

EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MULTI-PARTNER LEADERSHIP
CHARACTERIZED BY SHARED AND EQUAL DECISION-MAKING
AUTHORITY (SEDMA) AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Leadership characterized by multiple partners with shared and equal decision-making authority (SEDMA) is a unique leadership structure. The dynamics of this structure influence organizational culture differently than other types of leadership. Conversely, organizational culture also influences the decision-making process of this leadership structure differently. The unique nature of a shared and equal partnership and its reciprocal relationship with organizational culture is an under-studied topic. Many of the studies of these constructs approach the relationship between leadership and culture from a prescriptive view. Many researchers view organizational culture as something that can be manipulated by leaders to meet goals. This study argues that leaders are as much influenced by culture as they influence culture and this relationship is more complicated when unique leadership structures are involved. The purpose of this study was to explore the dynamics of SEDMA leadership and how it influences culture and is influenced by culture.

This study utilized a focused, realist ethnography grounded in a seminal organizational cultural theory to explore the relationship between SEDMA leadership and organizational culture. For 10 months I collected data from a small professional services firm with three partners who had shared and equal decision-making authority. I utilized semi-structured interviews, observations, and job shadowing to explore the relationship between leadership and culture in this organization.

Findings suggest that for SEDMA leadership to be successful, partners must have mutual respect and well-defined roles and responsibilities, recognize each strengths and weaknesses, have a long-standing relationship, understand the culture of their organization, and adapt and change as organizational and partner needs change. In addition, the study suggests that SEDMA leadership creates a fragmented culture characterized by ambiguity on cultural manifestations. The findings also show SEDMA leadership is impacted and influenced by culture, indicating a reciprocal relationship between leadership and culture.

Results from this study suggest a new form of leadership, SEDMA leadership, and provide more evidence of the reciprocal relationship between leadership and culture. The results indicate a need for future study in the area of SEDMA leadership and its relationship with organizational culture to add to Human Resource Development (HRD) theory, research, and practice.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my ever-patient, loving, and supportive husband, Jeffery Fellows. It is also dedicated to my parents Tom and Janet Whitener whose love and support not only encouraged me to start this journey, but who were also with me every step of the way. Finally, this is dedicated to my Meme and Pop, Mary Beth and Eugene Scott, who taught me the value and importance of education and life-long learning from a very young age.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
Prescriptive View of Organizational Culture	2
Leadership and Culture Relationship	3
Leadership	4
Influencing Culture.....	5
Shared and Equal Decision-Making Authority (SEDMA) Leadership.....	7
Studying Organizational Culture.....	11
Martin’s Organizational Culture Theory	11
Purpose of the Study	12
Research Questions	13
Method.....	14
Definition of Terms	14
Significance.....	19
Delimitations	21
Chapter Outline	22
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	23
Leadership	23
Leadership as a Shared Construct	26
Organizational Culture	34
Single Perspective Culture Studies.....	35
Relationship between Leadership and Organizational Culture	41
Conclusion.....	46

CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY	48
Research Questions	48
Methodology Overview	49
Research Design	51
Data Collection.....	54
Data Analysis	58
Standards of Trustworthiness	60
Limitations.....	64
Role as Ethnographer	65
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS.....	67
Organization of the Data	68
Characteristics and Dynamics of the Partnership.....	69
Division of Ownership	69
Partner Roles and Responsibilities	71
Partnership Dynamic	80
Orientation to Consensus	86
Employee Perception of Organizational Culture.....	86
Values.....	89
Customer Service	90
Partners Value Employees.....	93
Type of Employees at Office Experts (OE)	97
Human Resources (HR) Practices	98
Keys to Office Experts (OE) Success.....	102
Relation among Manifestations.....	109
Physical Arrangement	110
Founding Story	111
Dress Code	114
Rumors and Gossip	115
Celebrations.....	117
Orientation to Ambiguity	118
Partner’s Leadership Style.....	119
Communication	125
Employee Perception of the Partnership	128
Richard’s Absence.....	128
Inequality in Employee Treatment.....	133
Trust.....	134
The Economy	134
Human Resources (HR) Practices	136
Conclusion.....	138

CHAPTER V CONCLUSION	140
Summary of Study.....	141
Theoretical Framework	141
Method.....	142
Data Collection.....	143
Data Analysis	143
Interpretation of Findings.....	144
Overview of Interpretation of Findings.....	144
Shared and Equal Decision-Making Authority (SEDMA) Partnership	
Dynamic and Leadership Structure	148
Reciprocal Relationship between Shared and Equal Decision-Making	
Authority (SEDMA) and Culture.....	150
The Three-Perspective Cultural Analysis Approach.....	153
Organizational Cultural Findings	155
Negotiated Leadership.....	157
Why Shared and Equal Decision-Making Authority (SEDMA)	
Leadership Works for Office Experts (OE)	158
Why Richard, John, and Laura’s Partnership Works	159
Addressing the Literature Gap	162
Contributions to Human Resource Development (HRD) Research.....	164
Organization Development (OD) Research	164
Training and Development Research	165
Career Development Research	165
Contributions to Human Resource Development (HRD) Practice.....	166
Organization Development (OD) Practice	166
Training and Development Practice	166
Career Development Practice	167
Areas of Future Research	168
Reflection on the Study.....	169
Conclusion.....	171
REFERENCES.....	172
APPENDIX A SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	179
APPENDIX B SECOND ROUND SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL	
INTERVIEW GUIDE	181
APPENDIX C OBSERVATION PROTOCOL	184

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Martin's Complementarity of Three Theoretical Perspectives	37
Table 2. Trice and Beyer's Categories and Examples of Cultural Forms	40

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the prevailing myths about culture is top leadership creates it, manages it, and changes it (Keyton, 2011). As the popularity of the concept of organizational culture began to rise in the mid-1980s, scholars professed that organizational culture was a leadership panacea, a cure-all for every organizational problem. One of the first to espouse this view was Schein (2010), who treats organizational culture as a tool for a leader to use to increase organizational effectiveness. This prescriptive view of culture as a leadership instrument permeates the literature on leadership and culture. Today studies still approach culture as a tool for leadership to utilize to reach a desired goal. A few of the most recent studies include Muls et al. (2015); Stanislavov and Ivanov (2014); Kusy and Holloway (2014); Azanza, Moriano, and Molero (2013); O'Reilly, Caldwell, Chatman, and Doerr (2014); and Dan, Liu, Hsu, and Yu (2014). Eisenberg and Riley (2001) note this approach “[leadership] treats culture as values or practices that account for an organization’s success and that can be managed to produce better business outcomes” (p. 309). The philosophy that dominates this view of culture and leadership considers culture as something to be “harnessed to achieve both operational and strategic goals” (Brown, 1992, p. 3). Keyton (2011) further highlights this point from a management perspective, asserting “the term organizational culture became synonymous with everything that was right or wrong with an organization” (p. 93).

Prescriptive View of Organizational Culture

This prescriptive view of the relationship between leadership and culture instrumentalizes culture. Those who hold the prescriptive view of culture believe organizational culture can be analyzed easily and then manipulated and changed at the organizational level to achieve organizational goals, implement strategy, and create success; however, this view does not take into account organizational structure or leadership. For example, Schein (2010) advocates for the use of culture as an organizational development intervention. He believes a leader can diagnose a culture, then change and manipulate aspects of that culture to reach a desired organizational change. Popular business literature is rife with books like Cameron and Quinn's (2011) *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework*, which focuses on providing leaders with strategies and tactics for changing an organization's culture with little mention of the complex relationship between leadership and culture. Such formulaic, prescriptive approaches disregard culture's effect on the leader and disregard the leader as part of the culture itself. These prescriptive approaches on the relationship between leadership and culture underestimate the complexity of the relationship between leadership and culture.

Trice and Beyer (1993) highlight the need for an expanded perspective:

Managers, who try to manage, change or establish organizational cultures will surely run into unexpected difficulties and disappointments if they do not understand the nature of culture itself . . . Some mistaken assumptions that managers can easily make:

- that they can unilaterally decide what the culture of their firm should and will be,
- that a single homogenous culture can be easily created,
- that having a culture is largely positive and functional, and
- that culture arises from what managers say rather than what they do. (p. 356)

The prescriptive view of the relationship between leadership and culture undermines the complexity inherent in the two constructs. This perspective lacks the depth and rigor to fully understand the impact leadership and organizational culture have on one another. Without a broader understanding of how the two variables impact one another in an organizational setting, it is difficult or impossible to provide understanding and knowledge to leaders and members of organizations that will help them lead and work successfully.

Leadership and Culture Relationship

When leadership is added to the study of culture, understanding how the phenomena of culture and leadership interact and impact each other becomes more difficult. At a basic level, there is a relationship between leadership and culture—culture influences leadership and leadership influences culture. As Keyton (2011) points out, “Leadership does not arise magically from a neutral sociopolitical environment. Rather,

leadership develops from organizational culture, from within an existing pattern of artifacts, values and assumptions” (p. 153). To make decisions within a culture, it is imperative that a leader understand the culture of the organization and actively participate in that culture. For example, Alvesson (2013) notes “most people expected to exercise leadership in their jobs are much more strongly influenced by organizational culture than they are involved in actively producing it” (p. 114). He goes on to suggest a “precondition for changing culture is to connect to it” (Alvesson, 2013, pp. 114 - 115). Thus, to understand the influences of culture on leadership is crucial for understanding how to lead. It is equally important to know the nuances of the culture to be an effective leader.

Leadership

Just as organizational culture is a much-studied concept, so is leadership (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberget al., 2004; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). This is in part evidenced by the many definitions of leadership that proliferate in the literature on the subject (Stodgill, 1974). Northouse (2016) cites, “In the past 60 years, as many as 65 different classification systems have been developed to define the dimensions of leadership (Fleishman et al., 1991)” (p. 5). As many definitions of leadership exist as theories to explain the concept of leadership (Northouse, 2016); however, all of these definitions include the same essential components: process, influence, a group context, and goal attainment (Northouse, 2016). These elements are important in examining any form of leadership. How they are enacted defines and delineates one leadership theory from another.

A majority of the work examining the relationship between leadership and culture focuses on individual leadership or derives from a management perspective, and it offers a variety of views on how leadership impacts culture (Alvesson, 2013; Keyton, 2011; Martin, 2002; Schein, 2010; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Many posit that leaders can have an impact on culture through formal control, function, and authority; however, such studies underestimate the dynamic and fluid nature of leadership (Martin, 2002; Schein, 2010). Mohan (1993) suggests effective leaders facilitate a vision rather than impose a culture on an organization and from that vision, a culture will evolve. For the purposes of this study, I examined the relationship between culture and leadership as one in which the two variables are co-constructed—leadership impacts and influences culture, and culture impacts and shapes leadership.

Influencing Culture

Individual leaders can have a variety of influences on culture. Some scholars suggest that leaders can change a culture simply by deciding what the culture should be and putting it in place through formal policies, rule changes, dress codes, physical arrangements, practices, etc. (Schein, 2010; Smircich & Morgan, 1982); however, this perspective oversimplifies the process of the influence of culture on leadership. The influence of leadership on culture is, as Mohan (1993) suggests, to facilitate an inspiring vision from which culture manifests. The leader's goal is to use methods to influence the culture and to understand how the culture is influencing his or her decisions about when and how to use those methods to inspire a vision. Individual leaders can impact culture through:

- Controlling resources and deciding how those resources are directed
- Deciding where attention is directed in the organization
- Determining processes by which rewards are handed out
- Deciding what gets measured
- Coaching and teaching of employees
- Designing systems and procedures
- Endorsing rites and rituals
- Displaying and privileging artifacts
- Instituting formal practices
- Telling and embedding stories and myths about the organization
- Using metaphors in organizational communication
- Shaping organizational norms through informal actions
- Deciding dress code and physical arrangements (Keyton, 2011)

“These formal management mechanisms reinforce their assumptions and values and set in motion a series of procedures and practices that get other organizational members to do the same,” asserts Keyton (2011, p. 150). These assumptions and values are the core of the organizational culture and, through shifting resources and attention, leaders signal a value shift in the organization that shapes the culture. Alvesson (2013) emphasizes a key point about the culture-and-leadership relationship, “This [leadership as a culture-influencing activity] does not mean that leadership creates or drastically changes culture, only that leadership is a cultural manifestation influencing other cultural

manifestations, such as shared understanding of objectives, technologies, and environments” (p. 111). The impact of these influences can be either positive or negative. The individual leaders who make these decisions send a message over time to the organization about the culture that becomes embedded.

Shared and Equal Decision-Making Authority (SEDMA) Leadership

As discussed earlier, there are many theories and types of leadership (Northouse, 2016). I have been discussing the relationship between leadership and culture from an individual leadership perspective. I briefly examined the complexity of the relationship between an individual leader and organizational culture; however, that relationship becomes even more complex with the addition of second and subsequent leaders. Most theories of culture and leadership do not account for multiple leaders with equal authority and this leadership structure’s impact on the relationship between leadership and culture. A multi-partner leadership structure dictates how decisions are made; who has authority, influence, and power; and ultimately, who influences culture. This study focuses on the relationship between culture and multi-partner leadership. This section discusses the choice to focus on multi-partner leadership.

One such type of leadership is an organization that is led by multiple leaders with shared and equal decision-making authority (SEDMA) and power. This type of organization poses an even more complex relationship when studying leadership and culture. Current literature and theory regarding leadership do not provide an adequate frame for understanding how leadership is negotiated and enacted in the context of partnerships characterized by SEDMA. This type of leadership structure, SEDMA

leadership, is defined as two or more leaders at an equal level in the organization with shared and equal decision-making authority. One person is not the primary decision-maker or leader. The partners make joint leadership decisions and have a close interpersonal exchange while doing so. Leadership is negotiated among the partners on an ongoing basis. While each partner in the relationship has the authority to make individual leadership decisions, those decisions affect the partnership and are often discussed and negotiated as well.

After extensive literature review, I concluded there is a lack of research in this area, which, if studied, could lead to a greater understanding of the reciprocal nature of leadership and culture. The aim of this study was to begin to examine how the dynamics of decision making in a SEDMA leadership structure, as well as SEDMA leadership itself, impact culture and are impacted by culture. Wood (2005) sums up this need for further leadership theory development in the area of SEDMA leadership, “Current leadership research now has begun to generate new knowledge about leadership practice in relations of interpersonal exchange. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need for the ramifications of this insight to be more sufficiently developed” (p. 1101). Those ramifications include the reciprocal nature of SEDMA leadership and culture. Yammarino, Salas, Serban, Shirreffs, and Shuffler (2012) point to the need for more study on collective or shared leadership structures, “We believe that these new collectivistic leadership approaches are an important development for both science and practice in the leadership field” (p. 383). They go on to highlight the limited number of empirical studies in the field of collective leadership theory and research (Yammarino et

al., 2012). Currently, there is a lack of rigorous research into the phenomenon of SEDMA leadership that needs to be addressed. This is a relatively unexplored area of the leadership landscape.

While scholars (Alvesson, 2013; Martin, 2002; Keyton, 2011) have acknowledged the need for research to understand the relationship between leadership and culture, very few have examined how different leadership structures impact the reciprocal relationship between the two constructs. SEDMA leadership is one type of leadership structure that influences culture differently based on how decisions are made. It is important not only to understand how leadership in general impacts culture, but also to understand how different types of structures influence and are influenced by culture. As organizations diversify and change their leadership structures, it impacts the culture of the organization and how a leader is influenced by that culture.

Thus, the goal of this study was to explore the reciprocal relationship between organizational culture and SEDMA leadership. Given the lack of research on SEDMA leadership in general, very little has been done in the area of how SEDMA leadership interacts with culture. While the relationship between individual leadership and organizational culture is complex, SEDMA leadership adds a layer of complexity to the discussion of culture and leadership. The dynamic between multiple leaders with equal decision-making authority changes the nature of leadership and how it influences culture and how it is influenced by culture.

For example, the negotiation of leadership involved in a partnership leads to negotiated decisions, which influence culture, such as allocation of resources. This

directly impacts the way culture is influenced. If one partner decides to allocate more resources to one area of the organization over another, the partner is implicitly showing what is of more value to that leader. If another partner disagrees with this allocation and lets it be known that he or she values another part of the organization more, the potential for conflict in the culture of the organization arises, and subcultures begin to be created (Martin, 2002). The partners have demonstrated through their actions and practices that they value different parts of the organization more highly than others. Thus, through their conflicting actions they have embedded part of the organization's value structure, which may be in conflict.

Furthermore, each leader may be influenced differently by the culture and may have differing ideas about how to lead in that culture (Martin, 2002). This leads to different partners having different ideas about culture impacting decisions and potential conflict over those decisions. In an individual leadership situation, one leader may promote a specific ritual or privilege an organizational story; through this action he or she sends one consistent cultural message (Trice & Beyer, 1993). In a SEDMA leadership situation there are multiple leaders with equal authority who may or may not be promoting the same ritual or privileging the same story, which has the potential to send mixed cultural messages. In addition, different partners attributing value to different aspects of the organizational culture could confuse the cultural and political landscape for organizational members by their actions. It is, therefore, important to understand how this type of leadership structure influences culture differently than other

leadership structures. This is important in order to provide understanding of leadership and culture to both leaders and organizational members in these types of organizations.

Studying Organizational Culture

In order to explore the relationship between SEDMA leadership and organizational culture, a framework for studying culture is needed. This study will use Martin's (2002) three-perspective theory of culture as its guiding framework. Martin's (2002) theory is a seminal work on organizational culture and provides a frame through which to analyze the data. Martin's three perspectives help us to understand leadership structure and the reciprocal nature of leadership and culture. This theory will be discussed in detail in Chapter II, but it is helpful to have a brief overview in order to fully understand the research question and terms described below.

Martin's Organizational Culture Theory

Martin (2002) advocates for the use of a three-part typology as a theoretical foundation for conducting research on organizational culture. The three approaches defined by Martin (2002) are the integration perspective, the differentiation perspective, and the fragmentation perspective. Martin (2002) delineates the differences between these three perspectives utilizing three key variables: *orientation to consensus*, *relation among manifestations*, and *orientation to ambiguity*. The first variable, orientation to consensus, illustrates how one of Martin's perspectives views the need for consensus about culture in an organization. The second variable, relation among manifestations, concentrates on the degree to which the cultural manifestations, either material or

symbolic as evidenced in a given organization, reinforce or contradict each other (e.g., stories, dress, symbols, rituals, practices, and physical arrangements). The final variable, orientation to ambiguity, focuses on how those in an organization handle ambiguity found in a specific culture (Martin, 2002). How each of Martin's perspectives view the role of each of these variables defines how the cultural research is conducted, what is studied, and what is emphasized about a specific culture, thus defining the perspective.

Martin's theory provides the framework for this study, grounds the research question, and helps define the terms used in this work. Part of studying culture is examining cultural ideologies. Cultural ideologies are the core substance of culture and are evidence of the culture (Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Thus, this study examined ideologies, as well as manifestations, to understand the relationship between culture and leadership characterized by SEDMA. The following sections highlight the statement of the problem, the research question and the terms used, as well as the significance and limitations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the reciprocal relationship between organizational culture and SEDMA leadership. This understanding could perhaps begin to offer a richer view of the relationship between organizational culture and a unique form of leadership that moves beyond the prescriptive, variable approaches that use culture as a leadership tool to enact change (Alvesson, 2013). This study investigated the relationship between culture and SEDMA leadership in an attempt to gain deeper insights into how these aspects of organizational life impact each other.

A leadership structure characterized with shared decision making often results in conflict and tensions that impact and are manifested in the culture of the organization (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013; Lencioni, 2006; Martin, 2002). These tensions and conflict have the potential to influence and affect the culture and leadership of the organization in such a way that the organization is unable to operate effectively, leaving organizational members at all levels searching for understanding of the organization in which they work. Without an understanding of the relationship between culture and leadership, it is very difficult for leaders to lead the organization (Martin, 2002). Leadership characterized by SEDMA further complicates the relationship between culture and leadership. Therefore, a greater understanding of how SEDMA-based leadership and culture are linked is needed.

Research Questions

The two research questions guiding this study were:

- What effect does a leadership structure characterized by partners with shared and equal decision-making authority (SEDMA) have on a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity?
- What effect does a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity have on a leadership structure characterized by partners with SEDMA?

Method

Given that this study focused on leadership and culture, I felt the most appropriate methodology was a focused, realist ethnography. An ethnographic approach allowed me to study the relationship between SEDMA leadership and organizational culture in-depth. I spent 10 months on site at a small professional services firm with 12 employees collecting data. I collected data using observations and field notes, semi-structured interviews, job shadowing, pictures of the physical arrangements, and an investigator's diary. I analyzed the data using a constant comparative qualitative coding method. I coded and sorted data a total of 10 times. I met the following standards of trustworthiness: purposeful sampling; prolonged engagement; data triangulation; referential adequacy materials; member checking; reflexive journaling; and the use of rich, thick description.

