested in learning the culture beyond what they already learned if their reporting manager was less communicative or unapproachable. In this situation, the team members preferred to stay in the background and under the radar. They would adhere to the organizational culture just enough to stay out of trouble.

Minimal interaction or socialization with others. Often geographically dispersed team members felt that their organization had a tendency to forget them or not consider how their actions might impact them, resulting in an out of sight and out of mind mentality. As a result, there was less of an opportunity for the team members to participate in co-creating the culture or to socialize with others. Unfortunately in a geographically dispersed setting, team members have fewer opportunities to overhear other conversations or to engage in social conversation, thus limiting their opportunities to learn the organizational culture.

Minimal engagement. Engagement was another reported obstacle or barrier to learning the culture. Without an opportunity to get engaged in the organization through special projects or to provide improvement ideas, the team member did not feel a part of the team or organization and became disinterested in learning the culture.

Low trust and communication with colleagues. For geographically dispersed members, written and oral communication was the only way to share information and exchange or create culture. Communication appeared to go hand in hand with the trust barriers. Low trust created less communication for the team members. Team members did not feel comfortable sharing information if they did not know the person on the other end or did not know what that person

would do with the information they provided and, as a result, became very guarded. This lack of open communication and trust made learning the organizational culture much more difficult.

No one talks about the culture. Another obstacle to learning the organizational culture was that conversations about the culture in the organization almost never happen. It was generally agreed that most organizations rarely intentionally talked about the culture with team members. Most team members believed that generally people in organizations would be hard pressed to even describe the culture, let alone have intentional dialog about the culture. With very little opportunity to dialog about the culture, learning the culture is minimized.

Speed of change. Speed of change was another barrier and goes hand in hand with the lack of intentional conversations about the organizational culture. For the geographically dispersed team member, work comes fast and furious. Team members work on their tasks and usually do not have time to talk about the culture in order to maximize the learning of the organizational culture. Culture, at this point, may only be learned through trial and error and feedback during the normal work process.

Poor structural support processes and technology. Poor structural support processes and technology contribute to the barriers in learning the organizational culture. Organizations that did not have anyone at the helm to oversee a program to support geographically dispersed team members, had little or no support processes that would facilitate the dissemination of organizational culture, or had no clear organizational purpose or work expectations made it more difficult for the team member to learn the organizational culture. Without documented process, policies, or training, understanding the cultural context becomes a challenge. Without the

appropriate technology, technical support, and training in its use, communication became limited, thus learning the organizational culture became increasingly difficult.

Primary question two and sub-question two: How do geographically dispersed team members adopt and integrate the organizational culture into their own work? Not only did geographically dispersed team members learn the culture, they also adopted and integrated the culture into their work efforts. There were three key areas in which team members adopted and integrated the organizational culture into their work efforts: changed work actions, changed the way they communicated, and transference of the organizational culture to other areas of their lives beyond work.

Changing work actions. Team members changed some of their work practices since joining the organization. The work areas that were changed included the speed of processing administrative tasks, prioritizing face to face time, adapting to different time zones, and achieving (or at least working on achieving) work life balance. The improvement areas that were adopted and integrated were selected based on the value added to the participant or as a result of receiving feedback from members of their organization that encouraged them to make changes to their work efforts.

Changing the way they communicate. Much of the organizational culture that was most often adopted and integrated into the work effort focused on communication approaches. For the team members whose values aligned with the culture and who had a positive experience with the culture, adopted and integrated the communication style of the organization and the people with whom they had contact. The team members whose values did not align with the culture and had

a more negative perception of the organizational culture, changed their communication methods to be more guarded.

Transferring the organizational culture to other areas of their lives. Some of the geographically dispersed team members also brought certain behavioral norms and ways of working to other facets of their life, such as other organizations or in their personal lives. Generally the behavioral norms that carried over to other parts of the team member's life focused on communication with others, work habits, and giving feedback.

Sub-question two: How do geographically dispersed team members pass on the organizational culture to others? This question was not initially captured as a key sub-question of this research, but emerged during the interview process when team members were questioned about how they incorporated the organizational culture into their own work efforts. Team members used many of the same techniques as they used for their own learning of the culture. In general the team member's understanding of the organizational culture was passed to others through socialization, dialog, coaching, and mentoring.

Theory

Consistent with the grounded theory premise, I have developed a theory based on my analysis of data obtained in this research. Given my social constructionist perspective, however, my theory is an interpretive theory rather than an objective theory which provides an explanation and is predictive. According to Charmaz (2006), an interpretive theory "emphasizes understanding rather than explanation ... Interpretive theories allow for indeterminacy rather than seek causality; they give priority to showing patterns and connections rather than to linear reasoning" (p. 126).

To this end, my final theory consists of three core elements: connectors, context, and connections. Each element connects to the other two elements to create an environment for optimal learning of the organizational culture (Figure 2). Overall, the pattern of data indicated that the stronger the elements, the more likely the organizational culture will be learned, adopted, and integrated. The weaker the elements, the less likely geographically dispersed team members will learn, adopt, or integrate the culture into their own work efforts (See Figure 2). Each core element is discussed in detail in the next section.

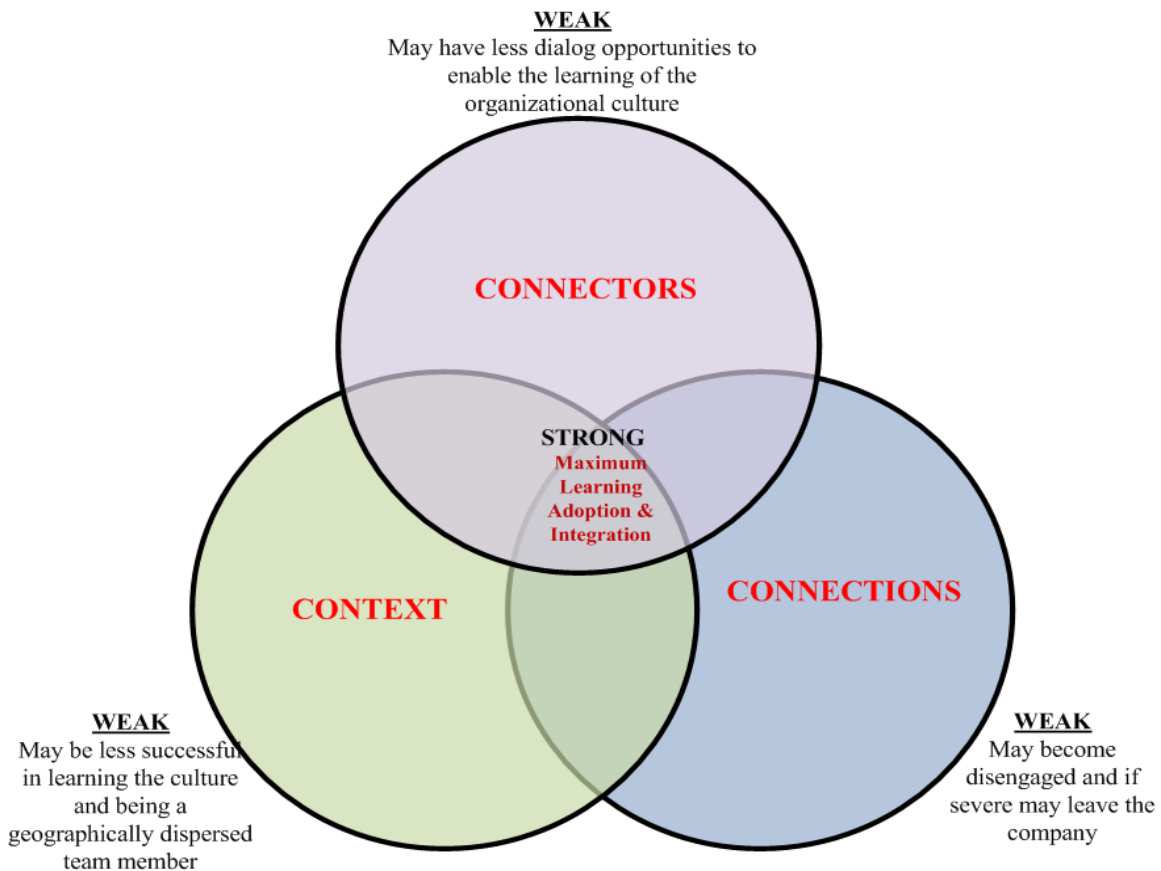


Figure 2. Model for Optimal Learning, Adoption, and Integration of the Organizational Culture

Connectors. Connectors provide the infrastructure and support processes needed for dialog to occur between members of geographically dispersed teams and others in the organization. Without the appropriate communication technology and well thought out structured support processes that provided opportunities for team members to dialog, socialize, and engage with others in the organization, the possibility of learning, adopting, or integrating the organizational culture was minimized. The key connectors identified in this study include enabling technology, structured support processes, structured relationship processes, and intentional dialog as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Connectors: Themes, Dimensions & Descriptions

Theme	Dimension	Description
Enabling Technology	Communication technology	Technology needed by members of geographically dispersed teams for communicating with others in the organization
Structured support processes	Technical support processes	Includes the technical support needed to effectively utilize the technology.
	Work processes	Support processes needed for guidance of work processes and behavioral norms within the organization. It also includes formal communication processes, formalized training, and documented policies.
Relationship processes	Socialization opportunities	Socialization opportunities that allowed geographically dispersed team members to get to know other team members in order to improve collaboration, communication, and dialog about the organizational culture.
	Engagement opportunities	Active engagement in the organization provided interest and awareness of the organizational culture.