Definition of Terms

Several terms are essential to understanding the research question guiding this study:

- *SEDMA leadership* involves two or more leaders sharing leadership in an organization. They have shared and equal decision-making authority (SEDMA); one leader is not the primary decision maker or leader. They make joint leadership decisions and have a close interpersonal exchange while doing so. Leadership is negotiated among the leaders on an ongoing basis. While each person in the relationship has the authority to make

individual leadership decisions, those decisions affect the leadership structure and are often discussed and negotiated.

- *Cultural ideologies* are the core substance of a culture. Ideologies, as defined by Trice and Beyer (1993), are “shared, relatively coherently interrelated sets of emotionally charged beliefs, values, and norms that bind some people together and help them make sense of their worlds” (p. 33). They are the norms, beliefs, and values of a culture that are not tangible or visible. However, they are shared and understood among the organization and form the content of the culture that is then evidenced through cultural forms and manifestations. These ideologies are the core sense-making mechanism for organizational members. Through these shared cultural beliefs, people make sense of how to operate and work within an organization (Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993).
- *Cultural manifestations, elements, or forms* are how culture is evidenced in an organization (Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). They include rites, rituals, narratives, physical arrangements, metaphors, dress, practices, symbols, artifacts, jargon, slang, songs, signs, humor, gossip, rumors, legends, myths, sagas, taboos, ceremonies, and slogans. Cultural forms are the concrete, tangible evidence of a culture that provide the clues

that reveal the ideologies of the culture (Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993).

- *Orientation to consensus* is one of three variables used to study culture and cultural agreement aimed at understanding the cultural ideologies present in an organization. It refers to the degree to which organizational members need consensus about cultural manifestations (Martin, 2002).
- *Relation among manifestations* is one of three variables used to study culture and cultural agreement aimed at understanding the cultural ideologies present in an organization. It refers to the degree to which the cultural manifestations—either material or symbolic—evidenced in a given organization reinforce or contradict each other (Martin, 2002).
- *Orientation to ambiguity* is one of three variables used to study culture and cultural agreement aimed at understanding the cultural ideologies present in an organization. It refers to the degree to which the organization either embraces or rejects ambiguity about manifestations of culture (Martin, 2002).
- *Integration perspective* is one of three theoretical perspectives on organizational culture. The integration perspective focuses on consensus (not always unanimity) throughout the organization at all levels and excludes ambiguity. From this view, interpretations

of cultural manifestations are consistent (Martin, 2002). An integration view indicates that members of the organization agree about how to operate in their organizational culture and why they are operating the way they do (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1991). “From the integration perspective, culture is that which is clear; ambiguity is excluded” (Martin, 2002, p. 94).

- *Differentiation perspective* is one of three theoretical perspectives on organizational culture. From a differentiation perspective, consistent interpretations of cultural manifestations only exist at a subculture level, there is no organization-wide consensus. However, consensus does exist within subcultures, and within these subcultures, cultural manifestations are interpreted consistently. Ambiguity is channeled around subcultures and is not present within the subculture. Thus, there is inconsistency about the interpretations of cultural manifestations within the organization; consistent interpretations are only found within subcultures and may differ between subcultures. These subcultures co-exist within the same organization and may exist in conflict with each other, independently of one another or in accord (Martin, 2002). An example of a differentiation view is “when top executives announce a policy and then behave in a policy-inconsistent manner” (Martin, 2002, p. 94).

- *Fragmentation perspective* is one of three theoretical perspectives on organizational culture. A fragmentation perspective places ambiguity, rather than clarity, as the focus or core of a culture (Martin, 2002). “The fragmentation perspective views ambiguity as an inevitable and pervasive aspect of organizational life” (Frost et al., 1991, p. 8). From a fragmentation view, interpretations of cultural manifestations are neither consistent nor ambiguous; they are based on which issue is at hand. Agreement about cultural manifestations is issue-specific, not organizational or subculture-specific (Martin, 2002). “Consensus and dissensus co-exist in a constantly fluctuating pattern influenced by changes, for example, in events, attention, salience, and cognitive overload. Any cultural manifestation can be, and is, interpreted in a myriad of ways.” (Frost et al., 1991, p. 8). For instance, a new policy may have been introduced that changes the way individuals view the organization’s culture and, at that point in time, they are in agreement with some individuals in the organization about the meaning of the new policy and at the same time they are in disagreement with others in the organization. However, regarding a different policy, they may be in agreement with some of the individuals they were previously in disagreement with. From a fragmentation perspective, organization-wide or subculture

consensus is not possible because consensus is issue-centric (Frost et al., 1991; Martin, 2002).

Significance

While there is an extensive body of research on leadership and culture, it has not adequately explained the relationship between these two constructs, and it has not begun exploring the relationship between leadership characterized by SEDMA and organizational culture. Thus, while leadership characterized by SEDMA may offer unique challenges and be difficult to manage, it is worthwhile to explore the impacts this leadership structure has on culture and how it is impacted by organizational culture.

Furthermore, the study of this partnership structure adds to the existing base of leadership theory. Currently, there is little rigorous research regarding how leadership is negotiated and enacted among leaders with shared and equal decision-making authority. There is also very little known about how this type of leadership structure impacts organizational cultures. This study offers additional research on leadership and culture.

The findings of this study also help illuminate some of the reasons why leadership characterized by SEDMA may work in some organizations and not in others. In addition, this study points to how SEDMA leadership may impact culture differently in different organizations and how culture may impact SEDMA leadership differently as well. This study highlights why SEDMA leadership is not the best fit for every organization, but why it can be highly effective in others.

This study also provides valuable information informing leadership development and organizational development in organizations by demonstrating both a different way

of organizing and designing leadership structures and providing a picture of what characterizes successful SEDMA leadership. This directly ties to the field of Human Resource Development (HRD). This research offers insights into the relationship between leaders in this type of leadership structure, the relationship between leadership and culture, and the relationship between culture and leadership. These insights might prove invaluable when HRD practitioners design training to help leaders understand how culture influences their leadership abilities and how they shape and impact culture. In addition, this research helps HRD practitioners and researchers understand one method of studying leadership and organizational culture. Understanding the culture of the organizations in which HRD professionals work and practice is key information when designing training, diagnosing organizational development interventions, and coaching and providing career development services. This research helps provide one framework for understanding the relationship between culture and leadership, thus adding to the body of HRD research and practice knowledge.

Finally, this study points to the need for additional methods for studying culture and leadership in order to move beyond a prescriptive view of the relationship between culture and leadership. The dominant method of studying culture is ethnography (Creswell, 2013). Ethnography is a rich method that provides copious amounts of data. However, ethnographies are intense and time-consuming. Research highlights the fact that alternative methods of study provide rich insights into the culture and leadership relationship. It suggests that further studies from a variety of disciplines using a variety of methods are needed to enhance existing understanding (Martin, 2002).

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study narrow its focus to a study of the reciprocal relationship between organizational culture and SEDMA leadership. I purposely chose one small organization in which to conduct this study. My goal was to be able to use the ethnographic approach fully, and a small organization with 12 employees allowed me to do so. I also chose to attempt to include all 12 employees in the study, so that I could get as complete a picture of the organization as possible with the goal of providing as much rich, thick description of the relationship between culture and leadership in this organization as possible.

The organization's SEDMA leadership structure consisted of three partners, two of whom are married. In addition, the partnership has an uneven equity stake: the married couple has 80% ownership in the organization and the other partner owns 20%. I chose specifically not to examine the equity relationship among the partners, except when it influenced the culture of the organization. I was examining the partner's decision-making processes, leadership, and relationship. I was also focused on how that partnership influenced and was influenced by culture. After spending time in the organization, it became clear the ownership issue did not directly impact the shared and equal decision-making authority and, thus, I chose not to include literature on this subject or focus on it in any depth in my findings or my interpretations of my findings.

As with the ownership issue, I did not focus on this being a family-owned business or nepotism, because it was not a fully family-owned business. Again, I did not include any literature on family-owned businesses because it was not the focus of this

study. In addition, I briefly touch on how the marriage influences the partnership, but I do so from the perspective of how it influences their decision-making and leadership and how that influences and is influenced by the organization's culture.

I was also not investigating partnership, per se; I focused on a leadership structure characterized by SEDMA, what the dynamics of that structure was, how that structure was influenced by the culture, and how it influenced the culture. Thus, I did not go in-depth on partnership literature. I do discuss the partnership in my findings and interpretations of those findings, insofar as it pertains to cultural influence. These delimitations help focus the study on the reciprocal relationship between organizational culture and SEDMA leadership.

Chapter Outline

Chapter I of this dissertation builds a case for the need for this study and includes the purpose of the study, theoretical framework, introduction of the method utilized, definition of terms, significance, and delimitations. Chapter II reviews the relevant literature in the fields of leadership and organizational culture and provides a foundation and framework for this study. Chapter III describes the methods used to investigate the problem, and Chapter IV presents the data collected and the findings of this study. Finally, Chapter V provides discussion, summarizes the study, situates the study in the field of HRD, discusses its impacts on the field, includes recommendations for practice, and provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The complexity of the relationship between leadership and culture takes in-depth study to understand truly. To study this issue, one must first understand the relevant theory and literature from which these concepts have emerged. First, this chapter will briefly examine leadership theory. Next, the chapter will examine different theories of shared leadership and discuss how they inform leadership characterized by SEDMA. Then this chapter will provide an overview of Joanne Martin's culture theory and explain its relevance to this study. To conclude the chapter will examine the link between SEDMA leadership and organizational culture.

Leadership

The body of literature on leadership and leadership theory is immense. There are almost as many perspectives on leadership as there are leaders. For the purposes of this study, I will briefly review the main schools of thought on leadership and then focus on the type of leadership studied here, SEDMA leadership. Leadership has been conceptualized in a multitude of ways from the focus of group process, to a personality perspective; to an act or behavior, to a power relationship; to a transformational process, to a skills perspective (Northouse, 2016). Northouse (2016) states that while leadership may be conceptualized in a variety of ways, there are common components that form a definition of leadership, "(a) leadership is a process, (b) leadership involves influence, (c) leadership occurs in groups, and (d) leadership involves common goals" (p. 6). These components lead to the general definition of leadership being "a process whereby

an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2016, p. 6).

Given this basic definition of leadership, leadership theory can be broken down into three major conceptual categories: leader-focused, situational, and social dynamic (Callahan, Whitener, & Sandlin, 2007). Leader-focused theories or approaches view “leadership through the characteristics and behaviors of the leaders themselves. Early conceptions of leadership focus on these behaviors and characteristics and include trait approaches, leader skills, leadership style, and power” (Callahan et al., 2007, p. 1). Situational theories take into account the context in which leadership occurs and include theories such as contingency theory, situational leadership theory, and path-goal theory (Callahan et al., 2007). Social dynamic theories consider that “[s]ocial dynamics of interactions between leaders and followers play an important role in the enactment of leadership” (Callahan et al., 2007, p. 154).

Regardless of the leadership perspective or theory, at its core the common elements of leadership are that it: (a) is a process, (b) involves influence, (c) occurs in a group context, and (d) involves goal attainment (Northouse, 2016). When examining leadership, these elements are key to differentiating leadership theories. The focus of this study is leadership in a shared context. While not a new concept, it was first studied in the 1950s (Pearce & Conger, 2003); it has not received a lot of academic research attention. “Shared leadership (e.g. Carson et al., 2007; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce et al., 2008) is an approach that views leadership as a shared responsibility among team members”(Yammarino et al., 2012, p. 389). Bergman, Rentsch, Small,

Davenport, and Bergman (2012) found an argument for the continued study of this concept in their study of shared leadership in teams:

Specifically, teams with shared leadership reported less conflict, greater consensus, and higher intragroup trust and cohesion than teams that did not experience shared leadership. Moreover, the results suggested that the likelihood of a team experiencing a full range of leadership behavior increases to the extent that multiple team members share leadership. (p. 34)

Grille, Schulte, and Kauffeld (2015) further highlight the lack of research in the area of shared leadership, “Shared leadership is considered a promising concept that meets the increased complexity of working life. Researchers and practitioners therefore need to know which factors might advance the development of shared leadership” (p. 324). In addition, Yammarino et al. (2012) highlight, “Very few empirical studies exist in this area (shared leadership) and more are required in order to expand knowledge on the subject” (p. 391).

I believe there is little research on shared leadership because the concepts of this type of leadership are defined very differently based on the author and/or researcher. This makes putting shared leadership into practice difficult. In this literature review, I discuss these definitions and why they do not adequately work to explain leadership characterized by SEDMA. Another argument is that these definitions do not really address shared leadership adequately and thus, once again it is difficult to put into practice. However, there needs to be more examination and study that focuses on how

leaders work together in partnerships to continue our understanding of shared leadership fully. One particular area that needs more emphasis is how leadership is negotiated among partners with equal and shared decision-making authority. I argue that this is a leadership structure that brings its own challenges. This study examines some of those challenges, as well as how this leadership structure impacts and is impacted by culture.

Leadership as a Shared Construct

Co-Leaders. Heenan and Bennis (1999) discuss the concept of co-leaders; however, their concept of co-leadership does not include partners with equal authority, but rather a deputy who supports and leads with a superior. They argue that “co-leadership should permeate every organization at every level” (Heenan & Bennis, 1999, p. 5) and that “power and responsibility are dispersed, giving the enterprise a whole constellation of co-stars—co-leaders with shared values and aspirations, all of whom work toward common goals” (Heenan & Bennis, 1999, p. 5). The concept of co-leadership first emerged in the 1950s. Pearce and Conger (2003) highlight:

The work focused primarily on situations in which two individuals shared one leadership position. The literature has been dominated by group therapy settings where co-leaders occupy mentor-protégé relationships (e.g. Mintz, 1963, Rittner & Hammons, 1992; Solomon et al., 1953; Winter, 1976). Much of it examines how co-leadership develops (e.g., Winter, 1976) and tactics for improving co-leadership effectiveness in these settings (e.g. Greene, Morrison, & Tischeler, 1981; Herzog, 1981).
(p. 8)

While co-leadership regards leadership as a shared construct, it does not examine leadership from the perspective of it being shared among those in equal positions of power and authority who share decision-making responsibility equally. This concept is not an appropriate frame for examining leadership in a partnership characterized by SEDMA. The deputy aspect indicates that leaders are not sharing decision-making authority.

Shared leadership. Pearce and Conger (2003) discuss a concept similar to Heenan and Bennis's co-leader concept: shared leadership. They define shared leadership as:

[A] dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both. This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchal influence. The key distinction between shared leadership and traditional models of leadership is that the influence process involves more than just downward influence on subordinates by an appointed or elected leader (see Pearce & Sims, 2000, 2002). Rather leadership is broadly distributed among a set of individuals instead of centralized in hands of a single individual that acts in the role of a superior. (p. 1)

Pearce and Conger (2003) posit that leadership is a group-level phenomenon rather than an individual one. They differ from Heenan and Bennis in their concept of

shared leadership in that Heenan and Bennis view co-leadership as two individuals in a vertical leadership position, whereas Pearce and Conger conceptualize shared leadership as a group-influencing phenomenon. Pearce and Conger (2003) believe that co-leadership is a special type of shared leadership, one between two people and that “although a distinct concept, is clearly related to the concept of shared leadership” (p. 8).

Current empirical studies on shared leadership focus mainly on leader behaviors that lead to shared leadership in teams, not on leadership with shared authority (Bergman et al., 2012; Grille et al., 2015).

While elements of Pearce and Conger’s theory apply to SEDMA leadership—leadership is relational and embedded in social interaction—shared leadership still does not fully explain the phenomenon of leadership among partners with SEDMA. It falls short of explaining how leadership is negotiated and enacted among equal partners. Shared leadership examines the concept of leadership shared among many instead of looking at how partners lead. Thus, it does not provide an understanding of how leadership is negotiated and shared among partners with equal decision-making authority.

Team leadership. Both shared leadership and co-leadership are related to the concept of team leadership. Team leadership, as defined by Northouse (2016), is leadership that is housed in teams. This form of leadership is focused on influencing and impacting team effectiveness and can be practiced by one individual leader or shared among two or more members of the team. Northouse (2016) defines teams as “organizational groups comprised of members who are interdependent, who share

common goals, and who must coordinate their activities to accomplish these goals” (p. 363). Team leadership is a model that provides a framework for leading teams. This model does not explore how leadership is negotiated and performed in a shared context. In addition, it does not provide an explanation for how leadership within a team impacts the larger organization in which that team is embedded. Thus, team leadership also falls short of providing an adequate frame for understanding SEDMA leadership.

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX). In addition to the concepts of shared, co-, and team leadership, another leadership theory that has the potential to explain SEDMA leadership is Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory. However, as with the other leadership concepts, LMX falls short. LMX focuses on interactions between leaders and followers (Northouse, 2016). “LMX theory makes the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers the focal point of the leadership process” (Northouse, 2016, p. 137). LMX takes into account that there are unique differences among followers and that leaders’ actions might impact followers differently based on the unique attributes of the follower (Northouse, 2016). LMX examines how leadership is negotiated between the leader and the follower and then, based on that negotiation process, followers fall into one of two categories: in-group or out-group. The theory then examines how leadership is enacted based on in-group or out-group followers. LMX does consider how leadership is negotiated, but once again it is a vertical relationship, not one among partners. “LMX theory works by focusing our attention on the special, unique relationship that leaders can create with others. When these relationships are of high quality, the goals of the leader, the followers, and the organization are all advanced”

(Northouse, 2016, p. 145). Atwater and Carmeli (2009) highlight this as well, “We found that employee perceptions of a supportive, high-quality relationship between themselves and their leaders were related to the energy needed for employees to engage in creative tasks and for creativity to emerge” (p. 271). While LMX is a relational theory, it does not examine the relationship between those with equal authority; thus it does not provide an adequate frame for understanding SEDMA leadership.

Distributed leadership. A final body of leadership literature that discusses shared or multiple leaders is distributed leadership. C. A. Gibb first introduced distributed leadership as a concept in the 1950s as a reaction to the charismatic and heavily individual-focused leadership theories prevalent at the time (Gronn, 2008). Gronn (2002, 2008) has more recently studied distributed leadership. At its core, distributed leadership theory postulates that leadership is distributed throughout an organization and does not lie within a formal leadership structure alone (Gronn, 2002). Distributed leadership theorists believe that leadership is attributed to leaders. Gronn (2002) breaks down distributed leadership into two main categories of thought “distributed leadership as numerical action” and “distributed leadership as concrete action” (p. 429). Distributed leadership as numerical action is defined by Gronn (2002) as:

If focused leadership means that only one individual is attributed with the status of leader, an additive or numerical view of distributed leadership means the aggregated leadership of an organization is dispersed among some, many, or maybe all of the members. This additive understanding

does not privilege the work of particular individuals or categories of persons, nor is there a presumption about which individual's behavior carries more weight with colleagues. (p. 429)

This additive approach basically states anyone within the organization can and does at certain times take on leadership roles.

The second conceptualization of distributed leadership Gronn (2002) defines is distributed leadership as concrete action:

At least three forms of concrete action may be attributed with leadership. First, there are collaborative modes of engagement, which arise spontaneously in the workplace. Second, there is the intuitive understanding that develops as part of close working relations among colleagues. Third, there are a variety of structural relations and institutionalized arrangements, which constitute attempts to regularize distributed action. (p. 429)

Gronn (2002) focused most of his work on the second category of distributed leadership: concrete action. Gronn (2002) posits that conjoint agency is present in the aforementioned forms of concrete action. He argues that "These three forms of concrete action represent successive stages in a process of institutionalization . . . Conjoint agency means agents synchronize their actions by having regard to their own plans, those of their peers, and their sense of unit membership" (Gronn, 2002, p. 431). Gronn (2002) goes on to argue that conjoint agency has two components: synergy and reciprocal influence. These components act on the leaders to create the concrete

actions. Finally, Gronn (2002) posits two properties that characterize distributed leadership: interdependence and coordination. Interdependence, as defined by Gronn (2002) is:

[T]o be constrained from autonomous task execution, with interdependence meaning reciprocal dependence between two or more organization's members. Interdependence is manifested in two ways. First, member's responsibilities may overlap. Second, their responsibilities may be complementary. (p. 432)

Secondly, Gronn (2002) states that "Coordination means 'managing dependencies between activities' (Malone & Growstone, 1994, p. 90) and encompasses the design, elaboration, allocation, oversight, and monitoring of the performance of an organization's technical core," (p. 433). In essence, Gronn's (2002) concept of distributed leadership states that leadership can emerge from anywhere in the organization and is attributed to a leader or a group of individuals acting as leaders. A group of leaders can arise to address a problem or they may be long-time colleagues working together that emerge as leaders. Leadership may be part of the formal structure of the organization, but if it is part of the formal structure, it has evolved into that state based on his concept of conjoint agency.

While there are aspects of distributed leadership that potentially explain SEDMA leadership, there is one major area that cannot be addressed by distributed leadership. SEDMA is not addressed in Gronn's concept of distributed leadership. He does discuss authority when he discusses formal structural relations, however, authority is ultimately

given to one individual. That individual may change within a unit or group of leaders based on the situation or problem, but it is never equally shared. Others may have input into the decision, but there is not a concept of equally shared decision-making authority through which a negotiation among partners must take place before a decision is made. SEDMA is what distinguishes SEDMA leadership from other forms of leadership. Currently, there is not an adequate theory to explain SEDMA leadership due to the unique aspect of SEDMA. While distributed leadership addresses some aspects of SEDMA leadership, it does not address the core aspect—shared and equal decision-making authority.

While other leadership theories, such as transformational leadership, authentic leadership, or servant leadership can explain how an individual leader in a partnership leads, they do not provide enough depth and rigor to examine the relationship between partners and do not provide a tool or lens to examine how SEDMA leadership is negotiated and enacted. Thus, while the current body of work on leadership is immense and varied, not one current theory provides an adequate framework for understanding how partners with SEDMA lead. The majority of the current work is anecdotal and lacks rigor. SEDMA leadership is discussed in trade publications at a superficial level. For example, articles such as “Successful Law Firms Have Strong Management and Leadership” (Denny, 2006, p. 11) and “Power pairs climb ladder together” (Kapos, 2009, p. 27) discuss SEDMA leadership in terms of a structure that is common in law firms, but do not discuss how leadership is enacted and negotiated. There are many articles such as these that could be cited, yet they lack academic rigor. One goal of this

study was to put forth initial work on how leadership is negotiated and enacted in this type of partnership and begin to form the foundations of a concept of SEDMA leadership.

Organizational Culture

Before examining the relationship between leadership and culture, it is first helpful to discuss organizational culture. As noted in Chapter I, for the purpose of this study I am using Joanne Martin's (2002) organizational culture theory to provide a frame for understanding how SEDMA leadership impacts and is impacted by organizational culture. Martin's theory provides both a frame and a tool for examining how manifestations of culture impact not only the organization, but also its leadership. I chose this theory because it helps articulate not only cultural manifestations, but also the impact and sense-making those manifestations symbolize. Through her framework, I will be able to analyze the manifestations of culture and how they impact the organization and SEDMA leadership.

While there are as many definitions of organizational culture as there are for leadership, this study utilizes Martin's (2002) definition of culture:

When organizations are examined from a cultural viewpoint, attention is drawn to aspects of organizational life that historically have often been ignored or understudied such as the stories people tell to newcomers to explain 'how things are done around here,' the ways in which offices are arranged and personal items are or are not displayed, jokes people tell, the working atmosphere (hushed and luxurious or dirty and noisy), the

relations among people (affectionate in some areas of an office and obviously angry and perhaps competitive in another place), and so on. Cultural observers also often attend to aspects of working life that other researchers study, such as the organization's official policies and so on. A cultural observer is interested in the surface of the cultural manifestations because details can be informative, but he or she also seeks an in-depth understanding of the patterns of meanings that link these manifestations together, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in bitter conflicts between groups, and sometimes in webs of ambiguity, paradox, and contradiction.

(p. 3)

Martin's definition underpins her organizational culture theory, which will be discussed further in this chapter. However, first it is important to highlight single-perspective culture approaches. These are the foundation of Martin's three-part typology.

Single Perspective Culture Studies

In order to understand the relationship between shared decision-making, leadership structure, and culture, I utilized Martin's three key constructs. These constructs help provide a picture of an organization's culture and provide evidence of the relationship between culture and leadership. Martin (2002) advocates the use of a three-part typology as a theoretical foundation for conducting organizational culture research. Traditionally organizational culture research has been conducted from one of three perspectives. Martin (2002) refers to these studies as "single-perspective studies of

culture in organizations” (p. 95). A single-perspective study adopts one of three approaches to conducting culture research and utilizes that perspective as the theoretical frame to guide the study. The three approaches as defined by Martin (2002) are the integration perspective, the differentiation perspective, and the fragmentation perspective.

Martin (2002) delineates the differences between these three perspectives utilizing three key variables: “orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity” (p. 94). The first variable, orientation to consensus, illustrates how a perspective views the need for consensus about culture in an organization. The second variable, relation among manifestations, concentrates on the degree to which the cultural manifestations or forms (such as stories, dress, symbols, rituals, practices, and physical arrangements) reinforce or contradict each other in an organization. The final variable, orientation to ambiguity, focuses on how a given perspective handles the ambiguity found in a specific culture (Martin, 2002). Each of these variables defines how cultural research is conducted, what is studied, and what is emphasized about a specific culture, thus defining the perspective. Table 1 provides a summary of Martin’s three-perspective view of organizational culture.

Table 1. Martin’s Complementarity of Three Theoretical Perspectives

	Perspective		
	Integration	Differentiation	Fragmentation
Orientation to consensus	Organization-wide consensus	Subcultural consensus	Lack of consensus
Relation among manifestations	Consistency	Inconsistency	Not clearly consistent or inconsistent
Orientation to ambiguity	Exclude it	Channel it outside subcultures	Acknowledge it

Note. Adapted from *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*, by J. Martin, 2002, p. 95. Copyright 2002 by Sage Publications, Inc.

Thus, an integration perspective looks for elements of a culture that have an organization-wide consensus on their interpretation. In addition, an integration perspective looks for consistency among cultural manifestations and excludes ambiguity. A differentiation perspective looks for consistency in cultural elements at the subcultural level and recognizes there may not be organization-wide consensus. A differentiation perspective also notes that there are some inconsistencies among cultural manifestations, and from this view, ambiguity is channeled around subcultures. Finally, a fragmentation perspective is characterized by a lack of consensus on cultural elements at any level of the organization. A fragmentation perspective highlights the lack of clear consensus on manifestations and embraces ambiguity. These single-perspective theories are the foundation for Martin’s three-perspective theory.

Martin's three-perspective theory. Martin (2002) argues that using a single-perspective approach to study culture is inadequate. She believes that by using only one perspective, a researcher misses much of the culture. Her argument is:

Taken together, the three perspectives oppose each other on the three dimensions of comparison: the relationship among cultural manifestations, the orientation to consensus in a culture, and treatment of ambiguity (see table 4.1) [in Martin's book *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Cultural Terrain*, in this chapter see Table 1]. Because they take different positions on these three dimensions, the three perspectives complement each other in a precise way. If an empirical researcher uses all three of these perspectives in a single study—which is the point of view I advocate—the three perspectives offer a wider range of insights than is available from any single viewpoint. Each perspective has conceptual blind spots that the combination of the three does not.

(Martin, 2002, p. 120)

Thus, Martin's approach is to use all three perspectives as a framework to ground a cultural study. For the purposes of this study, Martin's three-perspective theory is used to help interpret the cultural findings and examine those cultural findings' reciprocal relationship with SEDMA leadership. As we look to understand the relationship between SEDMA, leadership structure, and culture, Martin's variables are crucial. They allow us to examine the relationship between leadership and culture and provide evidence that will help lead to a deeper understanding of these phenomena. However,

before discussing the relationship between culture and leadership, it is important to examine one key element of Martin's theory and cultural studies in general: cultural manifestations.

Cultural manifestations. Organizational culture is evidenced through how it is manifested in an organization (Alvesson, 2013; Keyton, 2011; Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). When examining the relationship between SEDMA and organizational culture, part of that examination will focus on cultural manifestations. As noted in Chapter I, cultural manifestations are defined as one way in which culture is studied and operationalized. They are the evidence of the culture (Martin, 2002). "Manifestations of culture include rituals, stories, humor, jargon, physical arrangements, and formal structures and policies, as well as informal norms and practices" (Martin, 2002, p. 55). Trice and Beyer (1993) provided some of the seminal work on cultural manifestations, or as they termed them, "cultural forms" (p. 77). Trice and Beyer (1993) define cultural forms as "concrete manifestations of culture" (p. 77). They divided cultural forms into four categories: symbols, language, narratives, and practices.

Table 2. Trice and Beyer’s Categories and Examples of Cultural Forms

Category	Examples
Symbols	Objects, natural and manufactured settings Performers, functionaries
Language	Jargon, slang Gestures, signals, signs Songs Humor, jokes, gossip, rumors Metaphors Proverbs, slogans
Narratives	Stories, legends Sagas Myths
Practices	Rituals, taboos Rites, ceremonials

Note. Adapted from *The Cultures of Work Organizations*, by H. M. Trice and J. M. Beyer, 1993, p. 78. Copyright 1993 by Prentice Hall.

Table 2 provides categories and examples of cultural forms from Trice and Beyer (1993) and highlights commonly accepted cultural forms or manifestations, however, it is not all-inclusive. In addition to these manifestations, dress, artifacts, policies, informal norms and practices, and physical arrangements are also commonly accepted (Martin, 2002).

These manifestations in and of themselves do not stand alone. Martin (2002) highlights:

Content themes (such as values or basic assumptions) are used to capture and show the relationships among interpretation of the meanings of these

manifestations. These are the building blocks for you to understand the theoretical assumptions underlying a culture study, summarize the content of any cultural portrait, and if you wish, develop your own answers to the questions: What is culture? What is not culture? (pp. 55–56)

Following this overview of culture and leadership, it is valuable to consider the relationship between the two constructs.

Relationship between Leadership and Organizational Culture

As part of this study, I examined cultural manifestations and used those as part of the evidence of the relationship between organizational culture and SEDMA leadership. This study examined both how SEMDA impacts culture and how it is impacted by culture. Thus, the following section discusses that relationship and the little literature there is to inform that relationship. O'Reilly et al. (2014) highlight the lack of empirical research linking leadership actions to organizational outcomes:

Studies of organizational culture are almost always based on two assumptions: (a) Senior leaders are the prime determinant of the culture, and (b) culture is related to consequential organizational outcomes.

Although intuitively reasonable and often accepted as fact, the empirical evidence for these is surprisingly thin, and the results are quite mixed.

Almost no research has jointly investigated these assumptions and how they are linked. (p. 595)

However, in the O'Reilly et al. (2014) study they did not discuss how leadership was impacted by culture, which this study will. As noted earlier, given the paucity of

literature on SEMDA leadership, it follows there is even less on the relationship between these concepts and organizational culture. Thus, the concluding section of this chapter will focus on the broad relationship between leadership and culture and, at times, infer the potential impact of culture on SEDMA leadership.

Leadership behaviors and actions create and influence cultural forms, which provide the foundation for how organizational members understand the culture of their work environment, understand the values inherent in that environment, and know how to work and navigate in a given culture (Alvesson, 2013; Schein, 2010; Schumacher, 1997; Trice & Beyer, 1993). As Trice and Beyer (1993) noted, “Cultural forms also affect and reflect conceptions of leadership” (p. 254). Alvesson (2013) further pointed out, “[l]eaders influence the meanings, values, ideas and feelings of others” (p. 99). These two quotes taken together demonstrate how leadership influences and is influenced by cultural forms. By extension, leadership impacts organizational consensus on those forms, the relationship among those manifestations, and the orientation to ambiguity around those forms, which are Martin’s (2002) key variables. While there is little direct linkage between these three variables and leadership influence in the literature, the following sections suggest possible linkages and support those with literature that examines the concept of the relationship between leadership and culture.

SEMDA leadership has a potentially positive impact on culture, and culture has the potential to positively impact partner leaders. First, SEMDA leadership has the potential to increase loyalty. Heenan and Bennis’s co-leader research noted that in a culture that supports co-leaders, trust and loyalty are key elements for successful

leadership (1999). While SEDMA leadership is different from co-leadership, there are enough commonalities between the two to infer that loyalty is important in SEDMA leadership as well.

Furthermore, multiple leaders allow for multiple sources of cultural interpretation and understanding. Alvesson (2013) noted that:

leadership is per definition ‘cultural’, that is leadership must be understood as taking place in a cultural context and all leadership acts have their consequences through the (culturally guided) interpretation of those involved in the social processes in which leaders, followers and leadership acts are expressed. This, of course, does not imply that leadership means the significant impact on or capacity to shape or change culture at will. Leadership draws attention to the consequences within and through cultural meanings informing the thoughts, feelings and actions that leaders provoke. (p. 108)

Thus, as Alvesson pointed out, leadership is inherently cultural regardless of leadership structure or theory. In a SEDMA leadership structure, culture plays a role as in any other leadership structure. The difference is that as leaders negotiate their decisions and how to lead, they bring multiple interpretations and understandings of the culture to the table. As such, multiple perspectives come together to co-construct an understanding of the organization’s culture. Azanza et al. (2013) point out that, “people are more and more interested in working in organizations with a flexible organizational

culture” (p. 46). Perhaps a SEDMA leadership structure could foster that flexibility through the co-construction of an understanding of an organization’s culture.

Some would argue that leaders determine what an organization’s culture should be and then impose that culture on the organization (Meng, 2014; Northouse, 2016; Schein, 2010; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). This functionalist, prescriptive view of the relationship between an organizational culture and its leadership underestimates the complexity of the relationship between these two constructs. Alvesson (2013) argued for a broader perspective of the relationship between culture and leadership. He noted, “leaders and leadership can then be seen as organizational symbols, the orientation towards them are not treated as ‘facts’ about leadership ‘as much,’ but more as clues to understand organizational cultures” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 101). Alvesson (2002) asserted, “[t]he leader is involved in the negotiation rather than the imposing of new or revised orientations on people” (p. 107). He further stated, “I assume that most people expected to exercise leadership in their jobs are much more strongly influenced by organizational culture than they are involved in actively producing it” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 114). His view can be summed up as, “[a]rguably, culture forms leadership rather than, or at least as much as, the other way around” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 112). Alvesson illustrated that leadership by its very nature is cultural and that leadership’s influence on organizational culture does not happen in a vacuum, untouched by the influence of culture.

Thus, when discussing the impact of SEDMA leadership on culture, it is important to look at how culture influences SEDMA leadership. Is there a difference in the impact culture has on a leader when that leadership is characterized by SEDMA? At

this point, there is no literature examining this relationship; however, I would assert that if SEDMA leadership influences culture differently from other forms of leadership, the reverse may also hold—that cultures of organizations characterized by SEDMA leadership have different influences on the leaders than organizations with other types of leadership structures. What does that influence look like? It was one goal of this study to begin to answer that question.

While I have highlighted potential positive influences between culture and leadership, there are some potential negatives as well. One major potential conflict with regard to SEDMA leadership is individual leaders in the partnership sending mixed messages. There is potential conflict in how individual leaders in the partnership influence aspects of the culture both through the messages they send and their actions (Keyton, 2011). “In the interplay between leadership and organizational culture different kinds of relationships and emphasis (on cultural manifestations) are possible” (Alvesson, 2013, p. 111). Keyton (2011) noted:

Leaders control the resources of the organization. They decide where attention is directed, what gets measured, and how rewards are handed out. These formal management mechanisms reinforce their assumptions and values and set in motion a series of procedures and practices that get other organizational members to do the same. (p. 153)

Thus, potential conflict lies in how each partner uses his or her authority. Actions and messaging of partners may be in direct conflict with one another based on:

(a) how they are reading the culture and influenced by it differently from their partners;

(b) differing opinions on what actions and messages should be sent to influence culture; and (c) disagreement on how actions and messages actually impact the culture. This happens with leaders at various levels within an organization (Alvesson, 2013). However, this is particularly difficult in SEDMA leadership given that leaders are viewed as an individual leadership team with shared and negotiated authority.

Thus, different partners may then attribute value to different aspects of the culture and attempt to influence cultural aspects in contradictory ways. In other words, if different partners view one aspect of the culture in different ways and then attempt to influence that cultural aspect through policies or actions that are in conflict with one another, it could create a lot of uncertainty and confusion for organizational members as they attempt to work within the culture.

While there is the potential for SEDMA leadership to influence and be influenced by organizational culture in differing ways and for those differences to have both positive and negative impacts, differing leadership influences on cultural forms is not an inherently negative or positive phenomenon. It has the potential to be both. One of the goals of this study was to understand how shared decision making influences culture in addition to how leaders in this leadership structure are influenced by culture. This understanding is crucial to making SEDMA leadership successful.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the link between leadership and organizational culture and provided a review of the relevant literature about the relationship between these two constructs. The chapter also discussed both leadership

and organizational culture. In addition, the concepts of SEDMA and SEDMA leadership were introduced. Martin's organizational culture theory was presented as the theoretical framework for this study. Finally, the relationship between leadership and organizational culture was examined further. Chapter III will explain the method used in this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between SEDMA leadership and culture. To conduct this study, I utilized a focused ethnography (Richards & Morse, 2007) as the overarching qualitative methodology. Through this approach, I investigated and strove to further the research and understanding of the relationship between culture and SEDMA leadership. In this chapter, I first review the research question investigated and provide an overview of the methodology guiding this study. Next, I summarize the research design utilized and describe the sample employed. Then I provide a discussion of data collection and analysis methods. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study.

Research Questions

Chapter I summarized the problem statement and research questions to be investigated utilizing the methodology laid out in this chapter. The research questions guiding this study are:

- What effect does a leadership structure characterized by partners with shared and equal decision-making authority (SEDMA) have on a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity?
- What effect does a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity have on a leadership structure characterized by partners with SEDMA?

Methodology Overview

The primary methodology employed for this study is a focused ethnography (Richards & Morse, 2007). Richards and Morse (2007) note that:

A focused ethnography is used primarily to evaluate or to elicit information on a special topic or shared experience. It differs from traditional ethnography in that, as Muecke (1994) notes, the topic is specific and may be identified before the researcher commences the study. Focused ethnography might be conducted within a subcultural group rather than with a cultural group completely different from that of the researcher. It may also be used to study institutions. (p. 58)

A focused ethnography was an appropriate methodology in this instance because the purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the culture of one institution: a professional services partnership firm. The main goal of ethnographic research is to explore phenomena within a cultural context (Creswell, 2013; Richards & Morse, 2007). My primary goal in this study was to explore the phenomenon of SEDMA leadership in relationship to culture in one type of organizational structure. Thus, ethnographic research was a logical and appropriate choice as a methodological framework. Merriam and Simpson (2000) highlight:

Concern with the cultural context is what distinguishes ethnography from grounded theory – which builds theory – and case study – which describes and interprets a situation or social unit from the perspective of

the researcher . . . Case study and grounded theory approaches do not have as a major focus sociocultural interpretation. . . (p. 108)

While aspects of this study lent themselves to a case study approach, the goal of gaining an in-depth understanding of the culture in this organization and its impact on and relationship to the phenomenon of SEDMA leadership led to the methodological choice of a focused ethnography.

In addition to a focused ethnography, the methodology of this study could also be considered realist ethnography (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) describes a realist ethnographic approach as:

[A]n objective account of the situation, typically written in the third-person point of view and reporting objectively on the information learned from participants at a site. In this ethnographic approach, the realist ethnographer narrates the study in a third-person dispassionate voice and reports on what is observed or heard from participants. The ethnographer remains in the background as an omniscient reporter of the “facts.” The realist also reports objective data in a measured style uncontaminated by personal bias, political goals, and judgment. The researcher may provide mundane details of everyday life among the people studied . . . The ethnographer produces the participant’s views through closely edited quotations and has the final word on how the culture is to be interpreted and presented. (p. 93)

My overarching goal in this study was to examine the relationship between culture and leadership in a contextual setting. The realist ethnographic approach provided the methodological framework to interpret the culture of the organization studied in as objective a manner as possible, given the interpretive nature of the framework. Thus, this ethnographic approach coupled with the focused nature of the study make this methodology ideal for this study. An ethnographic approach was the appropriate choice because it is an approach “based on the theory of culture” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 172). An ethnography studies the cultural beliefs and patterns of a group (Creswell, 2013). This research design allowed me to uncover cultural beliefs held by both leadership and members of the organization, which at the core is the goal of an ethnography (Richards & Morse, 2007). By its research design, the ethnography allowed me to study the relationship between the deeply held cultural beliefs and values of the organization and both how they were impacted by and what impact they had on the organization’s leadership.

Research Design

In this study, I utilized a qualitative methodology: focused, realist ethnography. This design allowed me to collect extensive qualitative data in an attempt to gain a rich understanding of the phenomena in this firm. Given that I examined culture, which is by its nature contextual (Alvesson, 2013; Martin, 2002), an ethnographic method was the most logical choice for this study. In addition, as discussed in Chapter II, cultural studies are marked by a debate about the influence and relationship between the phenomenon and the culture itself (Martin, 2002). This inability to distinguish between

culture and the phenomenon of leadership makes the ethnography approach a natural fit. The ethnography allowed for in-depth investigation of the relationship between these phenomena. The focused, bounded nature of this type of ethnography allowed for the understanding of organizational contexts. The context of this organization and organizations of this type was a key factor under investigation. Without the ability to examine the cultural context that a focused ethnography affords, much of the understanding of the relationship between constructs of partnership firms, the culture present, and its influence on leadership might have been lost.