Intentional dialog	Dialoging about the culture	Intentional dialog provided the opportunity to learn the culture through co-constructing the culture with others in the organization.
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Enabling technology. Enabling technology was identified in this study as one of four connectors needed to create an environment in which organizational culture can be learned, adopted, and integrated by members of geographically dispersed teams. Communication technology creates the conduit needed for geographically dispersed team members to communicate with each other (Fisher & Fisher, 2001; Haywood, 1998; Hoefling, 2001; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; Warner & Witzel, 2004). Without some type of communication technology, learning the organizational culture would be impossible. Gray (2007) noted that communication technology creates a channel for sharing a common language, developing shared meanings, and providing a vehicle for synergized action to occur.

Telephone and email technologies were the most often employed communication vehicles by team member to communicate with others in the organization. These two technologies were used most often because of the ease of use and accessibility. This finding was similar to the research findings of Sapsed, Gann, Marshall, and Salter (2005):

Dispersed teams do not differ greatly from co-located ones in their use of face-to-face interaction, email, and project websites. The way in which information transfer is dealt with is similar in both modes of working, and both involve the use of a variety of different communications media. Yet the telephone as a medium is used significantly more by dispersed team members for almost all types of knowledge exchange. In particular, dispersed team members' ways of consulting and validating ideas and

concepts differed from their co-located colleagues. In project teams that were denied the opportunity to meet face-to-face, extended teleconferencing was the primary means of knowledge-intensive teamwork. Yet this frequently required follow-up calls for verification and validation (p.849).

Beyond phone and email technologies, web conferencing tools, instant messaging, and text messaging were also used as a means of communication. These communication technologies, however, either took more effort to learn or more time to use so they were used only to a limited extent by people who knew how to effectively utilize them. This finding is in line with other research that suggested geographically dispersed team members must be comfortable with the various communication technologies before they use them (Blackburn, Furst, & Rosen, 2003; Shin, 2004; Staples & Webster, 2007).

Structured support processes. The second enabling connector identified in this study by the team members is the need for strong structured processes to support both the technology and work effort done by the geographically dispersed team members. Team members must not only be proficient in their use of the technology, they also need to be trained on the rules of use and understand how to leverage the technology for optimal communication such as determining what information is best conveyed through which means, at what frequency, and for what purpose (Hess & Hess, 2000; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005). Without strong technical support processes in place, some technologies will not be used and existing technologies may not be maximized, thus impacting the communication channel between the geographically dispersed team member and other members of the organization.

In addition to technical support processes, the results of this study suggest strong work support structures, such as documented processes, policies, procedures, and performance standards are also critical to learning. These support processes enabled the team member to understand their work and work expectations. They would also use the documented processes and policies to obtain more contextual clues about the culture. Lohman (2009) identified similar patterns in his study with IT professionals. He suggested that IT professionals relied heavily on the Internet and Intranet sites to learn informally in the workplace. Only when they are unable to address their learning needs by reading information on these websites would IT professionals turn to interacting with others in the organization.

Lohman's (2009) research also suggested that an unsupportive organizational culture, unsupportive processes, and lack of equipment and technology hindered information technology professionals from "engaging in informal learning activities" (p. 39). Thus, these structured support processes are critical in creating the optimal environment in which learning, adopting, and integrating the organizational culture can occur. Accordingly, organizations must take an active role in creating a strong support environment (Bennett, 2009; Chen & Nath, 2008).

Structured relationship processes. Although I have already discussed the need for work processes in the previous section, in this section I broke out the relationship processes organizations need to have in place to enhance the learning, adoption, and integration of the organizational culture by geographically dispersed team members. The two key relationship processes include socialization and engagement processes. I specifically separated these two processes from general work processes because structured relationship processes was the single area all of the participants mentioned was lacking in their organization. It seems organizations

may realize they have to have processes in place to support the work effort of geographically dispersed team members, but perhaps do not realize that socialization and engagement processes are also needed to increase dialog, which in turn increases the organization culture learning process.

A strong relationship support environment would include structures and processes that support socialization, engagement, and dialog between geographically dispersed team members and other members of the organization. Schein (2009) noted that organizations need structures and processes in place to create a psychologically safe learning environment that allows team members to learn new behaviors. This finding can also be understood in terms of the social exchange theory. According to Sax (2006), employees who perceive they have a high level of organizational support tend to respond with greater levels of engagement, which can further lead to increased dialog and a greater opportunity to learn the organizational culture.

Socialization processes. Socialization is critical to geographically dispersed team members (Sparrow & Daniels, 1999). However, no matter how critical socialization is shown to be, it is difficult for team members who are geographically dispersed to get their socialization needs met (Wilson, 2008). Generally socialization is best created through mentoring, storytelling, or group work (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Smith, 2009; Nazir, 2005). Nonetheless, socialization needs planning and a process to create the space for dialog, belonging, and co-construction of the organizational culture and knowledge (Smith, 2009; Nazir, 2005).

This study suggested that organizational culture is co-created through dialog. Without socialization opportunities, dialog may be reduced, thus learning of the organizational culture may be reduced. This premise would agree with Muller and Millen (2001) who suggested that

“knowledge is defined by a social process, and is harvested, refined, provided, mandated, and monitored very much as a result of the social process that defines it” (p. 11). According to Nazir (2005), by leveraging socialization processes, organizations can attempt to create a better venue to learn the organization’s values, norms, and objectives by its team members. Schein (2004) suggested that “the socialization processes to which one is subjected may indeed reveal deeper assumptions. To get at those deeper levels one must try to understand the perceptions and feelings that arise in crucial situations, and one must observe and interview regular members or “old-timers” to get an accurate sense of the deeper-level assumptions that are shared” (p. 18). It is up to the organization to create structured processes that encourage socialization among its team members (Wu, Hsu, & Yeh, 2007).

It has also been suggested that socialization is a key tool for creating employee-organization cultural fit (Clugston, Howell, & Dorfman, 2000; Shin, 2004). “Newcomers adapt themselves to their organization, workgroup, and job by learning the organizational culture, workgroup norms, and task roles and demands from their supervisors or coworkers” (Shin, 2004, p. 739). However, Ahuja and Galvin (2003) noted that, although newcomers to the organization actively engage in cognitive discussions regarding the shared information, they do not spend time sharing normative or regulative information with each other. This type of sharing takes time.

Socialization has also been suggested to contribute to organizational commitment and the co-construction of new knowledge. According to Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman (2000), “cultural socialization is an antecedent to organizational commitment” (p. 22). Socialization has also been linked to numerous research studies on transferring knowledge and relaying tacit

information on many topics including organizational culture (Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 1995; Nonaka, von Krogh, & Voelpel, 2006; Smith, 2009; Song, 2008). In addition, a study by Sole and Edmondson (2002) noted the need for processes, technology, and socialization to pass on the situated or tacit knowledge of those in the organization.

Situated knowledge can be invisible to ‘non-natives’ (those not based at a given site) because they lack exposure to it and because it is rarely discussed explicitly by site ‘natives’ who may take it for granted. Awareness of situated knowledge can be enhanced by technology and socialization (p. 32).

Engagement processes. Employee engagement was also identified as a core connector in creating an environment that provides geographically dispersed team members with an opportunity to learn the culture through dialog and work. Brown and Duguid (2001) suggested that “the cultural forces most salient for the members of an organization are probably not those ‘determined by leaders’ nor even necessarily those espoused by their members. Rather, they are those arising through and at the point of an individual's engagement in the organization and its work” (p. 201).

Engagement opportunities to work on special projects also increased the geographically dispersed team member’s identification with the organization culture. This, in turn, seemed to increase the probability of the team member adopting and integrating the culture into their work efforts. This would agree with De Leede and Looise’s (2001) study that suggested “forms of employee involvement, the development of shared values, and the careful implementation of socialization practices seem to enhance commitment of team members, both in normal and extended or even virtual situations” (p. 513).

Intentional dialog. Intentional dialog is the fourth and final connector identified as critical in allowing geographically dispersed team members to learn, adopt, and integrate the culture. In this study, a majority of the participants mentioned that a detriment to learning the culture was that they never had an opportunity to talk about the culture with anyone in the organization. However, the participants in this study who did spend more time talking about the culture and organizations that had a more collaborative culture appeared to have maximized the learning, adoption, and integration of the culture by its team members. Dialog is the technology that feeds the contextual understanding of the organizational culture. Schein (1993) suggested that dialog is the technology people use to determine if they are on the same page, if they operate with different mental models, and if they are employing the same social constructions of reality. Without dialog, we would be unable to check our understanding of the actions and communication of others in the organization. “An important goal of dialogue is to enable the group to reach a higher level of consciousness and creativity through the gradual creation of a shared set of meanings and a ‘common’ thinking process” (Schein, 1993, p. 30).

To have intentional dialog about the culture, there has to be a plan or process in place to enable the dialog to occur. In this study, there were a number of organizations that provided focused time to dialog about the culture and to learn the culture. The best dialoging comes from organizations that create a structured plan for dialoging (Cseh, Watkins, & Marsick, 1999; Dixon, 1999; Schein, 2009). Dixon (1999) suggested that in any knowledge-sharing event the key activities needed to facilitate learning are an active community dialogue, team reflections, the use of appreciative inquiry, social interaction time, and the equity of all parties in

communication openness. Schein (2009) talked about how dialog must be active, not just informal conversation.

Dialog is more a low-key 'talking around the campfire,' allowing enough time for and encouraging reflective conversation rather than confrontational conversation, discussion or debate. But its purpose is not just to have a quiet, reflective conversation; rather, it is to allow participants to begin to see where their deeper levels of thought and tacit assumptions differ (p. 208).

Cseh, Watkins, and Marsick (1999) took Dixon's and Schein's position further and asserted that the dialectical process is much more of an active process. They suggested a multi-step dialogic process similar to problem-solving. These steps include framing the context, responding to experiences, interpreting the experience, assessing alternative solutions, selecting learning strategies, creating alternative solutions, assessing the results, and conducting lessons learned.

Connectors provide the infrastructure and building blocks that geographically dispersed workers need in place to learn, adopt, and integrate the organizational culture. For connections to be maximized they must be planned, structured, implemented, and communicated. The key connectors identified in this study include enabling technologies; structured support processes including technical support, policies, work processes, and procedures that support the team member's work effort; planned relationship processes including socialization and engagement opportunities; and intentional planned dialog to talk about the culture.

Context. Understanding context is critical for the learning processes. Context is the second core element identified in this study. Context provides geographically dispersed team

members with information they need to infer the meaning of words or actions of others. It provides an opportunity to co-create a shared understanding of the organizational culture.

If the group does not have shared assumptions, as will sometimes be the case, the new member's interaction with [the] old member will be a more creative process of building a culture. But once shared assumptions exist, the culture survives through teaching them to newcomers. (Schein, 2003, p. 19)

Creating context is not simply done at the beginning of the relationship; it has to be an ongoing effort for organizations and for geographically dispersed team members. Gibson (2003) noted that creating a shared understanding is an ongoing task.

So we can't just go in and pour shared understanding in people's heads at the beginning. That helps to jump-start it, but if we then diverge and never reconnect around it, we'll just break apart again in terms of how we understand what we're doing. It's an ongoing task (p. 18).

In this study, context was divided around three key themes as shown in Table 6: explicit boundaries the organization provided on mission, purpose, and work expectations; frames of reference including mental models, previous work experience, work competencies and values alignment to the organization; and contextual clues. Learning occurs through individuals. Individuals develop consensus around interpretations embedded in the content, communications, and form people use to construct a picture of action (Ayas, 1999). The stronger and more explicit the context is, the higher the contextual understanding of the organizational culture.

Table 6

Context: Theme, Dimension, and Description

Theme	Dimension	Description
Explicit boundaries	Mission & Purpose	A strong mission or purpose assists the participants in understanding the direction of the organization and provides context to learning the organizational culture.
	Work Expectations	Work and performance expectations guide the behavioral norms of team members.
Frames of reference	Personal mental models	Personal frames of reference such as personal mental models and previous work experience, as well as personal work competencies provide context to understanding the actions and the meaning behind the communication of others in order to learn the organizational culture.
	Previous work experiences	
	Personal work competencies	
	Values alignment	Similar values between the geographically dispersed team member and the organization provides context in which to understand the organizational culture.
Contextual clues	Individual learning techniques	Individual learning techniques focus on looking for clues, and reading documentation to gain the context needed in order to learn and understand the organizational culture.
	Experiential learning techniques	Experiential learning techniques include learning the organizational culture through trial and error.

Explicit boundaries. Organizational boundaries such as mission and purpose are usually the first pieces of context a new employee comes in contact. Often the mission or purpose statements are captured on the public websites. Team members tend to go to the website to find out about the organization in order to gain context around its culture. In a number of

organizations, self-research is followed by an employee orientation in which the mission and purpose of the organization would be explicitly presented and discussed.

In this study, it appeared that organizations that had a strong mission and purpose focused on sharing the importance of that mission and purpose with the team members. A strong mission reportedly was often told through stories or learned during an orientation program.

Understanding the context provided the driving force for the culture. When there was consistency in the message and actions of everyone in the organization, the mission seemed to become adopted. Chiu, Hsu, and Wang (2006) suggested that “identification with the community and its goals, shared mission and vision, and shared language play a significant role in employees’ decision to share their knowledge in a virtual community” (p. 545). This knowledge sharing assists employees in learning the organizational culture. Hoefling (2001) described the organization as a “living system,” one in which a common meaning must constantly be co-created with the team members by the leadership in the organization.

Leaders and managers must continually create meaning in the workplace. Without it, little innovation, learning, and sharing will occur naturally. Help people create a committed vision of a collaborative knowledge sharing and virtual culture, and the heart will pump life force throughout the system (Hoefling, 2001, p. 167).

During the interview and shortly after the first weeks of employment, performance expectations were usually presented to the team members, providing them with the behavioral norms expected in the organizational culture. During this time, work expectations are also set, along with boundaries, personal goals, and commitments (Mark & Poltrock, 2003). These expectations focused on work related behavior and performance criteria. Organizations set clear

work expectations to ensure all team members understood the context that surrounds organizational culture and the behavioral norms gained in clarity and cultural understanding. “It becomes the province of leaders to identify the vision or mission according to which the organization and its culture should develop” (Stacey, 2003, p. 327).

Personal frames of reference. Personal frames of reference provided team members with a base on which to interpret the organizational culture. In this study, personal frames of reference include a participant’s personal mental models, previous work experiences, and personal work competencies. Naevestad (2008) defined frames of reference as a

...context, viewpoint, and set of presuppositions or evaluative criteria. Our interpretations and judgments are based on frames of reference. Frames of reference are a necessity for perception, as the mind insists on structuring the ambiguous patterns to which it is confronted. (p. 158)

Personal mental models. Mental models form part of an individual’s personal frame of reference. Mental models “are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (Senge, 1990, p.8). They are the results of individual learning, personal beliefs, cultural biases, assumptions, and past experiences that become a person’s reality. Any behavior that is perceived to be inconsistent with a team member’s own mental model may appear irrational or even malevolent (Schein, 2004).

The team members in this study brought their personal mental models with them when they joined their organization. Geographically dispersed team members must use their own mental models to interpret the behavior and language of others in the organization. Their mental

models shaped the way they perceived the organizational culture and the actions of others in the organization (Fischer, 2009; Morgan, 1997; Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 1995).

Once the team member became part of the organization they had to confirm, clarify, or create new mental models in order to co-create an understanding of the organizational culture. While frames of reference are personal to each team member, they can be developed and shared by team members within an organization through dialog, socialization, and interaction (Huang, Newell, Galliers, & Pan, 2003, Schein 2004; Stacey, 2003).

Effective learning from models occurs best and perhaps only when the decision makers participate actively in the development of the model. Modeling here includes the elicitation of the participants' existing mental models, including articulating the issues, selecting the model boundary and time horizon, and mapping the causal structure of the relevant system. (Sterman, 2000, p. 36)

Further Schein (1993) suggested that organizational effectiveness depends on the development of a common language and common mental models. Thus learning the culture will require the evolution of shared mental models between subcultures of the organization.

Previous work experiences. Frames of reference are also developed from past experiences. Personal experiences supply individuals with an initial understanding as to the meaning of words and actions of others based on past professional experiences (Bjorn and Ngwenyama, 2009). To ensure a correct understanding individuals often have to verify these assumptions through various forms of dialog and trial and error. Morgan (1997) suggested that

We choose and operate in environmental domains according to how we construct conceptions of who we are and what we are trying to do. . . . And we act in relation to

those domains through the definitions we impose on them. . . . The beliefs and ideas that organizations hold about who they are, what they are trying to do, and what their environment is like have a much greater tendency to realize themselves than is usually believed. (p. 149)

Past experience in a certain profession helped the geographically dispersed team member learn the culture faster since they had a common language and conceptual base with others in their profession on which to build and co-construct their understanding of the organizational culture (Ogbonna & Harris, 2002). Schein (2004) suggested “we bring culture with us from our past experience but we are constantly reinforcing that culture or building new elements as we encounter new people and new experiences” (p. 63).