Sample. The sample for this focused ethnography was one entire organization. The entity was a small, office design firm specializing in office space planning, office design, and the sale of office furniture and supplies. The organization, called Office Experts (OE) for the purposes of this analysis, was founded in 1993 by three partners (Laura, Richard, and John). The partners comprised a husband-and-wife team along with a lifelong friend. The organization consisted of 12 individuals at various levels of responsibility and function in multiple roles within the organization and one overarching leadership team. The employees ranged in age from mid-20s to late 60s. There were eight men and four women, all from east Texas and all were Caucasian. Eight of the 12 employees had been with the firm since within a year of its inception and the additional employees ranged in tenure from 2 to 10 years. The bulk of the organization's business was office furniture sales and office design work. The company also offered office supplies, promotional items, and marketing services.

OE was located in a midsize town in east Texas and was the leading firm in its market. It had a reputation for professionalism, excellent service, and high-quality work. OE specialized in large-scale office projects, such as libraries, hospitals, doctor's offices, schools, school districts, and banks. However, the company also designed home offices. The three founding partners were the only members of the organization with decision-making authority and ownership. They formed the senior leadership team and were responsible for the oversight of the organization at all levels. The founding partners also managed the day-to-day operations and all played an active role in the running of OE.

This organization was chosen for this study because the three partners had SEDMA. In addition, as a small professional services partnership firm, it offered the ability to conduct an in-depth ethnographic study in a manageable way. The size of the organization made it ideal for studying in-depth the relationship between culture and a leadership structure characterized by SEDMA. Given that it was a small organization, I was able to interview all the employees and observe them as well. This allowed me to study their cultural beliefs and values and gain an understanding of how those beliefs influenced and were influenced by the organization's leadership structure. Thus, the small size of the organization allowed me to collect in-depth ethnographic data. The small size of the organization did influence the culture, which I will discuss further in Chapter IV. However, outside of the reasons already mentioned, I did not choose this organization to study the relationship between organizational size and its impact on culture. That was not the focus of this study.

In ethnographic research, the first phase of “getting in” is often the most challenging and difficult to negotiate (Angrosino, 2007; Crang & Cook, 2007; Richards & Morse, 2007). In this organization, I gained access through a long-time friend of the partners, and I was therefore able to negotiate entry through a trusted and respected source. Thus, this organization was a logical choice for the study, not only because it has the primary sample characteristics needed for this study, but also because the entry into the organization was easily negotiated.

Data Collection

I collected multiple sources of evidence using a variety of data collection techniques and analyzed them together to form the data set for the study. Ethnographic research investigates culture as a phenomenon in order to gain a rich understanding of that culture. This method is ideally suited for this study of culture and leadership characterized by SEDMA, given the need for a comprehensive understanding of the elements’ relationship to one another in context. Ethnographies are typically characterized by fieldwork (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Richards & Morse, 2007). “Fieldwork involves entering the chosen setting, establishing rapport with the residents of that setting, maintaining some type of relationship with the subjects, and, finally, leaving the setting” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 105). However, in a focused ethnography, “data making may include only some of the strategies that define ethnography. For instance, fieldwork may be omitted, and data may consist only of interviews” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 58). Fieldwork in a focused ethnography is omitted at times, depending on why the participants were chosen and where they are

located or the nature of the question being studied (Richards & Morse, 2007). For the purposes of this study, even though it is a focused ethnography, I completed fieldwork and utilized a majority of the traditional ethnographic data-collection methods. I utilized the following data collection methods typically employed in traditional ethnographies: participant observation, which is the “cornerstone technique of ethnography” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 105); in-depth participant interviews; document and artifact reviews; and investigator diaries (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Richards & Morse, 2007). Junker (1960) defines the following four types of participant observation:

1. Complete participant. The researcher becomes a member of the group being studied; concealing the fact that he or she is observing as well as participating.
2. Participant as observer. The observers’ activities are not concealed but are secondary to activities as participant.
3. Observer as participant. The role of the observer is publicly known, and participation becomes a secondary activity.
4. Complete observer. The observer is invisible to the activity (as in the case of a one-way mirror or hidden camera) or tries to become unnoticed (camera crews that live with their subjects, classroom observers). (pp. 35–38)

Any of the above types of participant observation can be utilized in an ethnography; however, typically either participant as observer or observer as participant

are utilized (Fetterman, 2010). For the purposes of this study and the fieldwork it entailed, I played the role of observer as participant as defined above by Junker (1960). Furthermore, given that strong ethnographies utilize fieldwork and multiple sources of evidence (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Simpson, 2000), I utilized the following qualitative data-collection techniques: semi-structured, interactive interviews with all 12 employees in the firm; informal conversations; direct observations (observer as participant) of daily activities and meetings; and job shadowing observations. I spent all day working in the office when I was present on site and I observed how the employees interacted with the three partners in the firm as well as with each other. I wrote those observations. During the course of the day I would have informal conversations with employees about what they were working on, how their day was going, etc. During those conversations, if something relevant to the study was discussed, I would write that down as well. I analyzed these notes along with all the other data. These conversations were more relaxed than the interviews and some employees would open up more about the organization, thereby revealing more about the firm's culture.

In addition, I kept an investigator diary with an entry for each day I was present at the firm. The diary included my thoughts on the activities that took place during the day; my initial observations and feelings about how I was conducting the research; notes on what I could change in my interactions with the employees in order to gather different/stronger data; and general reflections on the study, the firm, the employees, and myself.

The fieldwork for this study took place over a 10-month period, during which some data analysis was simultaneous to collection. I recorded data using field notes, audiotapes, and appropriate interview and observational protocols, which can be found in Appendices A, B, and C. I interviewed each employee twice; there was at least a three-month time period between the first and second interviews. This was an intentional choice to compare the two interviews and to see if the culture and leadership relationship remained the same or if it had evolved during this time period. This also allowed me to establish more trust with participants during the job-shadowing phase. My goal was to see if after having spent time around the participants and shadowing their jobs, they would be more comfortable and open in the second interview. Interviews varied in time from 30 minutes to 2 hours. The interviews were semi-structured, so the participant helped guide the interview, thus some interviews were much longer than others. The second interview followed up on my observations, both from daily observations and while job shadowing, and included questions to clarify information from the first interview.

Moreover, I spent a full day job shadowing the three partners and a minimum of a half-day job shadowing and observing the remaining employees. I also attended partner and employee meetings when I had the opportunity. In addition, during my time on site, I spent at least one day a week completing general observations of the firm. During these observation periods, I observed how the employees interacted with the partners and with each other. I observed their habits and office environment. I also observed the physical space, their dress, how they communicated with each other, how

much time each employee spent working with the partners, how much time the partners spent working with each other and with specific employees, employees' attitudes about the partners, who went to lunch with whom, rumors, jargon used, who was on time and who was not, who took the longest lunches and breaks, how the partners handled employee issues, and how they interacted with the firm's clients. I recorded thoughts and observations for each day on site in the field journal and kept detailed field notes of my observation and job-shadowing time. I photographed the offices so that I would have a visual record to observe and analyze one of the key elements of culture (i.e., physical arrangements and environments). Another data-collection technique I utilized was observing partner meetings. I observed four partner meetings, which typically happened at lunchtime away from the office. I recorded my observations of those meetings when I returned to the office. The next section will discuss how I analyzed these data.

Data Analysis

“Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes and finally representing the data in figures, tables or a discussion” (Creswell, 2013, p.180). Part of the data-analysis process took place on an ongoing basis during the study, which allowed for continual reflection and ongoing analysis (Creswell, 2014). In addition, I reviewed the field notes, interview transcriptions, investigator diaries, and observation notes continually throughout the study. I analyzed the data from all of these sources utilizing a constant, comparative qualitative coding method. The data-analysis process

followed this outline, as described and recommended by Creswell (2013) for ethnographic research:

- Data managing: Create and organize files for data.
- Reading/Memoing: Read through text, make margin notes, and form initial codes.
- Describing: Describe the social setting, actors, and events. Draw a picture of the setting.
- Classifying: Analyze data for themes and patterned regularities.
- Interpreting: Interpret and make sense of the findings (how the culture works).
- Representing/Visualizing: Present a narrative augmented by tables, figures, and sketches. (pp. 156–157)

I followed the above process again using thematic constant comparative methods to analyze field notes, interview transcripts, and the investigator's diary. I transcribed all the interviews. I then organized all the data into notebooks based on the two interview transcripts for each person, any observations of that person, job-shadowing field notes for that person, pictures of that individual's work space or office, and any appropriate information from my investigator's diary. Once I had organized all the data, I conducted an initial read-through of all transcripts and notes. I highlighted each transcript down one side each in a different color, so I could recognize individual transcripts and notes and keep track of them. I kept a log of which individual was assigned with which color. During the initial read-through, I developed a preliminary set of codes, making notes in

the margins of the documents. I then re-read all the documents two more times and re-coded them two more times. Once I felt I had a strong set of codes, I cut the transcripts and notes into pieces by data points. I then hand sorted those pieces into piles based on which code I felt that piece of data supported. I wrote codes on notecards and placed them on the walls and floor of my office space. I then read each pile and discarded pieces of data that I did not think fit with that code. I then re-sorted all the data three more times. I sorted through each code pile six more times until I felt I had strong data to support each code. During this process, I also discarded or changed a code that I felt no longer fit with the data sort or I felt was less important to the findings based on the data from the transcripts and notes supporting it. I also moved data from one code pile to the other if I felt it supported another code more appropriately. I had multiple copies of some data and sorted the data into more than one code pile because I felt they supported multiple codes.

These techniques allowed for a thorough and complete analysis of the large quantity of data collected. It was my goal through this analysis to paint a picture and tell a story of the culture of this organization and how that culture impacts and is impacted by SEDMA leadership. In part, that picture or story comes from my interpretation of the data. Because of this reliance on my interpretations, standards of trustworthiness need to be discussed.

Standards of Trustworthiness

“Qualitative researchers strive for ‘understanding,’ that deep structure of knowledge that comes from visiting personally with participants, spending extensive

time in the field, and probing to obtain detailed meanings” (Creswell, 2013, p. 243). As part of this goal to achieve understanding, it is not without merit that researchers often ask if the interpretation is correct or if it is even possible to get it right (Creswell, 2013). This is where standards of validation and evaluation come to the forefront in quantitative research and standards of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue for the use of alternative terms that are more applicable to qualitative, naturalistic inquiry: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I employed these terms in this study. The truth-value criterion of a study is credibility, which in a quantitative study would be similar to the construct of internal validity. Credibility refers to how adequately the researcher represents the informant’s realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The applicability criterion, transferability, similar to external validity in a quantitative study, focuses on how transferable findings are and if there is even a need for transferability. The consistency criterion of trustworthiness, likened to quantitative reliability, is dependability. Dependability deals with the ever-changing context in which the research is taking place. Paying close attention to and demonstrating how decisions about the research were made can accomplish dependability. Thus, even if researchers were to duplicate the research in a changed context, they could still duplicate the steps of the research. The final trust criterion of neutrality focuses on bias, objectivity in quantitative terms. Qualitative researchers look at confirmability in an attempt to mitigate the influence of bias. Confirmability is an attempt to get as close as possible to the participant’s perspective. This is done by

spending extended time in the field, conducting multiple interviews, and continuously checking and rechecking data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Utilizing the following criteria described by Spindler and Spindler (1987) and Creswell (2013), I strove to meet Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. "The most important requirement for an ethnographic approach is to explain behavior from 'the native's point of view'" (Spindler & Spindler, 1987, p. 20). In addition, Spindler and Spindler (1987) stress accuracy and a systematic approach to recording information using note-taking, tape recorders, and cameras to record the native's point of view. This process requires the researcher to be present and engaged in constant interaction and observation (Creswell, 2013). To that end, I took detailed notes of observations and, while job shadowing, recorded each interview and took pictures of the physical environment. This allowed me to be present and engaged while collecting data. Spindler and Spindler (1987) propose the following as measures of a good ethnographic study:

Criterion I. Observations are contextualized.

Criterion II. Hypotheses emerge in situ as the study goes on.

Criterion III. Observation is prolonged and repetitive.

Criterion IV. Through interviews, observations, and other eliciting procedures, the native view of reality is obtained.

Criterion V. Ethnographers elicit knowledge from informant-participants in a systematic fashion.

Criterion VI. Instruments, codes, schedules, questionnaires, agenda for interviews and so forth are generated in situ as a result of inquiry.

Criterion VII. A transcultural, comparative perspective is frequently an unstated assumption.

Criterion VIII. The ethnographer makes explicit what is implicit and tacit to informants.

Criterion IX. The ethnographic interviewer must not predetermine responses by the kinds of questions asked. (p.18)

I utilized the above criteria coupled with the following criteria to ensure a high-quality interpretation of the “native point of view” (Spindler & Spindler, 2007, p. 20):

- The clear identification of a culture-sharing group
- The specification of cultural themes that will be examined in light of this culture-sharing group
- A detailed description of the cultural group
- Themes that derive from an understanding of the cultural group
- The identification of issues that arose “in the field” that reflects on the relationship between the researcher and the participants, the interpretative nature of reporting, and sensitivity and reciprocity in the co-creating of the account
- An explanation overall of how the culture-sharing group works

- A self-disclosure and reflexivity by the researcher about her or his position on the research. (Creswell, 2013, p. 263)

I paid close attention to both Spindler and Spindler (2007) and Creswell's (2013) aforementioned criteria during this study to ensure a high-quality ethnographic study, as well as to ensure I met Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness standards. I also utilized the following techniques recommended by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) in conjunction with Spindler and Spindler (2007) and Creswell's (2013) criterion: I had a prolonged engagement (10 months) at the research site. During that time I conducted persistent observations and took detailed observation notes. I triangulated my data through the use of observations, interviews, and field notes. I utilized referential adequacy materials by tape recording interviews and meetings. I member checked my data after each interview round and utilized reflexive journaling in my investigator's diary. I have provided thick description of the culture of the organization in Chapters IV and V. I used purposeful sampling by choosing one organization that met the criteria for this study. I believe the standards of trustworthiness were met.

Limitations

All studies have limitations. A major limitation of this study was a concern that participants were either going to be very open or not open at all, depending on their comfort level and their trust in the confidentiality of their answers. I thought this could influence the data and it may have. I experienced a wide range of comfort levels and openness from the participants in the study. Some were very candid and comfortable that their answers would remain confidential and thus shared a lot of in-depth

information about the organization. Other participants were much more guarded in their responses. They were tactful and cautious in what they revealed. This openness level even differed between interviews with the same individual. In one instance, one participant was much more open during the first interview, but after being given time to think about it, I believe the participant felt he or she had revealed too much. In our consecutive job shadowing, observations, and interview, this person became a little less open and responded a little more guardedly. I believe this range of openness from participants was a limitation to the study, because I think there would have been even richer descriptions and more in-depth data if every participant had remained completely comfortable with the study throughout the data-collection process. In addition, the size of the organization meant a smaller data set. However, I obtained consent from all employees to participate in the study, which assured them that their answers would remain confidential. I believe using the ethnographic approach as the primary methodology helped to mitigate this limitation because I was able to add observations and job shadowing in my role as ethnographer to triangulate the data.

Role as Ethnographer

Throughout the study, my goal was to be an observer as a participant. I spent time observing the organization and its members. I was visible in the organization, but not fully participating. I believe that this both helped and hindered the study. I tried not to share too many personal details because it would cross the line from observer to becoming a participant in the organization. However, this was difficult while trying to establish rapport with the members of the organization. I wanted the members of the

organization to be open and honest with me, thus I worked to establish trust. That is a difficult task when not sharing too much about yourself. Creswell (2013) warns that sharing too much personal information during an ethnography can hinder data collection. While I believe that is partially true, in the context of this organization it made interviews more difficult.

This is partially because of the small town values embodied in the firm's culture and the small size of the culture. The members of this organization know each other very well and have worked together for years. Thus, when an outsider came into the organization observing, job shadowing, and interviewing them, they were wary at first. The partners were not, but the other organizational members were. So one of my first tasks was to establish trust with organizational members. In some cases that worked, however, a couple of organizational members were guarded the entire time I was on site.

Another thing I tried hard to guard against was my own bias. I routinely checked my notes and used my investigator's diary to check for my own bias coming into the situation. I utilized the investigator's diary as a place to journal my initial impressions and tried to keep my notes a recounting of observations made. It is impossible to control for one's own bias, but I believe I put in enough measures to help filter some of that bias out, through my data triangulation and other standards of trustworthiness I employed. One of the challenging aspects of this for me was that I am very familiar with the culture of small Texas towns and it was difficult to filter through my own experiences in order to accurately observe and describe the relationship between leadership and culture in the organization.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study. I analyzed the ethnographic data to answer the research questions posed in Chapter I:

- What effect does a leadership structure characterized by partners with shared and equal decision-making authority (SEDMA) have on a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity?
- What effect does a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity have on a leadership structure characterized by partners with SEDMA?

Major themes discussed in this chapter include: the characteristics and dynamics of a partnership characterized by SEDMA and how this leadership structure influences culture and is influenced by culture as evidenced in three categories: (a) orientation to consensus among members of the organization; (b) relation among manifestations; and (c) orientation to ambiguity. As previously noted, I used Joanne Martin's organizational culture theory to examine the collected data to answer the question. Martin's (2002) theory advocates the use of a three-perspective lens to study organizational culture. I adopted this approach to analyze the data. At the end of the chapter, I discuss further how Martin's three-lens approach impacted my analysis of the data.

Organization of the Data

First, I want to discuss how I developed the themes presented in this chapter. After sorting the data multiple times, four major themes directly related to the research question emerged. I attempted many different approaches to sorting the data, but always came back to organizing the data by the categories of the research questions. This seemed the most logical and intuitive way to interpret all of the data collected. The major themes presented here are broken down into the following categories: characteristics and dynamics of a partnership with SEDMA and how those partner dynamics influence and are influenced by organizational culture as evidenced by (a) orientation to consensus among members of the organization; (b) relation among manifestations; and (c) orientation to ambiguity.

Thus, the following organizing schema emerged in examining the data:

- How does a partnership characterized by SEDMA operate, influence, impact, and interact with employees?
- What effect does a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity have on a leadership structure characterized by partners with SEDMA?
- How does that leadership structure and decision-making process impact and become impacted by the organization's culture as evidenced by:
 - Orientation to consensus
 - Relationship among manifestations
 - Orientation to ambiguity

Characteristics and Dynamics of the Partnership

Using this schema as a framework, four themes emerged. The first theme related to the characteristics and dynamics of a partnership with SEDMA. This theme developed from the data about how the partnership works, how employees perceive it, and how the work is divided and negotiated among the three partners at Office Experts (OE). It emerged first because I first analyzed the data through the lens of how SEDMA affected the culture and was impacted by the culture. In order to analyze the reciprocal relationship between culture and a partnership characterized by SEDMA, I first had to examine the elements of the partnership.

Thus, the first step in the data analysis was to examine the themes that arose relating to the partnership itself. The partners share equal decision-making authority; however, they each have different roles and responsibilities and they hold different ownership stakes in the company. In addition, another key point is that Laura and Richard are married and Laura serves as the president of the company in order for the organization to qualify for Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) status, which provides them with certain advantages when bidding on government contracts.

Division of Ownership

The first element to emerge as significant was the distribution of ownership stake in the business. Richard and Laura have 80% percent ownership and John has 20% ownership. So, while the partners share decision-making and authority, the actual profits from the business are divided 80% to 20%. For the

terms of this study, the key element is the shared decision-making authority.

Before I collected and analyzed data, I did not realize what an impact the ownership stake or the marriage of Richard and Laura had on the relationship of the partners. I discovered as I analyzed the data that John, as the minority financial partner, is very aware that he is a minor partner, even though he does share decision-making authority. He said:

I'm the minor partner. I don't know if he [Richard] told you what our percentage is. I'm 20%; they can control my salary, everything. It's been my goal to make myself so valuable that I never have to worry about that. . . . I produce so much that I'm valuable.

John feels vulnerable in the partnership, which influences some of his decision making when it comes to handling employee issues. The partners communicate well, as discussed later, but John is more hesitant to lead employees, given his minority stake in the business. He went on to state:

Richard's very fair with me. . . . any time that we have rebates from our wholesaler, we third it. So, he gives me a higher percentage than what my actual ownership is on rebates. I appreciate that.

This vulnerability pushes John to sell and produce instead of focusing on leadership tasks and employee issues. During my observation, I noted that "John is very organized and focused on his tasks, selling furniture and managing the furniture side of the organization. However, he often neglects other leadership roles, due to the large workload that he has." Another employee said, "John accepts the fact that he's a very

minority owner, and he doesn't ruffle feathers much. Richard calls the shots." This imbalance in ownership often leaves John deferring to what Richard wants in the decision-making process, even if he would make a different decision.

Partner Roles and Responsibilities

The division of roles and responsibilities among the partners directly informs the dynamics of the partnership. One of the things noted frequently by both employees and partners was that each partner has his or her own roles and responsibilities and strengths and weaknesses, and that the three of them balance each other very well. Each partner's role is significant in that it demonstrates how the partners balance the workload to match their strengths and minimize their weaknesses.