The impact of previous professional cultures on the understanding of the current organizational culture was observed in this study. All of the team members in this study were experienced professionals and had come from similar industries and professions before they landed at their current organization working as a geographically dispersed team member. They used their previous professional experience and culture as a spring board to understanding the organizational culture of their new organization. Schein (2004) suggested:

If an occupation involves an intense period of education and apprenticeship, there will certainly be a shared learning of attitudes, norms, and values that eventually will become taken-for-granted assumptions for the members of those occupations . . . Reinforcement of those assumptions occurs at professional meetings and continuing education sessions, and by virtue of the fact that practice of the occupation often calls for teamwork among several members of the occupation who reinforce each other”. (p. 21)

Past professional experience is critical for a geographically dispersed team member to learn the current organizational culture. According to Bjorn and Ngwenyama (2009), if personal frames of reference, organizational structures, and work practices are not in place to help develop shared meaning, then geographically dispersed teams “are prone to communication breakdowns due to sense-making failures at these three levels” (p. 250).

Personal work competencies go hand in hand with personal work experience, but it bears a separate mention. A majority of the team members suggested that if they did not have previous work experience, they would not be successful as a geographically dispersed worker. According to Kirkman and Mathieu (2005):

Team member competencies will have an impact on the success of any type of team, and virtual ones are no exception. In terms of types of competencies, however, virtual team members require sophistication in three general areas: (a) task work; (b) teamwork; and (c) virtuality-related knowledge, skill, ability, and other (e.g., personality or disposition) characteristics. (p. 709)

For the team members, having previous experience was paramount not only in achieving success as a geographically dispersed worker, but also in increasing their level of understanding of the contextual insights into the organizational culture. In addition, team members suggested they needed to be self-starters, self-reliant, and able to ask questions. This finding is similar to Lohman’s (2009) work when he identified key personal characteristics which enhanced a geographically dispersed IT professional’s motivation to engage in informal learning: “initiative, self-efficacy, love of learning, interest in the profession, integrity, outgoing personality, teamwork ethic, curiosity, and open-mindedness” (p.50).

Values alignment. According to Nazir (2000), common cultural values provide the base for behavioral norms for team member's actions. Generally, team members were first attracted to the organization because of its values. Research conducted by Schneider (1987) proposed that individuals may be attracted to organizations they perceive as having values similar to their own personal values.

Hiring managers, on the other hand, may attempt to select employees who best fit into the organizational culture. Sparrow and Daniels (1999) suggested it is helpful to select team members based on value fit to the organization. Value fit is even more critical for geographically dispersed team members because they have fewer opportunities for socialization, making it difficult to learn the organizational culture. Thus, selecting team members who have the same set of values makes it easier for them to fit into the organization (Sparrow & Daniels, 1999). New employees are then socialized and assimilated and those who do not fit, leave. "Congruency between individuals and organizational values aimed through socialization may be at the crux of person-culture fit" (Nazir, 2005, p. 40).

My study found that when personal values aligned with organizational values, there appeared to be a stronger desire to learn, adopt, and integrate the culture into the participant's work life. Team members also became more committed to the organization and reported a higher job satisfaction (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Nazir, 2005). Schein (2009) suggested that

If the behavior fits the rest of the learner's personality and is congruent with the expectations of important others in the learner's work and social environment, it becomes a stable part of the person, and eventually of the group. But note that if you learn some new concepts that lead to new behavior that does not fit into your work or social group,

you will either revert to your old concepts and behavior if you value the group or leave the group if you now value the new concepts and behavior more (p. 120-121).

If there is a misalignment in the values, team members tended to disengage with the organization. Disengagement manifested itself by team members just doing their job with minimal dialog, engagement, or socialization with others in the organization. They would contemplate leaving the organization because they reportedly could no longer work for a company that violated their values. This was further suggested by Rounds (2009) “when one’s personal principles are not respected, that person will likely leave because of the incongruence such disrespect creates within the individual and their primary goals, beliefs, or values” (p. 181).

Contextual clues. Contextual clues connect with the documented processes, policies, mission, and vision of the organization already discussed in the previous section on connectors. Because team members in this study were geographically dispersed, they searched for contextual clues that might reveal the organizational culture. A geographically dispersed team member’s radar is always out, continuously capturing contextual data such as reading between the lines in an email; reading organizational documentation such as policies, procedures, or any other information on the organization; and through experiential learning techniques such as trial and error.

Without contextual information for understanding, communications may breakdown and lessen the ability for the team members to learn the culture of the organization.

Ordinary artifacts such as text documents (emails, memos, etc.) all have a formal language as well as a context of meaning. The context of meaning enables the actor to enact meanings not explicit in the document but relevant to reading the text. In virtual

teams, participants have limited access to developing a shared meaning context because they do not have regular face-to-face encounters, which support the development and alignment of common frames of reference. Thus, the risk of communication breakdowns increases (Bjorn & Ngwenyama, 2009, p. 230).

Context provides geographically dispersed team members with the information they need to infer the meaning of words or actions of others, which in turn provides an opportunity to co-create a shared understanding of the organizational culture, as well as gain clues about the culture through its documentation. For contextual understanding to be maximized, clear organizational messages must occur around the organization's mission and purpose, as well as work expectations which set the expectations for behavioral norms. In addition, team members need clear communication and clear, well documented policies, processes, and procedures to ensure more accurate contextual understandings.

Connections. Connections provide the relationships between the geographically dispersed team members and others in the organization. The important connections for geographically dispersed team members were with their reporting manager, trusted colleagues, and the organization itself. In addition, I have added trust as a connection. Trust is what makes the relationships work. According to Bosch-Sijtsema (2007), relationships between geographically dispersed team members and others in the organization are more social and psychological than tangible.

Table 7

Connections: Theme, Dimension, and Description

Theme	Dimension	Description
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Personal Connections	Reporting manager	For many geographically dispersed team members, the reporting manager represents and embodies the organizational culture. The manager sometimes provides the only connection team members have to the organization.
	Colleagues	Colleagues provide insight into the organizational culture as well as participation in the co-construction of the culture with the geographically dispersed team member.
	Organization	An opportunity to connect with and contribute to the organization beyond the confines of the normal job role and responsibilities facilitates the learning of the culture.
Connection enabler	Trust	Trust provides the foundation on which connections are built with the reporting manager, colleagues & the organization.

Relationship with reporting manager. The geographically dispersed team member's relationship with their reporting manager is critical to learning the organizational culture. Often the reporting manager is the only person the geographically dispersed team member has regular contact with in the organization. Thus, the reporting manager becomes the manifestation of the organizational culture to the team member.

Because the corporate culture is not seen, the participants look to their boss or manager, who is often the only connection they have to the organization, to manifest or represent the culture... then they would check their understanding with others in the organization to get feedback and understand context. Understood this way, the diffusion of learning in organizations becomes a matter of relationships among learners, where the relationships are what is practiced and the learning is what happens rather than the other way around.

It is the relationships rather than the learning labs, dialogue experiences, and training programs that cultivate learning, disseminate learning, and maintain learning processes as a way of organizational life (Bokeno & Gantt, 2000, p. 245).

Nonaka (1991) suggested that leaders of an organization are the ones to provide the context in which team member create knowledge. They have direct control over what activities are rewarded, what behaviors are encouraged, and how work will be valued in the organization. All these factors influence a team member's motivation and ability to develop new knowledge.

Brown and Duguid (2001) suggested otherwise. They believe that "the cultural forces most salient for the members of an organization are probably not those 'determined by leaders' nor even necessarily those espoused by their members. Rather, they are those arising through and at the point of an individual's engagement in the organization and its work" (p. 201).

In this study, it appeared that the more trust the team member has with their manager, the more likely they are to learn, adopt, and integrate the culture. More trust also leads to more engagement between the parties which will enhance their relationship and lead team members to have more positive attitudes towards the culture, and improve intentions and behaviors (Sax 2006). Alternatively, it appears the more mistrust built up between the reporting manager and the team member, the less dialog occurs which is essential for learning the culture. If the team member does not care for the reporting manager, their perception of the organizational culture will not be positive. Even if the team member does learn the culture in spite of a poor reporting manager, the team member generally did not adopt or integrate the organizational culture into their work.

The critical relationship between the employee and manager would suggest that the role of the reporting manager must move toward mentoring the geographically dispersed team members and not simply be focused on managing the work effort. According to Thomas and Bostrom (2008), because technology can erode dialog, trust and collaboration are needed. They suggested leaders employ a “theory y” style of leadership characterized by more facilitation and supporting actions rather than a “theory x” leadership style of command and control. This would also agree with Kirkman and Mathieu’s (2005) research that found that the role of managers should move toward a coaching or mentoring relationship that included monitoring the needs of the team members and ensuring they have the necessary resources and support they need as they learn new ways of working together.

Relationships with trusted colleagues. In the absence of information or a strong positive relationship with the reporting manager, organizational culture is learned from and confirmed with trusted colleagues. In order to make sense of the world, geographically dispersed team members often call on people within the same functional or professional areas for validation. As mentioned in the previous section, if the geographically dispersed team member does not have a good relationship with their reporting manager they begin to think ill of the organizational culture. If they have a good relationship with the reporting manager, the employees will think well of the culture. However, these perceptions can be overridden by close trusted colleagues who replace the reporting manager as the key representative of the organizational culture. The organizational culture is then dictated by the team member’s trusted colleagues within the organization and with whom they most frequently communicate.

These key trusted relationships with colleagues, when available, impact the learning, adoption, and integration of organizational culture. “Recent research has shown that high-quality relationships between members are a key enabler of psychological safety and learning behaviors” (Carmeli & Sheaffer, 2008, p. 473). In their model of informal workplace learning, Doornbos, Bolhuis, and Simons (2004) identified a number of characteristics that assisted work-related learning which includes social integration with managers, as well as social integration with colleagues. Lohman (2009) suggested that “the degree to which IT professionals are able to obtain help from others in their organizations, however, varied based on the accessibility and support of colleagues in the work environment (p. 51). Generally the support and accessibility depends on the culture of the organization.

Organization. The relationship with individuals within the organization are critical. Much of this has been covered in the values alignment section mentioned earlier. If team members had low trust with the people in the organization and these people failed to meet the team member’s expectations, it caused the team member to shut down and have only limited communication with others. With dialog, participation, and communication to a minimum, learning, adoption, and integration of the organizational culture also was minimized.

Trust. Trust is the foundation on which the relationships with the reporting manager, colleagues, and the organization are built. Team members are often more comfortable creating the initial relationships face to face if possible. They reported if they could not see the other person, they were less likely to trust them, and as a result, less likely to convey more private or personal information and keep a close connection to that person. If trust was established virtually, it was slow to build and people had to prove themselves to the team member. Team

members were also more guarded in their conversations, including what they were willing to share or not share with the other person, if they did not know that person well or did not trust him or her.

These findings were confirmed by research by Bennett (2009) who found that:

The level of trust employees have in an organization affects their willingness to share information. Trust is forged through daily work experiences, interactions, and political negotiation present in human systems. Employees are less likely to share information if a culture emphasizes territorial boundaries, information hoarding, or discourages risk taking. Organizations then must evaluate whether interactions are conducive to knowledge sharing or whether hidden messages, socio-cultural factors, or technical obstructions inhibit knowledge management (p. 365).

Wu, Hsu, and Yeh (2007) suggested that the higher the level of trust within a team, the more knowledge sharing and learning that occurs. Teams with high trust encourage each other to participate in open communication and encourage the opportunity to learn. Social interaction was also found in this study to have a positive relationship to individual learning. If members were not provided with adequate opportunities to gain knowledge, they could become discouraged and eventually give up on learning. Leaders in the organization must build trust with the team members and create social opportunities to increase the learning intensity (Wu, Hsu, & Yeh, 2007).

Puusa and Tolvanen (2006) also suggested that trust is the key to creating greater commitment to the organization by the team member. High levels of trust also provide a strong identity with the organization which reflects in the team member's perspective of the

organization and is created only through a shared understanding. A strong identity is a shared collective sense as to “who we are as an organization” or in essence “who we are as an organizational culture.”

Connections provide the relationships between the geographically dispersed team members and others in the organization. The key connections for geographically dispersed team members are their reporting manager, trusted colleagues, and the organization itself. Trust is what makes the relationships work. For connections to be maximized, reporting managers need to develop strong trusting relationships with their subordinate team members and provide them opportunities to build relationships with others in the organization. The reporting manager must also remember they are, in effect, the face of the organizational culture. It is important for them to understand that what they do and say will impact the team member’s understanding of the organizational culture, as well as their acceptance of that culture.

Implications for Organizations and Geographically Dispersed Team Members

Implications for organizations. The findings from this study have implications for organization development practitioners who want to put a program together for their organization to strengthen the organizational culture and support the co-creation of that understanding to all organizational members, including geographically dispersed team members. This information may also be beneficial for managers who work with geographically dispersed team members and want to improve their ability to strengthen the understanding of the organizational culture, with its behavior norms and values, with their direct reports. Key considerations follow.

First, given that we live in a fast paced world in which technology seems to change almost daily and geographically dispersed teams will continue to be part of the organizational

landscape, organizations need to create a technology use and support plan for geographically dispersed team members. This plan should include a suggested list of communication technologies used in the organization and who has access to this technology, technology usage suggestions (when to use and not use), a technology training plan to ensure optimal usage, and a technology support plan that will provide accessible ongoing technical support to geographically dispersed team members.

Second, according to the participants in this study, communication with geographically dispersed team members tends to be haphazard at best. Thus, there is a need to create and implement a communication plan that will facilitate intentional dialog needed for the sharing of information and the co-creation of the organizational culture. The communication plan should not only include work related matters, but time for socialization and talking about the culture. It also should include the establishment of communication ground rules, for example, every voice is heard or all ideas must be on the table, to ensure a safe environment in which to have open dialog.

Third, engage geographically dispersed team members by providing them a chance to participate in the organization. According to the team members in this study, organizational culture was learned at a faster rate if they are able to participate on special teams or work on special projects rather than being on their own with very little contact with others in the organization. Participation enabled the team members to take a much more active role in the organization, which gave them more say in co-creating the organizational culture, and provided them with additional opportunities for social interaction and dialog. Engagement also

encouraged geographically dispersed team members to adopt and integrate the organizational culture into their own work.

Fourth, provide the geographically dispersed team member with ways to develop a personal network within the organization. A majority of the participants in this study indicated that inaccessibility and the inability to communicate with others in the organization was a real detriment to learning the culture. Generally, networking occurs when individuals meet people face to face and develop a relationship with them. This is often impossible for members of a geographically dispersed team. Ideas to consider in providing support for team members to develop a personal network might include:

- Provide geographically dispersed team members with a list of other team members to call for information or support. It may be a list of team members in the same profession or on the same team.
- Create communities of practice.
- Provide a space for questions and answers on the organization's Intranet.
- Create a blog on various topics that allow the geographically dispersed member to participate.

Fifth, this study shows how critical the reporting manager can be in influencing the geographically dispersed team member's ability to learn, adopt, and integrate the organizational culture. Therefore, the role of reporting manager might need to transform from primarily providing work direction and oversight toward being a coach and mentor. In this case, the reporting manager may have to have training on how to work with geographically dispersed team members and how to coach and mentor their reports.

Finally, create a plan for how to provide consistent messages about the organizational culture, its mission, its values, and behavioral norms either from an organization perspective or a reporting manager perspective. This will provide geographically dispersed team members with the boundaries needed to help them assess and understand the organizational culture and behavioral norms of members within the organization.

Implications for geographically dispersed team members. The findings from this study have implications for geographically dispersed team members who currently work with or may work for a specific organization. In this section I deviate from the third-person standard to address team members directly.

First, look for organizations that match your values. Go beyond looking at the website. Ask people what the organizational culture is like for this organization. Ask questions in the interview that get the interviewer to talk about specifics about the culture. For example, ask the interviewer what they like about working in this organization or what did they look for in an organization before they joined? Try to discover if the espoused values of the organization are the same as their values in action. Being a geographically dispersed team member is difficult enough without joining an organization only to find out later is not a fit.

Second, be proactive in learning the culture. Don't sit back and wait for the organization to contact you. Make an effort to network with others in the organization. If possible, get involved in special projects or other team efforts that allow you to meet more people and develop close relationships.

Implications for Research

According to the literature review in this study, most of the research on geographically dispersed team members and organizational culture focused on the need for a strong culture in optimizing strategic initiatives. Other research focused on technology needs, communication, and trust development within a project team environment. While this research provided us with insight about the need for a strong organizational culture as a way to ensure the success of strategic corporate initiatives and the creation of high performing project teams whose members are geographically dispersed, it does not address how a strong organizational culture is created, learned, adopted, or integrated by team members.

This study opens the doors to understanding how organizational culture is learned, adopted, and integrated by geographically dispersed team members. It extends the limited research already out there by providing a detailed model of the key environmental factors needed to learn the organizational culture: context, connections, and connectors. This study also suggested that culture is learned through socialization and rich, intentional dialog. As a result, it changes how we need to think about culture in a virtual setting. It is not something that can be transmitted, but is co-created through dialog.

Further, this study provides a theoretical framework in which to situate future inquiry and research. Given the results of this study, I would suggest research in the following areas:

First, I would suggest researching the difference between organizational culture and subcultures of the organization and which cultures take priority to a geographically dispersed team member. Except to identify professional subcultures as a frame of reference, I generally

did not differentiate between the organizational culture as a whole and professional or functional subcultures.

Second, all the participants in this study were experienced professionals who used their previous work experiences to be successful in adjusting to work as a geographically dispersed team member. It would be interesting to study geographically dispersed team members who were new to the work force to see if there would be any differences in learning, adopting, and integrating the organizational culture, as well as the speed at which the organizational culture was learned.

Third, this research only studied geographically dispersed team members whose primary nationality is American and who were located in the United States. For further study, I would suggest looking at geographically dispersed team members who come from other national cultures or live in other countries.