John said:

We . . . all bring something to the table that is necessary for the business to work, and to be successful. I think that we recognize that. We all maintain that capability. That's a good deterrent for problems. As long as we all contribute . . . it's necessary to have us.

This quote shows John's need to contribute and illustrates the balance between the partners and how they each play a significant role in the functioning of the organization. John went on to say:

But there again, you have to pick your strengths and weaknesses between the two [Richard and John]. It's like building a team. Who's suited to what the best? [It lets] us utilize our talents to create the total picture.

The employees view the role distribution as Richard handling employees and John handling customers. One employee stated that “John was more focused on sales, while Richard’s role has been managing the company.” However, not all employees agree that the three are truly in a partnership. One employee noted:

I never really even consider it a partnership. . . . To me, everybody works together . . . everybody kind of has a responsibility. Richard . . . oversees everything. Laura . . . handles most of the accounting. . . . John handles the furniture side.

Thus the employees, who are not privy to the decision-making process, have a different and not necessarily accurate perspective on how the partnership operates.

Richard’s roles and responsibilities. Regardless of the employees’ perception of the partnership, the partners have clearly defined their roles and responsibilities among themselves. Richard manages the employees and the financial side of the business and budgets and oversees use of the company’s proprietary software. John said that neither he nor anyone else on staff could work with the software or the general ledger accounting. John stated that Richard usually created budgets: “He’s more financial.” Richard said of himself, “Any time there is a complaint, I personally handle it.” He went on to say, “I’m the dominant one.” He also noted, “They [the employees] know that the buck stops here.” From the employees’ perspective, Richard makes the final decisions.

From my observation notes:

Richard is the dominant personality, but he consults John and Laura daily on decisions. They go to lunch every day and have an informal partner meeting where they discuss company decisions. While John and Laura, as well as the employees, view Richard as “calling the shots,” he really just voices and enacts the decisions the partners make together. This skews the employees’ perspective on how the partnership functions and how decisions are made. Richard’s role is primarily financial, and he manages the majority of human resource issues.

Richard’s characteristics. Some of the descriptions of Richard as a person/leader give more insight into his role as a partner. One employee described Richard as “firm.” Laura described Richard as “a very nice controlling person.” One employee described Richard as understanding and compassionate; another said that Richard’s biggest strength is fairness: “He’s fair. I think everybody enjoys working for Richard.” Another employee said, “Richard encourages you to be at home and be with your family.” When asked about his greatest strength Richard replied, “Probably, caring. To me, I believe that I’m not just here to give them a paycheck, but to give them life.” Overall, while Richard is viewed as controlling and firm at times, he is well-liked by his employees, and they respect him and think that he is kind. From a cultural leader perspective, this allows him to use his influence to privilege things within the culture and shape how they are viewed because the employees respect him.

John's roles and responsibilities. John's roles and responsibilities are well-defined, although he would like to be able to take on a larger leadership role within the organization. John views his primary responsibility as selling furniture and believes that if he does not focus on selling, then it will not get done. He notes, "Richard doesn't have to be here all the time, with his area of responsibilities, but my area of responsibility is [to sell furniture] . . . if I'm not selling, it's not getting done." Another salesman agreed that furniture sales were essential to the business. "We are not at the point to where [sales of] supplies can support everything. Furniture is absolutely necessary, and he [John] carries the brunt of that on his shoulders." Thus, John's primary role is to manage, sell, and lead the furniture business at OE. John does not handle human resource (HR) issues often. As one employee stated, "I think it's [John handling employee issues] skirted. I don't think it is confronted, and that's simply because John is the operational person now, and he is non-confrontational. That's just the way he is." This statement indicates that the employees are very aware of John's role within the partnership. My observation notes reflected:

John leaves handling most of the human resource issues and confrontation to Richard. For one thing, he is carrying the load operationally at the moment, but his personality is also such that he steps away from confrontation. I am concerned that this diminishes his authority.

The implication is that while the partners discuss decisions and share leadership of the organization, John is carrying a large part of the load but missing out on

opportunities to truly lead. In addition, it indicates that the culture is such that it influences John to feel the need to carry the operational burden without realizing he is not truly leading. One employee confirmed my concern in a subsequent interview, saying, “I really look at John as more of an equal I guess, instead of a boss.” John’s focus on selling and operations has diminished his ability to influence the culture. Consequently, while he has SEDMA, within the organization his decisions are viewed as not as important as Richard’s. Thus, when John makes a decision or institutes a practice, it does not influence the culture of the organization in the same way as when Richard does; it does not have the same degree of impact and, therefore, creates and fosters ambiguity.

John’s characteristics. As with Richard, how employees view John as a person, given his personality, also shapes their perception of the partnership, as well as shaping the actual partnership itself. Richard described John as being too easy-going: “They [the employees] can twist John’s arm pretty easy. . . . John’s too good a person. . . . That’s his personality.” Laura described John as being “A pleaser . . . He’s not very direct.” One employee described him as “[e]asy-going and political. . . . He’s always Switzerland. He’s always neutral.” Laura also said of John:

He’s always positive. I’ve never seen him . . . get down. He’ll know I’m worrying, and he’ll come in my office, and he’ll tell me the jobs he’s got going and how many are closing . . . ’cause he knows I worry.

Another employee described John as compassionate. Another said, “[h]e’s probably not outspoken enough.” From my observation, John is a kind-hearted person

who likes to please people. He is also political, a fact that not all the employees recognize or see in him. However, his political nature does affect the organization's culture by orienting it toward ambiguity more often than not. Although John may be seeking consensus, the employees view the partnership dynamic as actually leading to more ambiguity than consensus because he is always trying to please and is always careful of what he says, how he says it, and to whom he says it.

Laura's roles and responsibilities. Laura has a much smaller role than her title indicates for several reasons. Laura is president in name only. Although she is actively involved in the decision-making responsibilities, she has a much smaller role in the daily operations in the company than the other partners. She noted:

Well, on paper, I'm president, and that is so we . . . are a woman-owned organization. We are, but, as far as me [being at] the helm . . . no, that wouldn't be my intent.

Laura described her responsibilities as falling into three categories: accounting, managing the physical showroom, and approving new clients. She handles accounts receivable, accounts payable, payroll, and payroll and sales taxes; she keeps the showroom decorated, stocked, and orderly; and does "anything that really needs to be done."

One employee said:

I don't know, as far as decision-making . . . how much say she has in it or how much she wants to have in it. I know she's . . . on paper, she's the majority owner, but actually, Richard is the one . . . so far as decision-

making. . . . She doesn't seem like she's as big a part of the actual day-to-day goings on with the business as Richard and John.

Just as with John, the shared decision-making process in the partnership, as well as the authority to make decisions, is not apparent to the employees. Culturally, this is an influence because the employees see a void in leadership when Richard is not present. In addition, the culture is influencing the leadership dynamic. John feels he needs to take on the operational load and isn't as present as a leader for employees and Laura is not seeing the need for her leadership; yet the employees need them to step up as leaders. Currently, the employees view Laura's role as minor within the organization. This view diminishes her authority as well. I noted this in my observations:

Laura is very removed from the daily operations of the business. She is normally only on site a couple of hours a day. She is standoffish with employees. She seems to talk only to Richard and John and to Richard's assistant, Kara. The employees are hesitant to approach her with questions. As with John, I am concerned that the employees do not view her as having any authority.

Laura's small role stems from her personality and from a consensus choice by the partners for her to take a step back from managing employees.

Laura's characteristics. With respect to Laura's personality, John frankly stated:

She is not a people person. She can't handle employees very well; she doesn't treat an employee like an owner or a manager should treat an

employee. It used to be . . . “Who is the employee of the month that’s going to get all the crap?” and “Who is the terrible employee?” And then it will move to the next employee and it’s always a blame game. It’s always blaming somebody else for anything, but I think she’s done a lot better in the last couple of years. She has mellowed out some. And employees have lived with it, and it’s better now.

Another employee emphasized that Laura does not like dealing with employees: “She’s usually more outspoken than John or Richard, so she pulls herself back as far as disciplining or stepping into to a situation.” The same employee said:

Laura doesn’t like a lot of stress. She doesn’t handle stress well. . . . She usually tries not to get caught up in the office drama because she knows she can get emotional with it, and she doesn’t want to get to that point. She knows her . . . boundaries as far as what she herself can emotionally handle and what she can’t.

Laura herself admitted that she is very emotional and that is why she often steps back from handling HR issues. However, several employees also described Laura as being understanding and having a high degree of integrity. Laura’s inability to handle stress well and her being very emotional have led her to carve a niche for herself in the organization. That is not to say that she is not involved or does not have a voice. She mainly communicates only with Richard and John, which reduces her ability to affect the culture of the organization.

Laura's evolution in the partnership has had an important impact. Laura describes the evolution herself:

[From the beginning of the company] I said, "I'm not just going to be a name that you're [Richard and John] using on a piece of paper. I'm going to have some input on this." So, I think when it first happened, I was kind of bristled up because I was going to make darn sure that I knew what was going on. Every—I mean—every little, tiny thing that was going on. I wanted to know what it was and why it was, and this and that and get involved in this. . . . It took . . . three years and getting private offices. . . . to realize I don't have . . . to be bristled up and worry. You know, I don't have to have a chip on my shoulder about why my name's on the papers. . . . Control was an issue with me. I wanted to make sure I had my share of the control.

Laura started with a need to control and be involved; over time, she has evolved, and she admitted that she does some things better than others. She has taken the approach she uses for dealing with employees in order to smooth over conflict and make the organization productive. She wants Richard and John to handle employee issues. They consult her, but she wants them to manage the daily operations. While this may lead to fostering additional ambiguity in the culture of the organization, it is one more example of how the partners have negotiated their roles over time.

Partnership Dynamic

A discussion of the dynamics of the partnership will provide clear understanding of how the partnership functions. John thinks the partnership is unique. He said, “Partnerships are hard. There’s not too many of them that work well. I think we’ve worked very well.” I observed the same thing in going to several of their daily lunchtime partner meetings:

The partnership dynamic is very interesting. They work very well with each other. . . . which partially has to do with them having a long-standing friendship before they became partners. In addition, I think everyone focuses on their responsibilities and roles, and then they discuss decisions and make them together. It is a rather unique partnership.

One of the things that allows the partnership to work is that all three partners have important roles to play and the ability to play them. Their styles compliment and balance each other. John acknowledged this fact when he said, “We each just have a little different style. But it compliments one another, and it works. It’s really weird.” He went on, “I think that’s why Richard and I have done well . . . because I’m on one end, and he’s on the other.” I think it is noteworthy that John discusses the partnership in terms of Richard and himself, omitting Laura. I noted that:

At times, it feels to me as if Laura is an afterthought when discussing the partnership with John and Richard. I know that this is not the case, having observed their meetings and decision-making process. I think it

points to her reduced daily responsibilities rather than a lack of role and respect in the partnership.

John also said, “My personal philosophy and Richard’s personal philosophy—they don’t line up perfectly.” The partners recognize that their balance of personalities is a key dynamic that allows the partnership to function.

Laura described the partnership dynamic this way:

I think it balances, it just balances out a company, in our case, for a company this size. . . . John has strengths, really strong strengths that Richard doesn’t have, and his personality is so different, and so when an idea or some kind of problem comes up, John throws something out and he’s going to deal with it this way, and normally Richard’s dealing with it his [way]. His [Richard’s] thinking is usually the opposite, and I’m just kinda thrown in there as, you know, kind of battling back and forth—I’m the mediator bounced back and forth between them, going, “Well this is this and that is that.” But . . . usually between the three of us, we can come . . . to some sort of agreement if we’re talking about something we want to do or the way something is to be handled.

As noted, another key feature of their dynamic is a long-standing friendship.

John noted that they had known each other for many years. “I think we sort of understood our strengths and weaknesses amongst all three [of us]. We mutually respect each other,” he said.

Another element that makes the partnership work is that they share decision-making authority and everyone has a voice. Laura described it this way:

If there's something that comes up in the middle of the day, and there's gonna be a decision made on it, normally, Richard will just say, "Hey, y'all, come on. We gotta talk through this," and we do it. It's really not a one-man show, not at all.

John said, "We always talk about things. All three of us. When it comes to employees or problems, we all know about it, and we all have a consensus. It's really unbelievable; we usually come to some decision." These statements illustrate the shared nature of the partners' communication and decision-making process. The process is not always evident to the employees, but the partners work to make decisions jointly.

A dynamic that complicates the partnership is the marriage of Laura and Richard. It could easily get in the way of the partnership, yet having John as a third partner mediates the relationship. However, not all the employees appreciate the marriage aspect of the partnership. One employee said, "It [the marriage] affects the way things are run here." I noted this as well:

I think the marriage aspect of the partnership is both a help and hindrance. It is obvious that it creates tension at times between Laura and Richard; however, it also strengthens their communication and the partnership, since they are partners in multiple areas. I can see that some of the employees resent this relationship, Employee C in particular. She and Laura do not see eye-to-eye, and Employee C believes that Richard

treats her differently sometimes because Laura asks him to do so.

Employee C thinks it is an unfair dynamic. I, however, did not see that.

Richard, Laura, and John make joint decisions regarding employee issues.

I think that the nature of the relationship between Employee C and Laura has skewed Employee C's opinion of the partnership dynamics.

From the employees' perspective, I can see the cause for concern about the marriage influencing the partnership; however, John is a very good balance to that dynamic and from what I observed, the marriage does not interfere with how the employees are treated. The marriage does impact the decision-making process in that at times, John has to balance personal issues between Laura and Richard that seep into the business partnership. However, the three partners manage this relationship well.

A further challenging aspect of the partnership is that Richard wants to be involved in everything. As Laura describes it, "He [Richard] wants his little toe right in there in every little thing." However, one interesting aspect of the partnership is that they do not believe they hold each other accountable. They just trust each other to do their jobs; they also trust their employees to do their jobs. This approach trickles down into the organization's culture in managing and leading employees. When asked how they hold each other accountable, Richard said, "We don't."

Another key aspect to their successful partnership is that they communicate well. As discussed, when an issue arises, they sit down, discuss it, and come to a mutual decision. As previously noted, they communicate primarily through a daily lunch meeting. One employee described this communication:

I think most business owners have like a scheduled meeting, weekly, monthly, whatever. Richard, John, and Laura kind of go daily. They do their lunch. It's more of a laid-back atmosphere. . . . I know that most people probably look like, "Oh y'all are just going to eat lunch," but no, really things actually get solved and discussed there. And a lot of times, they'll come back from lunch with them [business decisions]. That's kind of a different way to handle things, but that happens every day.

John noted that there is very little conflict in the partnership. "There's only been 1 time in 16 years that we had a really rough argument," he said. However, one employee does think that communication could be improved, stating, "I would like to see better communication between management." Again, the employees misunderstand a lot of the communication and decision making and it creates some issues within the culture of the organization. An in-depth discussion of those issues follows later in this chapter.

Even though the partnership works well and the partners communicate well, there are also frustrations that impact the partnership. Richard worries about what he calls "the lack of knowledge [of the industry] of the other two [partners]." He also gets frustrated with John for his lack of financial knowledge. "John has no concept of what

that showroom costs,” he said. John is frustrated that Richard is not as engaged in the business currently and is not as passionate about growth as he is:

I see that we’re missing opportunities or delaying those opportunities.

That’s where the most difficult thing is. It’s just that Richard has stepped back from where he used to be years ago. . . . And there’s a little voice there that I know if he stepped in and took it, he could run with it. . . . It’s just that . . . right now he doesn’t have enough room in his mind to have passion about that.

Laura’s biggest frustration is Richard’s lack of planning. She said, “I would like to see a plan of ‘Okay, we got this and this.’ . . . I would like to see it on paper and in front of me and a long range [plan].” These frustrations impact the organizational culture through the decisions made or lack of decisions made. Currently, there is uneasiness about the future of the business among the employees. The lack of growth and lack of decisions to move toward growth is creating unrest among the employees.

In summary, the partnership works. The partners make it work through their shared authority, responsibilities, and decision making. The following section examines in-depth how the partners’ actions, practices, choices, decision making, allocation of resources, shaping of norms, and general focus of attention impact organizational culture. The first group of themes focuses on orientation to consensus, those elements of the culture that create consensus in the organization through the actions and practices of the partners.

Orientation to Consensus

Considering Martin's three perspectives, culture can be studied by looking at elements in the organization that orient to consensus, the elements on which the majority of the organizational members are in agreement on how they are interpreted. To study how SEDMA impacted the culture, I first looked at elements in which the organization came to consensus. I also looked at the data to see what impact, if any, SEDMA had on creating that consensus.

Employee Perception of Organizational Culture

One aspect of the organization on which there was a clear consensus was the overarching cultural environment. When asked directly about the culture of the organization, the overwhelming response was that it is "like a family." John described OE as a family. One employee stated, "I think we all get along good. We're just kind of a big family." Another employee said, "We are like a family because we spend more time together here during the day than at home." Customers are also aware of the OE family culture. One employee described it as having "our own little office family here, and then when people call, they don't just say 'I need to place an order,' they have particular people that they know here [whom] they call." Finally, one element that contributes to the family atmosphere is that people in the organization are willing to help each other. One said, "I think if you ask somebody to do something for you, they would do it." I noted in my observations:

There is a strong emphasis on the organization having a family atmosphere. As I watch the employees work, they truly do help each

other. At times, they argue like family, but they also support each other.

I think they all feel like family.

In addition to a family culture, participants also described overall impressions about the organization's culture. The second most-used descriptor for the culture was "casual." One employee noted that when he first arrived at OE, he learned about the casual culture of the organization through the stories being told to him about the dress code. Another employee emphasized this, "I will tell you it is a casual culture. It is a casual culture. I wore a tie a couple of days and it was almost discouraged."

Besides describing the culture as "casual" and "family-like," employees also mentioned a small-town feeling as permeating organizational culture, "[this] city has a small-town culture, and we, our company, has a small-town culture to it." Employees also mentioned that the partners care about them and want them to have lives outside of work. "You know, Richard encourages you to be at home and be with your family," said one employee. Another said, "They understand that you got a life outside of Office Experts." However, not all the cultural elements discussed were positive. One employee commented about the current economic situation of the company:

I think all in all, everybody's a little down. . . . It's not like I am going to quit. It's just that . . . we're working as hard as we can, and all we hear is we've got to do it more. We haven't had much praise this year.

All these perspectives line up with a note I made in my observation log: The overall culture is very family-friendly and the partners are genuinely concerned about the well-being of their employees. The atmosphere is

laid-back and is heavily influenced by the small community in which the employees live. I see daily how the relationship of the partners and the employees with the community affects OE's business. Those relationships drive the business, and it is evident to me that the employees strive to maintain those relationships.

Through family-friendly policies, such as time away when needed, and a casual dress code, the partners have influenced the culture and created a casual, family-like environment. Their joint decision-making led to the creation of these policies, practices, and norms and thus, created a consensus among the employees of what the culture is like at OE. The partners did not specifically state that they wanted this culture and then go about getting it, but the policies and practices on which they decided together fostered norms and nurtured this culture. For example, if one partner were to dress in a suit every day and the others were to dress casually, it would send mixed cultural signals about the expected dress code, and then ambiguity might arise. However, this is not the case. The partners send consistent messages that foster a casual cultural environment.

Values

There was also consensus on the values of both the partners and the company. John believes that one of the reasons the company is successful as a partnership is that both he and Richard, “had an entrepreneurial spirit in the first place.” He also believes they both are extremely competitive, “I’m extremely competitive; Richard’s extremely competitive.” These two shared values allowed them to come together as partners in the first place. Note that again John did not mention Laura. However, I noted that:

As I observe the partners and have conversations with them, John and Richard talk more about their partnership with each other than with Laura. However, I believe Laura is integral to making the partnership work. She shares their values, and when a decision needs to be made, John and Richard want her there. Again, I think the lack of discussion of Laura is due to her reduced role in the daily operations of the business.

The employees believe the partners have a high degree of integrity: “Richard and John are people of integrity.” The employees also commented that the partners are quick to discipline and then let an issue go, as long as the issue is not reoccurring, “One thing I like about them is they don’t hold grudges. . . . and then they stand behind you on everything.”

The company operates on a set of core values that stem from the values of the partners themselves. At the root of these values is customer service, or serving the customer fairly and with honesty and integrity. Richard described the organization’s values as, “Honesty and integrity . . . so, we try to be honest with people, and like I said,

just fair. Treat the customer fair, the way we want to be treated.” As one employee described this value, “It’s all about customer service. It goes back to . . . serving the customer. Customer service has been the number one priority.” John emphasized this concept when he said, “The sod of our business is good quality, good value, and someone you can trust, and the professionalism, the level of professionalism.” An employee noted, “It’s just quality. . . . I think ‘quality’ when I think ‘Office Experts.’”

Through their actions, the partners have privileged the core value of customer service, and such privileging shapes both the way the business is run and its culture. Customer service drives the partners’ decision making. This value is communicated to the employees in every way possible, from the quality of the physical arrangements, to the expectations of the employees about how to take care of the customer, and the way the partners handle employee issues. These values and the decisions, actions and practices driven by them create consensus in the organization because the partners communicate and operate in a manner that permeates the culture of the organization.