Fourth, the participants in this study worked on different teams. Some of the participants worked on ongoing functional or management teams, while others worked on more temporary teams such as project teams or ad hoc teams. My suggestion for further research would be to compare the ongoing team member's learning, adoption, and integration of the organizational culture to those team members who spend most of their time on temporary project teams.

Fifth, in this study the reporting manager was often found to be the key representative of the organizational culture to geographically dispersed team members. It was suggested that if the team member did not have a strong positive relationship with their reporting manager, dialog would be minimized and the team member would potentially withdraw from further contact with the organization. For further study, I would recommend researching the relational impact of the

reporting manager and the geographically dispersed team member on learning, adopting, and integrating the organizational culture.

Sixth, in chapter two I described three different perspectives used to view and understand organizational culture: integration, differentiation, and fragmentation. I used an integration perspective for this study and assumed organizational culture was based on an organizational wide consensus shared by all members. It would be interesting to further investigate organizational culture by using a differentiation perspective which considers organizational culture to be based on sub-cultures within the organization or a fragmentation perspective focusing on the expression and manifestation of ambiguity as the essence of organization culture.

Finally, I would suggest conducting a similar study using a phenomenological methodology. This methodology may provide a richer and deeper understanding about the essence of the experience in learning, adopting, and integrating the organizational culture by the team members. Phenomenological methodology was not selected for this study because my primary interest was to understand the processes and barriers by which the team members engaged in learning, adopting, and integrating the organizational culture based on their interpreted reality and constructed meaning.

Final Reflection

I think one of the things that surprised me was the number of participants who were so welcoming and open with me, a person they never met and with whom the only conversation was over the phone. They allowed me to enter their lives for a brief moment of time to get the information I needed to further understand how geographically dispersed team members learned, adopted, and integrated the culture into their lives when most of their time is spent is alone.

Their candor about themselves and their experiences amazed me. Without their openness and willingness to share, this dissertation would not be as robust in its findings.

This was my first attempt at grounded theory. There were two reasons I initially selected grounded theory for this study. First, grounded theory aligns with how I tend to process information in my normal course of life. I prefer to gather all the data and identify the key patterns of commonality and differences that reveal themselves during analysis. Second, I selected grounded theory because it aligns closely with my social constructionist perspective. Generally, I believe that reality is socially constructed, and therefore believe that our understanding of the organizational culture is socially constructed. In retrospect, I believe that grounded theory was a good methodology for this study. Moving forward, I would like to continue to use grounded theory on any future research I might do and possibly use it for analysis of survey and interview data with my clients.

There were not a lot of surprises regarding the results of this study for me personally. I think this was because I have spent over 20 years working on various project teams, many which had team members, including myself, who were geographically dispersed. The key surprise for me, and one that I had not really thought about before this study, was the reliance of the geographically dispersed team member on their reporting manager for learning and understanding the culture and for sometimes being the only connection to the organization. Additionally, I think I did come away with a lot of tips I could use that would help organizations improve their communication with and create opportunities to learn the organizational culture with their geographically dispersed team members.

Summary

This grounded theory research uncovered three key elements that impacted the learning, adoption, and integration of organizational culture by geographically dispersed team members: connectors, context, and connections. Connectors, such as enabling technology, structured work and socialization processes, and intentional dialog, provided the vehicle for dialog and learning to occur. Context provided the foundation for understanding of the implied meaning beneath the language and actions of others in the organization. Context included frames of reference, such as mental models, previous experiences and work competencies, as well as techniques used to search for contextual clues through observation and reading documentation. Connections included the relationships people have with the reporting manager, trusted colleagues, and the organization itself, in addition to trust, which is needed to develop those relationships.

This research has suggested that the stronger the connectors, context, and connections, the more likely it will be for dialog to occur which is a necessary first step in learning the organizational culture. The findings in this study have huge implications for organizations. Organizations can now be proactive in their efforts to create an environment that maximizes the co-construction of the effort of team member to fully understand and learn the culture.

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Appendix A

Participant Recruitment E-Mail

Greetings:

As some of you may know by now, I am in the final stages of my doctoral program in Organization Development at the University of St. Thomas which involves completing my dissertation. The purpose of this e-mail is to ask for your help finding participants to interview to complete my dissertation.

The primary purpose of this study is to a) understand how organizational culture is learned by team members who are geographically dispersed and b) determine how geographically dispersed team members actively adopt and integrate organizational culture into their work actions.

Participant Criteria

I am specifically looking for people work who:

1. work for a U.S. based organization to minimize national cultural influences
2. are geographically separated from their team, department, division, and/or parent company so that they need some type of technology to communicate with other organizational members and that visual and auditory cues are minimized
3. although it is unrealistic to assume that the participants have not visited the corporate offices or physical office space of the organization, they must spend more than 90% of their time working away from the physical presence of the organization, department, or team to lessen the exposure to physical and visual cultural cues
4. have worked more than 6 months at an organization to give them enough time to learn some of the culture in the organization
5. are currently in an organization and currently experiencing the organizational culture, so they are less reliant on past memories
6. have not worked part time or full time at the parent organization's physical space in the past so they are less likely to have picked up the organization's culture through physical proximity
7. understand and converse in English to minimize translation errors

Participants may work at a satellite office, client site, home, rental office, or any other physical location that is not part of the corporate organization's physical space in order to limit physical exposure to the corporate culture. Age, gender, nationality, race, national culture, company location, or industry type will not be considerations in this study.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and there is no financial benefit to participating. Information that is collected will be confidential and will be used in a manner that protects the privacy and identity of the participants.

Please think about people you know who you believe will qualify for this study and who might be interested in sharing their employment experiences. If you are interested and/or if you've identified a potential participant please do the following:

1. Call and/or forward this email to the person and ask them to contact me by email or phone if they'd like to learn more about the study or

2. Provide me with the contact information for the person and I will contact them directly and invite them to participate in the study.

Participant Recruitment Process

Participants who indicate an interest in participating in the study will receive more detailed information from me that describes what they will be asked to do, expected time requirements, sample interview questions, and confidentiality and identity protections as a study participant. I will also let the participant know that their involvement in the study is completely voluntary and will ask that they contact me directly should they have any questions or concerns about the study.

When applicable, I will disclose that they were recommended for the study and by whom, unless you specifically request that I not disclose your name. Due to the confidential nature of this study, I will not be able to disclose to you whether people you've recommended actually participate in the study. Despite this fact, I believe that this is valuable research that will have a positive impact on both employees and employers alike.

If you have any questions or unsure about whether you or someone you know will be qualified to participate in this study, please contact me at (telephone number removed to protect privacy) or skheidorn@stthomas.edu.

Thank you, in advance, for your help. Please feel free to contact me if you would like more information about my dissertation or to discuss a potential participant.

Warmest Regards

Susan K. Heidorn

University of St. Thomas Doctoral Candidate

Phone: (telephone number removed to protect privacy)

Email: skheidorn@stthomas.edu

Appendix B

Sample Invitation Email to Participants

Dear

My good friend / colleague XXX sent you an email earlier today regarding my dissertation research. Would you do me the honor of participating in my study and talk about your experiences in identifying, understanding, and working with the culture in your organization?

I am conducting a study on understanding how organizational culture is learned by team members who are geographically dispersed and how those geographically dispersed team members actively adopt and integrate organizational culture into their work actions. I am seeking a number of people to interview around this topic. The data I gather from these interviews will be used as part of my dissertation research for a doctorate degree in Organization Development at the University of St. Thomas.

I will need about 1-2 hours of your time to interview you about your experiences. The interview may take place in person if you are located in the Minneapolis, St. Paul Metro area, or if you are not located in the twin cities area, by phone, Skype or other communication technology.

This study will focus on your description of the culture in your organization, how you came to understand and learn the culture, and how you incorporate the organizational culture into your work life. By analyzing the data you provide along with others, common patterns will emerge that will enhance our understanding of how organizational culture is learned and integrated into the work efforts of organizational members who are geographically dispersed. As a result, it is anticipated that organizations may be able to provide a stronger infrastructure that supports the construction, learning and integration of organizational culture throughout the organization, thereby maximizing the success of geographically dispersed team members, increasing their productivity, developing a stronger identity, and enhancing the construction and transfer of knowledge throughout the organization.

If you elect to participate in this study, please note that all information about your experience and any data you provide will be anonymous and confidential.

Appendix C

Pre-Screening Interview Guide

This guide will be used when making first contact with potential candidates to verify their eligibility to participate in the study.

1. Candidate name
2. Country of residence
3. Name of company
4. Company headquarters location
5. Work location
6. Length of time participant has worked for this company
7. Job title
8. Job role
9. Type of geographically dispersed team(s) they belong to

Candidates must meet all of the following eligibility requirements:

1. Work for a U.S. based organization.
2. Are geographically separated from their team, department, division, and/or parent company so that they need some type of technology to communicate with other organizational members.
3. Spend more than 90% of their time working away from the physical presence of the organization, department, or team.
4. Have worked more than 6 months at an organization.
5. Are currently working with an organization.
6. Have not worked at the parent organization's physical space.
7. Understand and converse in English.

Appendix D

Interview Confirmation

Dear xx

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study. Our interview is scheduled for DATE at TIME by COMMUNICATION METHOD (In person, phone, Skype or other communication technology).

This study will focus on your description of the culture in your organization, how you came to understand and learn the culture, and how you incorporate the organizational culture into your work life. By analyzing the data you provide along with others, common patterns will emerge that will enhance our understanding of how organizational culture is learned and integrated into the work efforts of organizational members who are geographically dispersed. As a result, it is anticipated that organizations may be able to provide a stronger infrastructure that supports the construction, learning and integration of organizational culture throughout the organization, thereby maximizing the success of geographically dispersed team members, increasing their productivity, developing a stronger identity, and enhancing the construction and transfer of knowledge throughout the organization.

As we discussed, I have enclosed a set of initial questions that will be asked (although others may be asked during the interview), and a consent form. Please return the consent form to me in the stamped, self-addressed envelope that is enclosed.

If you need to reach me for any reason or have additional questions or concerns, you may contact me via email skheidorn@stthomas.edu or by phone 763-712-9005 (office) or 612-805-8590 (cell). I look forward to our conversation on DAY, DATE, and TIME.

Thank you so much for your willingness to help me with my research.

Warmest Regards,

Susan Kay Heidorn

University of St. Thomas - Doctoral Candidate

Enc.

Appendix E

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

A grounded theory study on how organizational culture is learned and adopted in the work lives of geographically dispersed team members.

IRB # B10- 224-02

I am conducting a study on understanding how organizational culture is learned by and integrate into the work actions of organizational team members who are geographically dispersed. I invite you to participate in this research. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You were selected as a possible participant because you met the participant criteria for this study. Please read this form and call me with any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Susan Kay Heidorn, Doctoral Candidate: Organization Development, University of St. Thomas. Chair: Rama Hart

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to understand how organizational culture is learned by team members who are geographically dispersed - what are the contributing factors and obstacles to learning organizational culture and how do geographically dispersed team members actively adopt and integrate organizational culture into their work actions.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: (1) Participate in a 1-2 hour interview. The interview will be held either in a location of your choosing if you are located the twin cities metropolitan area or via a communication technology of your choice. (2) Be available to review the general findings of the study to determine if they are consistent with your described experience.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Information will be gathered about your personal thoughts and feelings about your organization's culture, your ability to learn that culture, and your adoption of that culture into your work life. Your answers will be kept confidential and you will be given a unique identifier and pseudonym to protect your identity. All data will be kept confidential and secure in locked files or a password-protected media file. In the event that a transcriber is used, he/she will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. In addition, you will have the opportunity to review the preliminary findings to determine whether anything is included that may make it possible to identify you; if so, these statements will be removed or modified. There is no direct benefit of participating in the study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. Research records will be kept in a password-protected file and/or a locked file cabinet. A transcriber of these interviews will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement before having access to any data. Voice recordings will be erased and or destroyed within one month of the end of study when my dissertation is approved for publication, which is anticipated to be May, 2011. Per 141 guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (APA), all other data will be destroyed within five years of the publication of the dissertation (estimated to be May 2016).

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you can choose to “skip” or not answer any of the interview questions. You are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw the data collected about you will not be used in this study and will be immediately deleted.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Susan Heidorn. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-805-8590 or my advisor, Dr. Rama Hart at 651-962-4387. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and give my permission to have this session audio taped.

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix F

Confirm Research Understanding

The following questions were asked to assess the subject's understanding of his/her participation in your research prior to the start of the interview.

1. Tell me what this study about?
2. Explain what you will be asked to do in this study?
3. Please explain the risks involved in the study.
4. How will your information be kept confidential?
5. What is your understanding of the voluntary nature of this study?
6. What are your concerns about participating in the study?

Appendix G

Original Interview Guide

Because this is a grounded theory study, these questions may change during the course of my interviews and analysis effort.

Personal Demographics

Participant Name	Interview Date & Time
Country of residence	Industry
Nationality of Company Headquarters	Job Title/Position
Years working for this organization	Job Responsibilities (brief)
Work location: (home office, satellite office, client site)	Part Time/Full Time
How does your job fit into the organization?	Team Types

Sample Interview Questions with Probes

1. Describe the overall culture of the organization.
 - 1.1. What does it mean to work for ~~xxx-xyz~~ organization?
 - 1.2. How would you characterize the culture of this company?
 - 1.3. Describe what it is like to work for this company?
 - 1.4. When you began working for this organization, what surprised you in the way things worked?
 - 1.5. Is there a difference in the culture of those you work with and the organization? Describe those differences.
2. Describe the artifacts of the organization (policies, brands, etc.),
 - 2.1. What do they mean to you? How did you learn their meaning?
3. Think about your place of work, its history and traditions. How does it relate to your own values and ways of doing things?
4. Describe the norms of this organization
 - 4.1. How are you expected to perform in your job? How do you know that?
 - 4.2. What are the boundaries you should not cross in this organization? What would get people into trouble? How did you learn what these boundaries were?
 - 4.3. What behaviors get rewarded? How did you learn this?
 - 4.4. What are the key characteristics and behaviors does the organization values the most? How did you find this out?
5. What does your organization value?
 - 5.1. How is information shared? What information is not shared? How did you learn what to share or not to share?
 - 5.2. How do you know what information is important to pay attention to?
 - 5.3. How are decisions made? How did you learn this?
6. How did you learn the culture?
 - 6.1. Through what key vehicles (stories, observations, reading, emails, etc.)
 - 6.2. What challenges did you encounter?
 - 6.3. What are the barriers to learning the culture?

- 6.4. What structures support transferring organizational culture and information?
7. Describe how you incorporate the organizational culture into the work action and decision making
 - 7.1. How is the culture of the organization reflected in your actions and behavior?
 - 7.2. How do you communicate the culture with others in the organization?
 - 7.3. How does the organizational culture impact your actions and decisions?
 - 7.4. What work behaviors have you changed since working in this culture (e.g. the way you conduct meetings, the decisions you make, the information you focus on, determining work priorities)
8. Closing Questions
 - 8.1. Are there any questions that I didn't ask that you think are important to this interview and study?
 - 8.2. Do you have any additional information to add beyond what we have already talked about?

Appendix H

Final Interview Guide

Personal Demographics

Participant Name	Interview Date & Time
Country of residence	Job Title/Position
Nationality of Company Headquarters	Job Responsibilities (brief)
Industry	Years working for this organization
Work location: (home office, satellite office, client site)	Part Time/Full Time
Size	Team Types

Sample Interview Questions with Probes

1. Describe the overall culture of the organization.
 - a. What does it mean to work for xxx organization?
 - b. How would you characterize the culture of this company?
 - c. When you began working for this organization, what surprised you in the way things worked?
 - d. Is there a difference in the culture of those you work with and the organization? Describe those differences?
2. Think about your place of work, its history and traditions. How does it relate to your own values and ways of doing things?
3. Describe the norms of this organization
 - a. How are you expected to perform in your job? How do you know that?
 - b. What are the boundaries you should not cross in this organization? What would get people into trouble? How did you learn what these boundaries were?
 - c. What behaviors get rewarded? How did you learn this?
 - d. What are the key characteristics and behaviors does the organization values the most? How did you find this out?
4. What does your organization value?
 - a. How is information shared? What information is not shared? How did you learn what to share or not to share?
 - b. How do you know what information is important to pay attention to?
5. How did you learn the culture?
 - a. Through what key vehicles (stories, observations, reading, emails, etc.)?
 - b. What challenges did you encounter? What are the barriers to learning the culture?
 - c. What structures support transferring organizational culture and information?
 - d. What would have been in place to learn the culture more easily?
6. Describe how you incorporate the organizational culture into the work.
 - a. How is the culture of the organization reflected in your actions and behavior?
 - b. How do you communicate the culture with others in the organization?
 - c. How does the organizational culture impact your actions and decisions?
 - d. What work behaviors have you changed since working in this culture (e.g. the way you conduct meetings, the decisions you make, the information you focus on, determining work priorities)?

Closing Questions

7. Are there any questions that I didn't ask that you think are important to this interview and study?

Appendix I

Transcriber Confidentiality Statement

In your role as a transcriber, you may be given access to personal information, thoughts, and reflections of the participants in this study. In order to maintain the trust between the University of St. Thomas and its research participants, I have established the following guidelines for the use of information.

- Information that is provided on the digital audio files is private. It should not be shared with anyone other than Susan Heidorn, the principal researcher, for any reason.
- All information is to be kept confidential and shall be stored in password protected files when on the computer, and locked files when in print form. All digital audio files and transcribed documents are to be destroyed within three (3) days of transferring the information to Susan Heidorn.

I have read, understand and agree to comply with this Confidentiality Statement.