Customer Service

As noted, the primary value of the organization is providing excellent customer service. It was mentioned over and over again almost as a mantra. It is an embedded practice within the organization that stems from the partners’ emphasis on it through norms, policies, practices, and allocation of resources. “The whole idea of the company is based on service,” noted one employee. John said:

We feel like when they entrust us with their business that we have the responsibility to take care of them and to look out for them and to make

sure that they have a good value. I think everybody here has that same attitude.

Another employee commented, “We try to instill customer service [so] that if there’s a problem, you call us, and we’re going to do what we can to take care of it and make it right.” “Our job is not an 8-to-5 job. It is a taking-care-of-the-customer job,” said Richard. “We take pride in making sure a customer is happy when we leave [a furniture installation],” said another employee.

The partners also view customer service as their competitive edge. When asked what makes his organization unique, Richard said, “Our personal service. . . . That’s what we’ve built our business on.” Another employee said, “If we are going to have an edge, it’s usually going to be that [customer service]. It’s personal service. More face-to-face time. You’re not going to end up with a recording or . . . something like that.” One employee said that customer service was one big selling point, “I think that helps a lot. Next day service, service after the sale.” Richard also pointed out that they want to feel like family to their customers. One employee stated, “We just try to make sure that even though the sale’s final, they know the service isn’t.” Richard encourages his employees to think about things from the customer’s perspective, not the employees’. He said, “People have a tendency to think about their way of doing things and not the customer.” Other aspects of customer service that the partners and employees of OE pride themselves on are honesty and integrity. As noted, honesty and integrity are two of the core values that the partners have instilled in the organization. “People want that.

People want to be taken care of. People want to be dealt with honestly, and I think that's something that takes place," said Richard.

I witnessed employees going to great lengths for their customers. After every furniture installation was completed, the customer's office was left in pristine condition. On sales calls, representatives would spend hours with customers helping them find the best products for their needs, even going as far as recommending the customer go to another store for a product if the OE price was too high for a particular item. John demonstrated the standard in the way he interacted with his furniture customers. He went out of his way to draw and design different furniture options before the customer asked. The partners have made customer service a major priority through their actions, practices, and norms, fostering a culture oriented toward customer service above all else. There is consensus around this element in the culture.

Partners Value Employees

Another key cultural element that employees had consensus on was their treatment by the partners. John said, “I think we value our employees. . . . I think we have great people, and we need to take care of them. . . . that person is an investment.” The employees feel that the partners support them and are on their side. One employee said, “I think that if he [Richard] could save an employee, he would do it. I think both John and Richard would do it, absolutely.” Again, I noted a lack of reference to Laura. I believe this is because she is not heavily involved in the daily operations of the business. However, she does have a say in decisions about employees, so I believe she wants to ensure that the employees are taken care of. I noted that:

In observing Laura, while she doesn't interact with the employees very much, she does care for them. She is just unable to relate and interact with them in a way that isn't too directive and harsh. She is self-aware enough at this point to realize this and has taken a step back from handling employees. However, I see through her actions and interactions with Richard and John that she truly cares about them as both people and employees.

Moreover, the employees feel like the partners take the time to explain the reasoning behind what they are asking of the employees. One said, “They will not only tell you what they need you to do, they tell you why they need you to do it.”

The partners believe they give their employees autonomy. John said, “I feel like we give autonomy to our employees to do their job, and to not be extremely detailed on

how to do their job, as long as they produce, which I think is good, especially in sales.” Richard agreed with him, saying, “I think that we probably, on the most part, assume that they are doing what they are supposed to be doing.” However, John finds it hard to provide negative feedback to someone:

And it’s really hard for me to really come down extremely hard on someone, unless they’d done something really bad, because I understand all the mistakes that I make, and I like to give people the benefit of the doubt and to give them a chance to learn.

The employees also feel that they are treated fairly by the partners. A prime example of the support the partners give their employees occurred when an OE employee got into an accident while driving the company van. The employee had this to say about how the situation was handled, “[T]hey weren’t mad or anything. Actually, Richard paid my ticket. So . . . they understood.” The same employee said, “They stand behind you on everything.” The partners are extremely loyal and supportive of the employees. I observed this in their daily interaction with their employees. This loyalty and supportiveness fosters a culture of loyalty among their employees, evidenced by a very low turnover rate. Through their decision to support their employees and provide assistance with personal issues outside of the office, a strong family culture has developed. Through discussing how to handle employee issues and negotiating decisions, they ultimately present a united front to their employees and use an even hand in handling employee issues. This fosters company norms about what to expect. The

way the partners treat employees fosters consensus and employees were unanimous in their interpretation of how they were treated by the partners.

Time away from work. One element that was mentioned repeatedly is the partners' understanding that employees have lives away from OE. The partners are generous and understanding regarding employees who need time away from work, and this has fostered a lot of loyalty among their employees. Regarding time away from work, John said, "I think everybody takes for granted that if you need to get off for something, you can." In appreciation of the relaxed attitude one employee said, "My husband has been sick . . . a lot, and I've been off, and they have never questioned it . . . they've been really, really super. . . . Very understanding, very." Another employee echoed that story:

Well, it was just a trying year, and I had built up days because my parents were getting older, but over that period, I was probably gone . . . a month. He [Richard] never questioned me because he knew if I could be here, I would be here, and that means probably more to me than a paycheck.

The partners' generosity with time away from work has become a norm within the organization. Their shared decision to allow this practice has led to a staff that works very hard and is very loyal. This was another cultural element upon which there was widespread agreement among the members of the organization.

Partners' generosity toward employees. The partners are generous with their time, but they are also generous in other ways. John said, "There's been times that we get them car loans, and there's times that we allowed them to take their vacation from

next year. There's times we've loaned salaries, so we want to be fair." One story epitomizes the partners' treatment of employees and their generosity. The employee was hesitant to tell me this story, but in order to emphasize the partner's generosity and kindness to him, he said:

I didn't really want to get into that [the background story], but I also want to be honest with you about how good these people are.

When I left coaching, the reason I got out of coaching is because I got in some trouble. I'm not proud of it, but it went on for about 2½ years of my life. I had inappropriate relationship with a student and got out of coaching. And, I mean, it wasn't a choice. I resigned. And I spent 2½ months in the state pen. And after that happened, I didn't work for a while. And it actually turned out where I saw John and Richard one night at a hospital. . . . and they followed up with me and wanted to know what I was doing. I said, nothing right now, because it's hard . . . I don't know too many people who would stick their neck out like Richard and John and Laura have for me. They called most their customers and told them I was coming to work to make sure that was okay. . . . It's a small town. . . . Most people knew my situation. . . . I think I left [for prison] this year on January 14 and was gone until April and came back to work a week later. Not many people are going to let you come back to work [after going to prison].

The partners are willing to stand up for their employees and support them, and the employees know it. Through their actions and decisions, such as those taken with the aforementioned employee, the partners have demonstrated that they will go to great lengths to help people. This has created the family atmosphere in the organization and a culture of support. The employees know they have the partners' support and that the partners care about them as people. This norm of treating employees with respect and supporting them has created consensus in the culture that OE is a family.

Type of Employees at Office Experts (OE)

The partners have developed the culture of their organization through hiring decisions. They look for individuals with specific qualities. Consequently, there are many common traits among the people who work at OE. John said, "The quality of people we have is really, really good. They're real good and they're very, very dedicated." Richard said, "I think we have such good employees and good opportunities." Another employee noted, "I just think it's a dedicated staff." John also said, "I am glad that they want to take care of people." Another employee said, "Everybody just kind of knows their part . . . gets stuff done." John also emphasized, "I think everybody mutually respects everyone. There's not a negative." Another employee said, "[Y]ou have to be driven [to work at OE]. You have to be motivated, but this is not a characteristic that I have much of; you have to be flexible." Finally, a description of the employees from John that embodies the culture of the organization, "[T]he culture is that everyone here is customer-service oriented, every single person." To ensure that employees perpetuate this culture, the partners' hiring practices are

oriented toward finding people who (a) have industry experience, (b) fit in the current culture of the organization, (c) are competitive and driven, and (d) are self-reliant.

Secondary to the partners' preferences for employee experience, is how an employee fits in with the organization, "I think . . . [that they hire] somebody that can get along with everybody and somebody that doesn't mind doing a little bit of everything," said one employee. She went on to say, "Just focus on your work. Make sure you know what you are supposed to be doing. Get that taken care of, and if you see that there is somewhere that you can help, then help. . . . don't get caught up in office drama or it always goes back around. It's a small office. Be tight-lipped and listen and keep your lips shut. Just sit there and stare at everybody. I've watched it and that is what I'd say." Through their hiring decisions, the partners have reinforced this culture of responsibility and dedication. There was consensus on these elements from employees.

Human Resources (HR) Practices

I cannot say that the partners are doing a good job on their HR practices. However, there is an element on which there was organization-wide consensus. The first HR practice involved a pretty big request by the partners of the employees and created one of the more memorable events in the history of the organization.

Pay cut. The business was hit very hard by a downturn in the economy. In order to keep the doors open and the business operating, the partners made the decision to ask their employees to take a 10% pay cut to avoid a layoff. This decision was difficult for the partners, but they had used this tactic in the past. John discussed the reasoning behind the pay cut. The partners (or John) presented the pay cut as a case of the

employees sharing the burden to prevent one of them losing his or her job. One employee said of the pay cut, “[O]f course you hate to lose any type of pay, but it was better than someone losing their job and getting laid off. And I didn’t mind doing that at all.” Another said, “I think the pay cut was more acceptable than losing an employee.”

At the time of the interviews, the employees were unsure if they would get the money back. One employee said, “We was [*sic*] hoping to get it back already. I don’t know. I honestly don’t know.” Another employee said, “People aren’t holding their breath [to get the money back].” Richard’s response to that sentiment was, “Well when it’s happened before, they’ve always gotten it back.” The consensus on the pay cut was that it was a necessary evil. The pay cut demonstrates that the partners have an organizational culture where employees support and sacrifice for each other and for the good of the organization. I believe this is due in part to the partners’ generosity toward and support of the employees. The employees were willing to take a pay cut because of the norms the partners have created and the way in which they treat the employees. It is a rare culture that can support a staff-wide pay cut without overt bitterness and sabotage, none of which was evident at OE.

Turnover. OE has an extremely low turnover rate. The business may lose a delivery driver from time to time, but for the most part the employees have been with the organization for a long time. This is another testament to the consensus that OE is a good place to work, the culture is supportive, and the partners are seen as strong leaders.

One employee noted:

When you see people have worked there for a long time, then you know that speaks well for the company itself. Richard actually pays well compared to the industry. And that is one of the reasons that we don't have as much turnover.

John said, "We don't have turnover." Richard went on to say:

But I think . . . it really says a lot that we've got people that have been with us. We don't have people coming in and going, "Well I tell you, I've got another offer for another job up the street here." You know, we've never had people try to come and say they want a better job so they can get a raise. We don't have that.

Another employee seconded that sentiment: "I mean, you don't have a lot of turnover here at all." The low turnover rate reflects the partners' practices of taking care of their employees, which fosters a culture of loyalty. This was another cultural element on which there was consensus.

Firing. As discussed earlier, hiring practices influence an organization. I think it is also valuable to discuss the partners' practices regarding firing employees. This was an area where I saw a lot of loyalty to employees. The partners genuinely care about the

people who work for them. Employees perceive that care and that perception embeds itself in the culture. There was consensus around what it would take to get fired at OE. One employee said this of the partners, “I think if they feel like that person is an asset at all to the company, then they are going to do everything they can to keep [that employee], and maybe just deal with issues.” It takes a lot to get fired from OE. One employee noted that someone could get fired for “taking advantage of the time and freedom given him or her.” Another noted, “It would probably take stealing, or just an all-out verbal meltdown, you know, where things were said that couldn’t be taken back.” Richard was specific about what it would take to get fired, “Immediate firing is [for] theft and lying. Those are two things I don’t tolerate.” I think the consensus in the culture around firing again points to the norms the partners have created through their actions about what is acceptable. Employees understand these norms, and thus this element of the culture reinforces itself.

Smoking. A final notable HR practice is the company’s smoking policy. It is noteworthy because there was consensus on the subject. The partners have agreed to have a strict smoking policy. Richard explained the policy: “Well first, according to the company policy, they’re not supposed to smoke during the working day. . . . Now they both do [the two employees who smoke]. They both go out back against the rules, and it’s almost getting to the point that I am gonna stop it.” John also discussed the policy. “Two of our main employees do [smoke], and he [Richard] hates it. And he makes no bones about it. We have very strict rules [about] where they can smoke and so on.” The thing of importance about the smoking policy is that everyone is aware of it, but some

ignore it. However, even though they are frustrated, the partners have allowed policy violations to continue. This lack of enforcement of the policy points to an unwillingness to confront employees on issues that the partners do not view as vitally important to the operation of the business. I noticed this during my observations and will discuss it more later in this chapter:

Unless an employee is harming another employee, not providing excellent customer service, or in general just not doing their job, the partners really allow their employees autonomy and freedom to do their jobs. The smoking policy is interesting to me. I know Lila and Cathy smoking is driving Richard crazy, yet he seems reluctant to rock the boat and put an end to it. I think it is in part because Lila has had such a rough year personally. Again, it points to the caring for their employees I see from the partners.

Keys to Office Experts (OE) Success

OE has been very successful in their industry and in their market. The partners' decisions and practices have created a culture that fosters and supports that success. There is an organization-wide consensus about some of the elements that make OE successful. John spoke about one of the major keys to OE success from the beginning of the organization:

Richard was very well adept at the industry and the software, and the proprietary software was extremely important to that success. . . . Richard was involved in it from the very, very beginning. So, we have the

software now that our competition doesn't have, and that can really separate us.

Regarding OE success, one employee said, "Obviously, I think customer service and developing a relationship with those customers is the biggest thing that I see that keeps us with repeat business with those relationships that transcend into people talking about us and other people using us."

According to John, key factors to OE's success were furniture expertise and the ability to visualize what the customers want. One of the keys to the furniture business has been John and another employee developing the skill to do 2- and 3-D modeling. "John, Lila, and Richard can take a floor plan, draw up a room, draw up the furniture in there, 3D, 4D [*sic*], whatever you want to see in it. There's nobody else here in town that can do that," said Laura. The partners' decisions have made them and their employees successful and have fostered a culture of success. The partners support employees' growth and, as a result, create consensus around a culture that values success.

Relationship building. One key element of the culture that has led to organizational success is relationship building. "From the people you know [in the community], I think . . . that we develop really close relationships with the people that we serve, most of the people that we service," said one employee. Richard pointed out that it is harder to build relationships in some cases: "In the old days, people were very loyal. . . . That doesn't exist." This is one major factor that influences the way the partners do business in their community. Richard said, "I think you have to strive for a

higher standard when you're in a place where people know you." OE has developed a loyal customer base. The partners have fostered a keen sense that relationships and relationship building are important. The value they place on relationships permeates the culture, creating consensus among the employees that this is a key factor in OE's success, and the employees practice relationship building as well.

Local community. One aspect that had organization-wide consensus was valuing local business. The partners are committed to taking care of their local businesses. The decisions they have made promote them as a local business, and they ask their employees to do the same. "I think our biggest strong point for our customers locally is that we're here," said one employee. Another employee stated, "We exist because [of] the relationships that have been created with Richard and the people that he knows, with me and the people I know, with John and the people that he knows. It is a small-town atmosphere." Richard said, "Our practices are different because we do a lot of stuff on knowledge of people and friendships." One employee put it succinctly: "Everybody knows everybody." Encouraging employees to be involved in the community has helped foster and grow the business and favorable local sentiment. I observed this when I went out into the community while job shadowing the sales staff. It was obvious that OE was well respected and that the organization had deep community ties from the interaction between the sales people and customers. The partners encourage employees to be active in their community to promote and maintain their favorable local reputation.

Richard's leadership. The final element in the culture that had a strong orientation to consensus was the employees' thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs in Richard's leadership qualities, skills, and actions. This is in direct contrast to how they feel that the other two partners lead. Richard's leadership style and qualities are more aggressive, in direct contrast to those of John and Laura. However, although the employees are ambiguous on John and Laura's styles, they are in consensus about how Richard leads. This may be due to the fact that he is the most vocal in the partnership and the one that handles most employee issues; however, he is the only one of the three partners that had any orientation to consensus from employees on his leadership.

According to John, Richard is authoritarian in his leadership style: "Richard's a little—his style's a little different. He's more authoritarian. He'll eat 'em out if he has to. But it's over. The next morning, everything is fine. He doesn't hold it against them. It's great. It works." One employee said, "Richard likes things done a certain way." However, another employee pointed out that Richard was very tolerant of poor employee performance because "Richard is good at readjusting that and lifting them back up." Richard is also very approachable: "Any time we have a question or a problem, I don't hesitate to go to Richard and talk to him about it. He [may say] 'I don't know,' but he always gets back to you with an answer, one way or the other. I think he's a great leader," said one employee. "He's fair. I think everybody enjoys working for him," said another.

One of the primary messages on which employees had consensus was that Richard trusts them to do their jobs and does not micro-manage. As one employee

stated, “He just believed in his employees and he wanted them to run that part of the business, and if there wasn’t anyone [of the partners] here . . . you know what needs to be done.” Another employee noted that Richard was like “an old track coach,” he encourages when needed, but is also strict in the enforcement of his expectations.

Furthermore, employees describe Richard as aggressive: “He’s more aggressive. Again, he’s good to work for, but he’ll tell you straight out if there’s something he doesn’t like.” Finally, Richard sets an example for his employees and sets expectations high. He expects his employees to work as hard as he does. One employee said:

He sets the bar high for himself, and so therefore, if we’re following behind him, then we have no choice but to set the bar high for ourselves. With him constantly working, you know it’s like, okay, if he can do it and he’s the owner, then of course us as the employees, we have no choice, but to follow. So therefore, I think that’s why . . . everybody works as hard as they do for the company, because we see him. He never stops. I mean, ever. From 8 to 5, he’s on it. Seriously.

Richard leads by setting an example of what he wants his employees to do, even though in recent years he is not physically at the office as much as he used to be, he still sets a strong example. He is setting the cultural norm of hard work. The other partners do the same. This fosters a culture of hard work. There was organization-wide consensus that hard work and dedication are expected.

Richard’s strengths. Richard’s leadership strengths include his knowledge of the industry. “His knowledge. He’s got a lot of knowledge as far as business skills,

money, financial, and all of that,” said one employee. “I think one of his biggest strengths is . . . delegating. Another of Richard’s strengths is his ability to use the proprietary software.” John said, “Richard’s strengths, from my perspective, were definitely the software.” Richard’s strengths line up with his role in the partnership and in leading the organization.

Richard’s leadership choices. In addition to Richard’s strengths, his leadership choices and actions influence culture. Richard wants employees to figure things out for themselves and, through his actions, he empowers them to do so. “I don’t want them to lean on me. Many times, I don’t respond so that they can figure it out and take care of it themselves, because that’s the only way they learn,” he said. He went on to say:

Nowadays, I expect this place to run without me, to a large extent. I realize a lot of the financial stuff people don’t know, but I can leave here for two weeks and it’ll still be running. That’s what I expect.

One employee said of Richard, “He lets people solve their own issues; he doesn’t babysit. He doesn’t get in the middle if there’s a *[sic]* issue over here or over there.”

She added:

Richard usually, if there’s like tension or something like that, he’ll usually try to let those people work it out themselves. He doesn’t like to be a babysitter. Now, if it is causing a big problem, he’ll call somebody into his office and just, you know, handle it.

Richard does not like people outside of his partners telling him how to run the business. John said, “I think that as far as Richard’s perspective, as far as a structure or

job description change or whatever, he doesn't like anybody telling him what needs to be done with what he has set up." Richard is also the most vocal of the three leaders. "He can be vocal if he needs to. When I mean vocal, I mean he's very to-the-point. . . . He doesn't beat around the bush. He wants to make sure things get done. . . . if we're doing something, he wants to know what we're going to get in return," said one employee. One employee emphasized, "I think he [Richard] uses more fear as a motivator, as fear of the situation, of what might happen." Finally, one employee noted, "You know the beauty of it is, if it's something that I really think would help me, I could go to him, and Richard will give it to me in a minute, so I don't yearn for anything." Consequently, one of the consistent themes that run through the culture is that Richard is supportive. Employees believe that he trusts them to do their jobs, challenges them, will tell them what they need to fix, but also that he will do anything in his power to help them. I noted the following regarding Richard's leadership in my observation journal:

Richard is a very dominant force in the organization. The other two partners defer to him in all issues dealing with employees; thus the employees see him as the primary leader of the organization. As such, he has the most influence over the culture of the organization from the employees' perspective. However, the other two partners have equal sway over the culture in very different ways and it is obvious from spending time with the partners that they make decisions together. Some of Richard's strengths are also weaknesses that are balanced by John and Laura.