Printed name

Signature

Date

Appendix J

Focused Coding: Re-categorization of Categories and Codes

Category	Code
Barriers to learning the culture	Communication challenges Geographical barriers Guarded communication Little interaction with others Little or no documentation Little or no formal training Little sharing of information Making up stories with the lack of information Misalignment of what organization does & says Mismatched expectations Mis-matched values Mistrust of the organization Mixed messages No clear mission or vision No dialog - this is the way it is No face to face No feeling of interest or care No one discusses the culture No relationship no trust with boss No set deadlines or expectations must ask No support No vested interest when company is not interested in the person Not having a big picture view Out of sight out of mind Poor communication tools or difficult connections Speed of change and speed of work Unable to participate in the culture Withholding information from the employees

Category	Code
Behavioral boundaries	Don't disrespect a fellow worker or client Follow the hierarchical boundaries Going beyond the boundaries for clients Hiding the real organization How to work with different groups Living within compliance boundaries Monitored emails Policy boundaries Staying within the rules
Characteristics of a successful employee	Ability to ask questions Ability to build relationships Ability to work independently Ability to be adaptable Acts with integrity Be able to follow the rules Be comfortable ambiguity Being entrepreneurial Being self-disciplined Experienced professional Fitting into the culture Good communicator Make their own decisions People who can get the job done
Collaborating with others	Collaborative decision making Collective conversations Operating as a team Setting expectations together Sharing data information Working on projects together Working together on teams

Category	Code
Communication types	Ad hoc meetings when needed Clear communication Consistent messages to workers and clients Customizing communication to fit the needs of the audience Face to face meetings Flexibility in communication Focused communication Formal approved communication versus underground communication Frequent communication Indirect communication Informal communication Open communication Prioritizing communication Respectful communication Safe communication with trusted colleagues Scheduled meetings Setting expectations Siloed communication
Developing strong relationships	Bonding with others Developing relationships through social in person opportunities Earning trust with people Getting to know other people Influencing others Taking initiative to build strong relationships

Category	Code
Dialog between other people	Asking questions Conversations with the boss Conversations with trust colleagues and friends Determining meaning through conversations Finding safe people to talk to Having authentic conversations with others In person communication Learning through discussion with others Learning together Listening Participating in ad hoc discussions Rules of engagement through discussion and process Talking about the culture Talking about what we do Training by boss Transferring knowledge Use of language
Experiential learning	Informal coaching and mentoring Learning by trial and error
Forming the organizational culture	Creating culture through action Creating culture through dialog Environmental influences - client-economy-geography Forming culture through founding members Forming culture via strong personalities Leadership forms the culture Mission influences the culture

Category	Code
Getting feedback from others	Announcing infractions via email False feedback Fear of getting negative feedback Fear of losing your job Feedback from boss Feedback from others Feedback from owner Feedback from the client Formal reviews from management Frequent check ins Getting feedback through no communication Getting negative feedback Immediate feedback Measuring success Reigning people in Reviewing work approach
Getting rewarded for special behaviors	Asking for more work or extra projects Being a team player Following the policies & mission Getting positive feedback & appreciation Getting rewards and kudos Meeting performance objectives
Integrating the culture into participant's work life	Aligning what you say and do modeling the behavior Carrying org culture to other environments Changing the way we work Changing the way you communicate
Taking initiative to learn the culture	Personal accountability for learning Willingness to ask for help

Category	Code
Looking for clues about the culture	Clues in the interviewing process Common characteristics of people hired Learning culture through the boss Learning from people outside the organization Learning through observation Learning through the work you do Listening for non-verbal cues Listening to stories Looking at the client niche they serve Looking at the website Looking for ways to fit in Marketing Information Observing artifacts Observing misalignment between words & actions Observing others Our own beliefs about how the culture should be Past history with people Publishing where people stand in the organization Reading documentation Skimming emails looking for clues & info Understanding decision making in the organization Understanding people by their past jobs Understanding peoples roles in the organization Understanding personality differences Understanding work expectations Using past experience What the boss pays attention to Working members of management Working with people experienced in the culture
Mission as a key component of the organizational culture	Aligning mission and action Consistent messages Incorporating the mission in work Living the mission Memorizing the mission and message Mission alignment to artifacts Product focused Providing a symbol to remember the mission Repeating the message Telling stories Understanding the mission

Category	Code
Other subcultures that influence the participant	Business unit subcultures Client culture as an overriding culture Corporate culture versus functional cultures Functional subcultures Geographical cultures Industry culture Professional culture
Providing for the needs of the individual	Caring for the needs of the organizational member Creating a welcoming environment Employ feels valued Feeling of equality Freedom to make decisions Getting the job done Helping people being successful Open to contributions Personal support Respect for people
Organizational structures	Create an Intranet site Documented cultural artifacts Documented expectations Documented policies, processes, checklists Formal communication plans Formal training Having consistent meetings Planned face to face meetings Provide communication tools Strong support structures & processes
Transference vehicles	Coaching & mentoring Encourage communication Formal meetings with agendas Informal training Letting people participate Provide formal training

Category	Code
Values alignment	Aligning organizational values to client values Aligning personal values with client values Being true to your own values Bringing in revenue Doing the right thing for the client Helping others be successful Making a difference in the company Modeling success for cultural change Passion for what you are doing Personal values align with corporate values Providing value to the client Work aligns with personal work style Working with people with the same values

Appendix K

Theoretical Coding: Identification of Key Themes, Categories, and Codes

Sub-Theme	Category	Codes
Personal frames of reference	Mental Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts with integrity Begin true to your values Personal work ethic Doing the right thing for the client Helping others be successful Making a difference in the organization Our own belief about how the culture should be Passion for what you are doing Providing value to the client
	Past experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characteristics of a successful team Experienced professional Past communication experience Past history with people Understanding different personalities Using past experience
	Past cultural experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographical cultures Industry cultures Professional cultures
Work competencies		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to work independently Ability to be adaptable Being self-disciplined Personal accountability for learning Personal work ethic Willingness to ask for help

Sub-Theme	Category	Codes
Enabling organizational structures	Clear purpose and mission	Aligning mission and action Consistent messages Incorporating the mission in the work Memorizing the mission and messages Mission alignment to artifacts Mixed messages No clear mission or vision Providing a symbol to remember the mission Telling stories Understanding the mission
	Documented expectations	Meeting performance objectives Understanding work expectations Mismatched expectations No set deadlines or expectations
	Set boundaries	Don't disrespect a fellow worker or client Follow the hierarchical boundaries Follow policies and mission Living within compliance boundaries Monitored emails Staying within the rules
	Support processes	Documented cultural artifacts Documented policies and processes Formal approved communication Formal training Little or no formal training Out of sight, out of mind Planned communication Publishing where people stand Scheduled meeting Strong support structures and procedures
	Support and communication technology	Email In-person communication Instant messaging Intranets / website NetMeeting Skype Phone

Poor communication tools

Sub-Theme	Category	Codes
Learning techniques	Informal learning techniques	Clues in the interviewing process Coaching and mentoring Getting feedback Learning through dialog Learning through the work you do Talking about the culture Working with experienced people Learning by trial and error Learning through observation Looking at the client niche they serve Looking for clues though listening & artifacts Looking for patterns of behavior Working on projects together Working together on teams
	Formal learning techniques	Knowledge transfer Orientation programs Training programs
Communities of influence	Organizational leadership	Forming the culture through founding members Forming culture via a strong person Leadership forms the culture Working management
	Trusted colleagues or friends	Conversations with trusted colleague Finding safe people to talk to Learning form people from the outside Safe communication with trusted colleagues
	Environmental influences	Environmental Influences Client culture Economics Speed of change

Sub-Theme	Category	Codes
Contributing factors to learning organizational culture	Relationship with the “boss”	Conversations with the boss Feedback from the boss Learning culture through the boss Setting expectations with the boss Training by the boss What the boss pays attention to No relationship or trust with the boss Low conversations with the boss
	Dialog opportunities	Collaborative decision making Collective conversations Operating as a team Setting expectations together Sharing data information No one talks about the culture
	Developing strong relationships	Ability to build relationships Bonding with others Developing relationships Getting to know other people Influencing others Taking initiative to build strong relationships
	Socialization opportunities	Ad hoc meetings when needed Face to face meetings In person communication Informal communication Little interaction with others Needed face to face connections No face to face
	Trust	Earning trust with people Fear of getting negative feedback Fear of losing your job Guarded communication Withholding information

Sub-Theme	Category	Codes
Contributing factors to adoption and integration	Values alignment	Aligning organizational values to client Aligning personal values with client values Goring beyond the boundaries for client Mismatched values Personal values align with corporate values Work aligns with personal values Working with people with the same values
	Engagement	Asking for more work and extra projects Creating culture through action Freedom to make decisions Getting rewards and kudos Looking for ways to fit in Open to contributions Reigning people in Unable to participate in the culture
	Personal respect	Ability to help others be successful Caring for employees Employees fee valued Feelings of equality Getting positive feedback Personal support Respect for people Respectful communication
Adopting & integrating the culture	Adoption / integration	Carrying organizational culture to other environments Changing the way you work Changing the way you communicate
	Transference	Encourage communication Formal meetings with agendas Information training Letting people participate Provide formal training