These elements of the organization emerged from the data and generate orientation to consensus. Next I will discuss the elements that describe the relation among manifestations, which is Martin's (2002) next variable to consider when examining culture.

Relation among Manifestations

Martin's (2002) variable of relation among manifestations concentrates on the degree to which either material or symbolic cultural manifestations evidenced in a given organization reinforce or contradict each other. One way in which the partnership has an impact on the culture is through the cultural manifestations that they privilege, or pay more attention to, such as physical arrangements and dress code. I have focused on practices, norms, and narratives in both the orientation to consensus and orientation to ambiguity theme categories in the data analysis; however, there were several other cultural elements that need to be discussed under the relation among manifestations category. These fall mainly into the orientation to consensus category because most organizational members agree upon the interpretation of these cultural elements.

However, they are traditional cultural manifestations that should be discussed as relation among manifestations.

The weakest area of data was that pertaining to relation among manifestations. While there was a lot of evidence of organizational culture, it mainly fell into the categories of practices, norms, narratives, physical arrangements, and dress. I have used those cultural elements to discuss orientation to consensus and will also use those elements to discuss orientation to ambiguity. There were few strong metaphors, stories,

rituals, legends, artifacts, or jargon evidenced in the culture at OE. Consequently, for the purpose of data analysis, I focused on (a) physical arrangements, (b) the organization's founding story, (c) dress code, (d) rumors and gossip, and (e) celebrations.

Physical Arrangement

OE is located in a suite of offices in a shopping center that is centrally located in the city. The offices are comprised of individual, private offices for each employee, except the furniture installation manager and the delivery driver. These two employees occupy a small warehouse space in the back of the office suite where supplies and furniture waiting for delivery are stored. The front of the office suite features a large showroom with office furniture on display from which customers may order. This is an upscale office furniture showroom. It has plush carpet, elegantly and appropriately decorated walls, and furniture displayed as office suites. It is a very pleasant work environment. Employee offices are well appointed with upscale office furniture, and each one has been decorated individually by Laura. The employee offices are part of the showroom, and the employees are asked to keep them neat because they are examples of what OE is selling in both furniture design and product.

Employees are happy and pleased with their office environment and believe it is appropriate for a company that designs office spaces and sells office furniture. "I think we have plush offices," one employee said. Richard describes the physical arrangements, "The offices are part of our showroom. They [employees] got the furniture they needed, but at the same time, it had to be something that we sold and we needed to show. So each office is done different. And my wife [Laura] does all the

decorating.” As for personal touches from the employees Richard notes, “We never turn them down. They got pictures. . . . They are reasonable. And they know it’s a showroom.” The one complaint about the physical arrangements came from an employee who worked in the delivery and installation area, “Sometimes I cannot have enough space.” I noted in my observation journal, “The environment of OE reflects the conservative nature of the organization. In addition, it is an excellent sales tool for employees.” The employees in the organization are in a clear consensus that the physical arrangement of the organization reflects the culture and purpose of the business. Physical arrangements are one cultural form that is a tangible, visible signal of the culture of the organization. OE’s physical environment reflects its conservative culture and family culture in the way it is arranged. The partners have decided to utilize their office space as an additional selling tool and, as such, the employees have used that tool. By deciding to have their employees work in a pleasant, comfortable office, the partners again reinforce the cultural message that the company is a family that wants to take care of the employees.

Founding Story

Often one of the most revealing stories about the culture of an organization is the story of its founding. OE’s founding story reflects the nature of the partnership and how that partnership has influenced the organizational culture. Richard’s version was the most succinct and revealing:

Well, for years, we [the partners] had planned on doing something, and in 1992, really my wife, John (who worked for me at that time at another

place), and I sat down and came up with a game plan. We set a date. We did all of our incorporation prior to leaving our other positions, our jobs. [We were] very cautious because we were going to be opening a competing business venture, so we had a lawyer involved—a personal friend. . . . We made sure of what we were doing. We weren't doing anything illegal. We made sure we didn't take anything with us that would be construed as a problem. And we actually purchased our software, got our loan, got everything set up, and purchased our equipment three months prior to opening. And began at that point building our database and working out of my house. July—no June 30, 1993, John and I both resigned our positions effectively immediately that day. The next day, we were tearing wall out of a place we had rented with sledgehammers and chainsaws. And we did a lot of initial construction work ourselves and then brought in the finishing guys. We had already put together all our inventory, opening inventory order. It just all fell in place. We opened the doors on August 3, 1993. . . . There were three of us, and we hired one other . . . Then one of our sales people from the company we were with [previously] wanted to come to work for us. Told her no. . . . She said, "Well, I'm quitting there." I said, "Okay." She'd been with me a long time. . . . I told her I would not hire her until she was no longer employed there. She quit and immediately came and said, "Okay, I'm not employed." We actually hired her. It was not in the

plan. It was not part of the plan, but she kind of forced our hand. . . . We still have those employees. The same employees we started with.

One of the more important parts of their founding story is a struggle very early on to keep the business viable. John told the story of the day they almost closed their doors:

I remember leaving the office and going out and calling on a hospital that I had gotten as a supply customer, and Richard and I had a discussion that morning—and it was a pretty tough day—that we really needed—that something really needed to happen. We could be in jeopardy. I remember walking into that office and the procurement manager leaned over and took a piece of paper and turned it over and said, “Do you think you can get this furniture for me?” It was a pretty big furniture sale. So, I went right back to the office – so usually when I left the office, I didn’t come back until the end of the day. And I came back and put it on Richard’s desk and said “Well here it is.” So, that’s what saved us that month. So, anyway that got us over the first hump.

These two stories about the history of OE reveal quite a bit about the nature of the partnership and its influence on OE culture. These two stories are cultural manifestations themselves and every member of the organization knows them. There is no ambiguity or debate about these cultural stories in the organization. They communicate to the employees of the organization that the partners are a team and that they work together to make the organization strong and viable. They also reveal that the

initial struggles forged a strong partnership, and while John may be the minority partner, he has equal sweat equity in the business and has as much decision-making authority as Richard and Laura. Furthermore, it reinforces the loyalty of the employees for the organization and that the partners take care of their employees. These two stories form a foundation for consensus within the organization on its core values and how the partnership works.

Dress Code

The dress code is another strong cultural manifestation upon which there is agreement in the organization. The partners determined the dress code together and set the example for the employees to follow by dressing according to the code. The dress code is business casual. This is how Richard described the dress code:

Business casual. Fridays is casual. If you want to wear decent jeans on Friday, that are respectable, you can do that on Friday, because most everybody is kind of in and around here on Friday, and not making calls outside and doing stuff like that.

Richard went on to say, “I wouldn’t hire anybody that had a ring, other than a lady with earrings, but if they had a nose ring, and I don’t hire guys with earrings. Not allowed to wear them. I mean, you know, I just, it’s got to fit with our customer base.” One employee stated, “Sometimes we have to calm down dress, you know, and remind people of the dress code.” Another employee described the dress code: “They just want you to look nice.” One employee, who was slacking on the dress code, began dressing better and was rewarded for it: “So I kind of stepped up a little bit and, I don’t know,

several weeks later, there was a note in my [pay] stub with a little bit extra [money] there.” The partners have set a standard in keeping with the culture of professionalism while staying true to the casual, family culture of the organization, and they expect their employees to meet that standard. They have set this cultural expectation through clear signals on policies and practices.

Rumors and Gossip

Rumors and gossip can have a major impact on an organization. As a cultural element, they exist in every organization, in some, more intense and severe than in others. OE does not have a major problem with rumors and gossip. However, they have one employee who gossips and spreads rumors, and the partners are aware of the situation. They have decided that the behavior is generally harmless, and given that she is one of the two founding employees besides the partners, they talk to her about it but do not really discipline her. The consensus within the organization is that rumors and gossip are not really a problem as long as one speaks carefully around this individual. I noted this during my observations:

Employee C likes to be in everyone’s business. She is always probing for information while giving out little information herself. She likes to gossip, mainly with two people in the office. Most of the time it isn’t malicious, but she could definitely start trouble if she had the right information.

Richard believes that the gossip is not a problem in the organization: “I don’t think there’s enough of it to make a difference.” Another employee however voiced a different opinion:

I think it [gossip] affects morale. I mean, there have been days where it definitely affects my morale. You know . . . everyone’s morale can have an effect on productivity. . . . I think it can get in the way of a lot of stuff, just takes up space.

Another employee had a slightly different opinion: “I think management thinks there is [a lot of gossip and rumors], but I think it is much, much less than what they think.” Another employee addressed the main office gossip, “There is one person here that you have to be careful about what you say around this individual, but I just am careful with what I say. And I don’t think this individual is a bad person. I think they like to talk, so I kind of keep everything close.” Another employee said:

Employee C can be talkative and it can go beyond this office. It can go to other people. I’ve always wondered about that. Employee L would be a person that would use it against you if she could. I hate to say that.

Richard seconded this thought, “With Employee C, there is always rumors and gossip.” One employee said, “People talk, but I don’t think it is to the extent that it would make anybody uncomfortable or anything.” While there is consensus that Employee C is a gossip and that she spreads rumors, there is much less consensus on the impact she has on the organization and its culture. Some employees see it as harmful, and others think it is harmless. The partners do not address the gossip or take Employee

C to talk about it, so they create ambiguity in the culture, which gossip and rumors reinforce in and of themselves.

Celebrations

Regarding memorable events and stories as significant cultural manifestations, the data showed their impact on the culture to be basically non-existent. There were not enough data about either cultural manifestation from which to draw any meaningful conclusions. However, there were a little more data about celebrations in the office. Basically, there are no celebrations outside of an annual Christmas party. The Christmas party was cut back this year because of the financial situation of the organization. Regarding celebrations, one employee said, “There’s not a lot of celebrating.” Richard said this about birthdays:

I do not believe in celebrating an employee’s birthdays. I don’t mind telling them happy birthday, but I’m not going to give them a card and I’m not going to have a birthday cake or present, because you never know who you’re going to offend and whose feelings you’re going to hurt. . . . To me, that is personal. I don’t like doing that on the company.

This statement about birthdays could reveal in part why there are very few celebrations at OE. John said, “There is [*sic*] not very many pats on the back. We don’t celebrate good things very much overall.” Laura said, “There should be more celebrations.”

The one major celebration in the organization is the Christmas party. One employee describes it: “And then of course we have a Christmas dinner where we all get

together every Christmas, in poor times and good times. It just depends on where we go and what we eat. We've always had an employee dinner." Another employee said, "The Christmas party. You know what I mean. . . . that's something that everybody looks forward to." However, given the financial situation of the organization, this year the Christmas party may not happen. The partners worry that such a decision could make the employees uncomfortable about the future of the organization. Celebrations like the Christmas party send a message to the employees that the organization is healthy enough to celebrate. The partners worry about the message they are sending and how it will impact morale and the culture of the organization.

Orientation to Ambiguity

The last major theme is based on Martin's (2002) variable orientation to ambiguity. This variable focuses on how members of an organization handle ambiguity about the cultural elements found in a specific organizational culture. Based on my initial impressions during the data-collection process, I was surprised to find much more ambiguity around cultural manifestations when I analyzed the data.

The SEDMA of the partnership creates much ambiguity in the organization. This stems from a lack of consensus among the partners about which elements to privilege. One partner privileges one element over another, while a different partner privileges a competing or contrasting element. It creates confusion and ambiguity, especially in treatment of employees and setting work expectations. Orientation to ambiguity is not a judgment on the organization and its leadership practices. It is simply an understanding of what is happening in the culture of the organization that can inform a leader's

decision. If, as a leader, I know there is ambiguity in the organization, I need to take that into consideration when I make decisions, allocate resources, and institute policies, because it impacts how those things are received and implemented in the organization.

Partner's Leadership Style

I discussed Richard's leadership style in the section on orientation to consensus. I did not discuss John's or Laura's leadership styles or Richard's weaknesses because there was no consensus on these areas. There was, however, a lot of ambiguity. Employees struggled to describe John or Laura in terms of leadership. Their actions create confusion and ambiguity in the organization. There is a lot of ambiguity around Richard's weaknesses as well.

John's leadership. Richard described John as "passive":

He leads in a different way. He's easier going than I am, but, on the other hand, I think my message comes across loud and clear when I need to be.

. . . On the other hand, [John is] kind of like Obama. He's apologizing the whole time he's trying to say something.

One employee said of John, "John is going to be much less confrontational than Richard." John described what he believes the employees would say about him when he said, "I think they would probably say that I'm approachable." One employee agreed, "If it's a reoccurring issue, and people get really frustrated, they go to John. John's the politically correct one. He's the diplomatic one." Richard also described John's leadership style as: "He's a pleaser. . . . He's not very direct."

John's leadership style is part of what creates ambiguity in the organization. Some see his strengths as weaknesses and vice versa. John said of himself, "I'm probably too soft." The employees agreed that he is soft in his leadership style. From my observation notes:

John is the person that employees come to when they are either really frustrated with Richard or they think Richard will say no. They think they can manipulate John. I don't think this is the case. John and Richard and Laura discuss everything, and I don't know that the employees always see this. However, I have noticed that there are times that John needs to stand up and take a firmer stance and he doesn't. This undermines his authority with his employees on certain issues.

John's political nature leads to confusion in the culture of the organization. One employee said:

He [John] won't make decisions that I think he should. . . . If you go and ask him a question, if Richard's not here, he normally . . . will pass the buck if it is something that he doesn't maybe he doesn't feel like is his area.

Part of what this employee described is the shared decision-making process that the partners use, which is not transparent to the employees. The lack of transparency about how decisions are made leads to confusion and ambiguity and leaves John looking weak in this instance. The same employee said, "John doesn't think fast enough." This

is a reflection of John trying decide if something should be decided jointly or if he feels comfortable making the decision himself.

Another employee said, “He [John] can almost be too nice.” Another said, “I think some [employees] really don’t listen to John at all.” An employee with whom John works stated, “He doesn’t come across as the boss.” Finally, employees realize that John’s workload does not allow him time to manage employees and general operations closely. One employee said, “John, most of the time we both have our hands full keeping up with furniture. Therefore he doesn’t have time to manage.” Another employee stated, “He just gets involved in too many things.” John’s leadership style and workload do not allow him to deal with employees effectively and, thus, they are unsure of his role in the partnership. In sum, employees are confused by John’s leadership, and it creates ambiguity in the culture.

Laura’s leadership. Laura’s leadership creates even more confusion and ambiguity than John’s. Employees are very unsure of what Laura’s role is in the organization. They do not realize she is involved in the decision-making process. They do not view her as a boss or a leader. When she tries to manage them, they are not sure why she is doing it, which fosters more ambiguity and confusion. John said:

Laura lets personality—if she doesn’t like somebody, then she doesn’t like him or her. She can’t step back and say, “They’re an employee. They’re valuable. I might not like them, but . . .” If we have a problem going on, it’s always somebody’s fault, and that’s the person, for six

weeks, that's she's on. And then she'll go to another one and she's on that one. It just rotates. She is not a good people person.

Laura's inability to treat her employees as employees causes frustration among them and the partners as well. That frustration permeates the culture in the form of ambiguity. People are unclear about how to work with Laura. Laura herself said that one of her biggest challenges is:

Worrying. I mean, honest to goodness, it's worrying. And right now, on and off through the years. I'm kind of an up-and-down type person and right now, I'm in a down slope.

"I don't think Laura has the tolerance for pressure that Richard and I have to take, so in that regard, when there are things that are tough, career threatening, monetary threatening, that she doesn't handle it very well," said John. The employees notice Laura's worry and inability to handle stress and pressure. They avoid working with her, if possible. This creates operational problems and creates an underlying tension in the organizational culture that also leads to ambiguity. Employees never know what Laura is going to do or how she is going to react. I noted in my observation journal:

Laura is the only partner that I see that is not well liked. The employees walk on eggshells around her. I get from my conversations that at times she can be very explosive and can jump on employees for minor things. I think employees don't know how to handle her.

Laura is also particular in the way she wants things done. She describes herself: I'm impatient, I'm a perfectionist, and I expect things to be done right the first time. And overbearing. That would be a good word. . . . I've mellowed out over the years. . . . I'm more of the let's jump on it, let's get this fixed.

"Laura either will stay out of [employee issues] or she'll just be blunt and say it," said one employee. By generally staying out of employee issues but being overly blunt and at times explosive when Laura does intervene, she creates a tense environment and a culture of fear about working with her. Her erratic style creates confusion because employees do not know what to expect from her on a daily basis. Overall, Laura creates a lot of confusion for the employees, which permeates the culture as ambiguity.

Richard's weaknesses. While there was overwhelming consensus on Richard's leadership style and strengths, there was no consensus on his weaknesses. Employees described his weaknesses in a variety of ways. Many employees view Richard as the dominant one, and therefore believe he has few weaknesses that impact the business. One of common theme, however, was that the business would be greatly improved if Richard were more engaged. One employee said:

I think if he were more engaged, that it would help, you know. . . . If he is more engaged, the company is going to do better . . . I hate to oversimplify, but . . . that is . . . the one thing that needs to happen to make OE better.

Another challenge Richard himself admits is, “Getting it done. Getting it done in a timely manner.” One of Laura’s frustrations with Richard is:

He is the type that likes to keep it under his thumb, so it’s very hard for him to delegate, and once he does delegate it, sometimes it’s hard for him to not go back and want to get in the middle of it.

Another employee said, “He [Richard] controls a little too much.” Another employee, however, said “I really can’t think of any weaknesses.” I noted in my observation journal:

The employees and John feel Richard’s absence. I think they want him to reengage fully with the business. However, I don’t get the sense he is willing to be engaged at the moment. This has left a void, particularly in the area of handling employee issues.

Richard’s weaknesses create ambiguity because the employees look to him to lead, and when he fails in that role, it creates confusion in the culture of the organization. The employees are unsure of what to do.

Handling employee issues. As previously stated, Richard primarily handles employee issues, which has a tendency to create ambiguity and confusion. Employees who work closely with John have to go to Richard to handle a situation. As mentioned above, Laura or John will step in at times to handle something. Given the inconsistent way in which the partners handle employee issues, it is evident that confusion permeates the culture. I noted in my observation journal, “If Richard isn’t here, employees are confused on who to go to about issues. In addition, John avoids handling employee

issues, and Laura seems to hold things in until she blows up.” One employee said that if John is unsure of something, he’ll go to Richard with it instead of handling it himself.

Richard said:

Laura is going to come to me. She can’t tell anybody anything unless she gets mad at somebody enough. . . . She can get on them, but usually she’s mad and out of control and doesn’t know what she is doing.

Richard said, “We’re so close in proximity to each other and we are involved in what’s going on that . . . We’re a different animal, being the size that we are.” Even though Richard believes he has a handle on the organization, what happens when he is not there? John and Laura have abdicated their responsibility for handling employees. Thus, if an issue needs to be handled, it is often postponed and allowed to fester, causing the employees to be confused about what is and what is not acceptable and about how to handle a situation. This behavior creates ambiguity in the organization. The handling of employee issues is one of the biggest contributors to ambiguity in the culture. On one level, I believe that Richard tries to keep things ambiguous in the culture to force employees to handle issues themselves. Again, ambiguity is not bad; it is just a feature of a culture that one needs to understand in order to lead in that culture.

Communication

One of the challenges mentioned by almost everyone interviewed was communication. “I think the main thing the employees would say, from their standpoint, is probably more communication, regular communication,” Richard said in response to being asked about his major challenges. Another employee said, “I wish we

communicated more, but I'm negligent." Another said, "Sometimes communication is horrible." Laura said, "Communication, we could do so much better on communication. We talk about that all the time. We're like, 'Communicate, communicate, communicate.'" Richard says, "I have to trust right now that my employees are communicating between themselves and if I need to tell them something, I tell them something." One employee said:

Communication, I think, is our biggest weakness. . . . Disgruntlement.

No one likes to not know what's going on. If you have a truly a vested interest in your company, and I'm not saying vested as far as financial, but emotional investment, when you sit and management comes to you and asks you to take a pay cut, then you do have a vested interest in the financial success of the business because now your money's involved.

That's the way I look at it, and when you see things not running efficiently, most of the time it's because of communication in my eyes.

In my observations notes I stated the following about the communication practices of OE:

OE is challenged when it comes to communicating. While the partners do a good job communicating and decision-making, I don't think they do a good job of communicating those decisions to employees, and I think it creates some confusion and frustration. I also don't think the different areas in the organization communicate well with each other either.

Again, creating frustration, frustration for employees.

When asked about their preferred form of communication, the majority of employees said e-mail. “I always like to have a record. I sent that and you did or did not reply. If you did, this is what you said,” commented one employee. “I like e-mail, because later on, if there’s a misunderstanding, you have a paper trail,” said another employee. The preferred form of communication points to an underlying lack of trust on the part of some employees in the organization that belies the family culture to a degree. I think that part of that lack of trust is due to the communication issues in the organization. In addition, the lack of communication from the partners to the employees and amongst the employees creates a culture of confusion because no one is really sure of what is happening. The lack of communication created resentment about the pay cut. Failures in communication created worry because employees are unsure if they are going to have a job. In general, poor communication is a breeding ground for ambiguity in an organization, and currently, that lack of communication is influencing the culture at OE.

Employee Perception of the Partnership

Employees have an ambiguous perception of how the partnership works and functions. They are unclear how decisions are made, and they don't know who really has authority and who does not. This ambiguity creates confusion about whom to approach and how to handle situations, fostering more ambiguity. One employee said, "I think the big decisions are made over lunch with John, Richard, and Laura. They do a lot of their executive decision making at lunch, and I think that they all have a voice in that." Another employee said, "Generally, you know, if it's something that Richard really wants to do, we'll do it." Another employee said:

Richard's money is in this company, and that becomes more of a priority.

I think, in John's eyes, that Richard will win any argument, period. . . .

John accepts the fact that he is a very minority owner, and he doesn't ruffle feathers much. Richard calls the shots.

Another employee commented, "I don't see John and Richard the same. John is somebody that I work with, but he is also my supervisor and I respect him. To me, Richard is the boss." The lack of understanding of the partnership and roles creates a lot of confusion and ambiguity. How the partnership works is not transparent to the employees, which fosters ambiguity in the organization.

Richard's Absence

Because of health problems, a house remodel, and a general feeling of being burned out, Richard has disengaged and stepped back from the business somewhat. He is not in the office every day, all day. A lot of his work can be done from home. This

situation creates a lot of stress for the employees who see Richard as the main authority figure in the organization. They are confused about why he is not on site more; they worry about his health and how it will impact the future of the business and their future. They are unsure whom to approach to handle issues. The void Richard leaves contributes directly to the ambiguity in the culture of the organization. Employees are unsure of what to do.

However, Richard feels like he needs to and can take a step back from the business:

I'm going to do whatever it is I need to do. I have been doing this so many years—I started at 6 years old working with my dad. My initial goal was to semi-retire at 55. Of course, that's not going to happen anymore. Good old economy. That blew that real quick. Nevertheless, I don't . . . have to be here or have to meet . . . nowadays, I expect this place to run without me to a large extent. . . . My role's changed drastically . . . I don't take it seriously anymore. But I don't want to have to. It's not that I don't want to do it. It's a matter that I have to know that it works without me. And they [employees] don't—they [don't] always understand that, but I do.

John echoes, “Richard is able [to step away from the business] at this point . . . he doesn't have to be here all the time, with his area of responsibilities.”

While Richard is trying to make the business self-sufficient, he hasn't communicated that goal to his employees; thus, there is a lot of confusion about why he

is not as engaged as he used to be and a lot of worry that if he is not engaged the business will not survive or grow. John said:

It's just that Richard has stepped back from where he used to be years ago, and I'm not mad . . . I understand. If I was in his position, it's just reality. And there's a void there that I know if he stepped in and took it, he could run with it. . . . The company really needs him a little more—and I'm not saying that in a negative way.

Richard's absence is felt and it impacts organizational culture by adding ambiguity and uncertainty. Employees are unsure of what Richard's absence means. John is left with a lot more on his plate, and he does not have time to communicate with employees. All of this fosters a culture characterized by ambiguity.

Meetings. One way to improve communication and decrease confusion would be to have staff meetings. However, OE does not hold regularly scheduled staff meetings, which adds to a culture characterized by ambiguity. Richard said:

We don't have a lot of store meetings. I am not a big, huge fan of burning time. In a small organization, we probably need to have more store meetings than we do. In fact, I've been criticized—not criticized, but we've discussed the fact that we don't. . . . We don't have enough people to have weekly meetings.

However, he went on to add, “The only downside to that [not having meetings] is sad news can travel in the wrong way, too.” Richard is missing the confusion, ambiguity, and lack of communication that is created by of a lack of meetings. John, on

the other hand, would like to have meetings. I am not sure it is something about which either feels strongly enough to make a decision, but it is one area that would improve their communication. John said, “If we would have store meetings, then when things come up, say we had a customer here that’s a repair problem for a while and we haven’t gotten to that yet, and reiterate that, then it wouldn’t grow into the time-frame that it grows into.”

When they do have meetings, like an annual strategy session, often people get left out because they need someone to handle the daily operations of the store. “Don’t have as many employees to cover the place. Somebody gets left out, that’s the biggest problem,” said Richard. The employees are aware of this and one noted, “I think that not everybody is included in all meetings. . . . Well, when you have a meeting, I think everybody ought to be included.” Other employees would like to have meetings as well. “Communication could be better, and when I say ‘better,’ I mean . . . it would be better if we had time to sit down and meet as opposed to exchanging e-mails. . . . e-mails are good, but they’re real informal.” A lack of communication and meetings foster ambiguity in the organization.

Accountability. Another area of the organization about which employees are ambiguous is accountability. There is a lack of accountability throughout the organization. Employees are unclear about how they are held accountable. This is a direct result of the partners’ decision not to have formal performance evaluations. “The system [accountability] doesn’t really exist. They’re used to just getting the check. And there needs to be accountability for the check,” said Richard. “And that we just assume

that they're being accountable. That they're doing. Do we hold them accountable? Well, yeah, we do, and I think overall that they're really doing what in our mind we think they are supposed to be doing," said Laura. One employee said, "I guess there's really not a definite performance evaluation. I guess I would know more if I was not doing my job." There is currently no feedback system, so employees are ambiguous about whether they are doing what they are supposed to do. This creates a culture that, on one hand promotes independence, but on the other provides no feedback to tell employees whether they are successful. Thus, employees are ambiguous about accountability. I think Richard wants and fosters ambiguity around accountability and that John is focused on other things and does not have the time or energy to argue.

Inequality in Employee Treatment

Employees feel that certain members of the organization are treated differently than others. They think that based on performance, some individuals get treated differently than others (for example, given more leeway on time away, on the smoking policy, or larger bonuses). Inequality of treatment sends the message to employees that no matter how hard they work, they cannot be sure that they will be treated the same as their colleagues. Inequality of treatment fosters ambiguity in the organizational culture. One employee said, “Sales people are just treated differently than everybody else. They just are.” When asked if everyone was treated fairly in how the partners handled employee issues, one employee responded:

Oh no, no. It has to do with the effort that that employee puts in for him [Richard] whether or not he puts in an effort for that employee. . . . But, like I said, I’m on the good side, and I know he will take care of me.

Another employee said, “Certain people want special attention because of who they are. And I think he’s [Richard] real good at making sure that he deals with those issues, I mean that’s hard.” “If you are going to do it one way [handle employee issues], everybody needs to follow the same rules, guidelines,” said another employee.

Ambiguous rules and treatment lead to ambiguity in the organization, as evidenced at OE. I think in this area, the partners feel that employee treatment should be based on their effort. I observed this in their decision-making process. They do not care if it creates ambiguity. They actually embrace it as a motivating factor for employees.

Trust

The subject of trust also produced a variety of responses. Employees at OE have varying opinions about whether they can trust their fellow employees. “I think there’s no problem in that area [trust], except between Employee L and Employee T,” said Richard. One employee had this to say about trust:

But here, any problem that comes up, if I’m not here, I feel comfortable that it’s going to get taken care of, or they’re going to contact me. “Hey, we’ve got a problem with such and such.” I trust anybody here to take care of most problems that come up.

In contrast, when one employee was asked if she trusted everybody, her response was, “No.” Another employee does not trust her colleagues because, “I think they are out for them[selves].” A variety on the spectrum of trust exists at OE. The partners believe there is trust among their employees, so they do not make any decisions to foster trust. However, some trust is lacking in the organization, which perpetuates the ambiguity present.

The Economy

OE was so hard hit by a downturn in the economy that they asked their employees to take a pay cut, as previously mentioned. Uncertainty about when the pay cut will be restored has employees confused and on edge about their future with the organization. The partners have not done anything to alleviate that confusion, once again fostering a culture of ambiguity. The employees see Richard and Laura remodeling their home and taking vacations, yet they had to take a pay cut. These

actions and decisions contribute to ambiguity about the company's future; however, the partners have made a consensus decision not to address the issue with the employees beyond the news of the pay cut. Richard said:

As bad as things are right now, I hate to sit them down and then tell [employees] how bad it is, to some extent. You know what I am saying. It's like they don't need to deal with any more stress. Business is slow and they can see that. . . . You talk to the employees and they become scared, and all of a sudden they're out looking for a job. So, communication is probably lower now than it was, but with a little bit of purpose.

The company took a big hit when it lost one of its major customers, a local bank that was sold. This event added to the unease felt by employees. One employee described another economic situation:

We had a big account, a bank, that we had all their locations. We even serviced them in Dallas. We just lost them this last year. And financially, that was a burden that we're still kind of trying to find our way through. They were probably 40% of what we did. . . . When we first heard about that, it was, "What are we going to do without them? We're going to go under."

John had this to say about losing another account:

We had this large hospital that was a huge, huge portion of our business about four or five years ago. When we lost them, I think "We'll have to

shut the doors,” but we didn’t. It happened, and we didn’t shut the doors.

We found a way around it. The key is not to have a huge part of your business wrapped up in one customer.

However, the partners are not communicating this message to their employees, leading to a culture oriented toward ambiguity and a workforce that is nervous and scared.

Human Resources (HR) Practices

While there are some HR practices that oriented toward consensus in the culture of OE, there are also several that orient toward ambiguity. The partners do not have a well-defined HR structure. They feel they do not need one with an organization of their size. However, the result fosters ambiguity in the culture.

Compensation and rewards. Most employees believe they are paid well; however, they are confused over an ambiguous reward system. Is there one? Is there not one? If so, what are the rewards? Rewards fail to motivate if they are not transparent, and the partners’ decision to not discuss the reward system leaves employees confused. This is one more factor that contributes to a culture characterized by orientation toward ambiguity. “I would probably put in a better system of rewarding our employees for profitability,” said Richard, even though he could not really articulate what the current reward system was. John noted, “As far as compensation, I think we’ve been fairly fair with our employees.” One employee agreed, saying, “Richard actually pays us well compared to the industry.” Richard spoke about one tool he uses to incentivize: “I like to think they earned the raise. I don’t want them to think you are

automatically getting it.” Another system they use to reward is to put extra money in a paycheck after an employee has done a good job on something, but the employees are unclear as to how it works. John noted, “Richard will put some more money in their check.” By structuring the reward system the way they have, the partners foster a culture oriented to ambiguity. Again, this is partly by design. They want employees to work regardless of a reward system, so they do not define that system. From my observations, I found this lack of transparent reward system confusing, frustrating, and de-motivating to employees. This practice seems in direct opposition to the culture of family the organization fosters through its other practices.

Job descriptions. Deciding not to write job descriptions is another decision the partners have made that contributes to a culture orienting toward ambiguity. The employees have no job descriptions and are expected to figure out what they are responsible for in the organization. “I mean, I have a little different opinion. I’m not a person who believes somebody should know specifically what his or her job is. Their job is to take care of the customer,” Richard explained. In making that choice, the partners consciously foster ambiguity. John, however stated, “I feel like we can improve on job descriptions. . . . People want to know what is expected of them, and they want to know what their job description is.” Laura noted, “Like I’ve said, we’ve had a little issue with that [job descriptions], and I think there is still a little bit of an issue with that.” The partners are not in agreement on job descriptions, thus the employees are confused as well.

Performance review. Currently the partners do not have a formal review process. They provide feedback as needed to employees when an issue arises. So, some employees may never receive feedback on their job performance, leaving them unaware of areas to improve or what they are doing well. Again, this is an element that reveals that a culture is oriented toward ambiguity through the decisions the partners have made. On a formal review process, Richard said, “No. I call them in and tell them they’re getting a raise. . . . Now, I do tell them that they’ve done a good job. It seems that’s where I differ. . . . I like to bonus them.” John noted, “I think we can improve on . . . I know we can improve on annual reviews, since we don’t do them.” One employee stated, “But, no as far as sitting down for a job appraisal or anything like that, I don’t think we’ve ever had one.” This is yet another element of the organization in which the partners foster confusion in their employees and thus, cultural ambiguity in the organization.

Conclusion

These findings indicate a culture that is more fragmented, yet also has some integration. Differentiation was not found strongly in this culture. They also indicate a reciprocal relationship between SEDMA leadership and organizational culture. The SEDMA partnership works in this organization because of the partners’ respect for each other, a commitment to making joint decisions, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. However, while they make joint decisions, some of their practices and norms they have set in place have led to a fragmented culture characterized by ambiguity. In the final chapter, I will interpret these findings further, revisit the

literature and address how this work contributes to filling the gaps, discuss implications for HRD research and practice, and provide recommendations for further research in the areas of SEDMA leadership and culture.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This final chapter briefly summarizes the study, discusses the broader interpretations of my findings, discusses the contributions to the literature in the fields of leadership and culture and how this study addressed literature gaps, discusses implications for HRD research and practice, and concludes with recommendations for future research and my reflections on this study. The purpose of this study was to examine the dynamics of leadership characterized by multiple partners with SEDMA and its reciprocal relationship with organizational culture. The goal was to further the understanding of the dynamics of the partners' decision-making process and how that process impacts and is impacted by organizational culture. The study investigated whether a leadership structure with multiple partners influenced organizational culture in any significant way or not. In addition, the study looked at whether that leadership structure and decision-making process was influenced by organizational culture.

Utilizing qualitative methods, the study attempted to answer the research questions:

- What effect does a leadership structure characterized by partners with shared and equal decision-making authority (SEDMA) have on a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity?
- What effect does a culture's orientation to consensus, relation among manifestations, and orientation to ambiguity have on a leadership structure characterized by partners with SEDMA?

Summary of Study

Theoretical Framework

I used Joanne Martin's (2002) organizational culture theory to ground the study and to interpret my findings. As previously noted, her theory calls for a three-perspective approach to understand and interpret organizational culture. She defines those perspectives with three variables: (a) orientation to consensus, (b) relation among manifestations, and (c) orientation to ambiguity (Martin, 2002). This study incorporated these three variables into the research questions in order to collect and analyze data to answer the questions of whether SEDMA leadership structure influenced the culture of the organization and how that leadership structure was influenced by the organization's culture. From there, I analyzed the data using Martin's three perspectives—Integration, Differentiation, Fragmentation—to interpret the findings.

In Chapter II, I argued that there is a gap in the literature about shared or collective leadership. Other scholars (Bergman et al., 2012; Grille et al., 2015; Yammarino et al., 2012) point to this gap in studies examining shared leadership constructs. Further, in his seminal text on leadership, Northouse (2016) only discusses two types of leadership that could be considered shared or collective: team leadership and Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory. While there are other types of leadership that could be considered collective or shared leadership (Yammarino et al., 2012), including co-leaders (Heenan & Bennis, 1999), shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003), team leadership (Northouse, 2016), LMX theory (Northouse, 2016), and distributed leadership (Gronn, 2008), none of these theories adequately address

leadership characterized by SEDMA. Thus, one goal of this study was to contribute to the body of literature on shared or collective leadership structures. In addition, given that there is very little literature on shared leadership structures, there is nothing on SEDMA leadership and its relationship to organizational culture. The goal of this study was to examine an under-studied type of leadership and utilize Martin's (2002) framework to examine how this type of leadership structure influences and is influenced by culture.

Method

To answer the research question, I conducted a focused, realist ethnography. The goal of the study was to further understanding of the complex relationship of SEDMA leadership and organizational culture. I chose this method to answer the question because I believed it would provide an in-depth understanding of the cultural phenomena at Office Experts (OE). The main goal of ethnographic research is to understand cultures (Angrosino, 2007). Given that the primary purpose of this study was to understand the cultural context of OE and how that culture was influenced by and influenced SEDMA leadership, it was the most appropriate method for examining the research question.

The organization for this study was chosen based on its leadership structure and the partners' willingness to participate in this study. Finding an organization characterized by this leadership structure that was willing to allow me to conduct ethnography was a challenge. Many organizations with a similar partner structure handle very sensitive client information, such as law, accounting, and private equity

banking firms. They were unwilling to allow me the access needed to conduct an ethnography given the nature of participant observation and the potential for compromise of sensitive information.

Data Collection

OE is an office design firm with 12 employees. OE is the leading firm in its industry, in its market (a mid-size town in east Texas). Three partners with SEDMA lead the organization. I served as an observer-as-participant. During 10 months on site at OE as the data collection instrument, I conducted two interviews with all the members of the organization, observed them in their daily work environment, completed an investigator's diary, and recorded observations using observation protocol. I also job-shadowed each employee for at least a half-day and worked to establish trust and build rapport while I was collecting data.

Data Analysis

As discussed in depth in Chapter III, once I completed data collection, I analyzed the data by coding interviews, job shadow notes, my investigator's diary, and observations. I then sorted those codes by theme and re-sorted the data 10 times. Ultimately, I felt the best organization for the data was based on four major theme categories grounded in the theoretical framework: (a) partnership dynamics, (b) orientation to consensus, (c) relation among manifestations, and (d) orientation to ambiguity. Within each major theme, I utilized cultural elements, forms, and manifestations to create a picture of organizational culture and to answer the research

questions. The main cultural elements that emerged from the data were practices, norms, narratives, policies, dress, and physical arrangements.

Interpretation of Findings

Several key findings emerged from the data analysis. In this section, I will discuss and interpret the main findings from the study.

Overview of Interpretation of Findings

After completing the data analysis, I was surprised at my findings. I expected to find a much more integrated culture than I found. Through my observations and interviews, I anticipated that after analyzing the data, I would find a fairly integrated culture with a slightly differentiated culture in some elements and even fewer fragmented elements. However, based on the data presented in Chapter IV, this was not the case. Based on the data analysis, I think the culture strongly leans toward fragmentation, with quite a bit of integration. I did not find the subcultural consensus that generally typifies a differentiated culture. I believe the size of the organization deters the creation of subcultures. I found much more ambiguity present in the culture than I anticipated and based on my analysis, I believe that this is a highly fragmented culture with areas that are also highly integrated. The culture ranks low in terms of differentiation.

In answer to my research questions, based on this analysis, I believe that the partnership characterized by SEDMA has created a culture of extremes. I also believe that this culture of extremes directly impacts the partner's decision-making process. The

partners' decision making created either a large amount of consensus on cultural elements or a lot of ambiguity on those same elements. This decision-making process led to confusion in the organization. In the end, the shared nature of the decision making and authority created more ambiguity than consensus, and thus, the culture is more heavily fragmented than integrated. This fragmented culture influences the partners' decision-making process through not always being clear on certain practices and norms within the organization and how to make decisions around those practices and norms. I observed that this then created a sense of unfair treatment among some employees, as noted in the findings in Chapter IV.

However, a fragmented culture is not a bad thing, in and of itself, and neither is ambiguity. Ambiguity typically means that members of an organization find consensus around certain issues or cultural elements but do not find consensus about the overall culture of the organization (Martin, 2002). I believe that this is reflected exactly in the data from OE. While there is a strong family culture, there are a lot of elements in the organization that lead to confusion about what else OE is—a culture characterized by ambiguity, with elements of consensus on specific cultural practices and manifestations. I believe the fragmentation is a result of the nature of the partnership and, based on these findings, that a leadership structure characterized by SEDMA will most likely create a fragmented culture, as shown here.

Collective leadership in of itself can be confusing and difficult to navigate (Northouse, 2016; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Yammarino et al., 2012). By its very nature, a SEDMA partnership can be confusing, as evidenced by the data in the study, given that

there is a lack of research in this area. While the partners may work well together, their employees are not always privy to decision making and thus, mixed cultural messages are sent, fostering ambiguity and fragmentation. One partner privileging one cultural element over another and another partner privileging a different element creates ambiguity (Martin, 2002). Thus, a culture weighed more heavily toward fragmentation is fostered. There was no judgment in this study about whether fragmentation is good or bad. Rather than trying to judge the efficiency of a partnership with SEDMA, I was studying how a SEDMA partnership impacts and influences the culture of an organization and how that partnership dynamic was influenced by said culture. My results show that a SEDMA leadership structure creates more ambiguity than consensus, which leads to a culture characterized by fragmentation with areas of integration.

Studying the dynamics of the partnership through the course of this study was key to helping understand the reciprocal cultural influence. The relationship of the people in the partnership, their skills and abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and willingness to negotiate leadership determine whether SEDMA can be a successful leadership structure and ultimately determine cultural influence. OE has done very well as a business, even though it was hit hard by the economy. I think a SEDMA partnership works well for OE, based on my data analysis. The partners work well together and are able to lead as a cohesive unit. I believe based on this study's findings that the inherent nature of such a leadership structure will probably always create more ambiguity than consensus, but the leadership structure has not harmed this organization. SEDMA leadership has made the organization successful. As the partners themselves

readily admit, this type of leadership structure is not for the faint-hearted. They all told me on multiple occasions how difficult a partnership is and that they warn people away from partnerships. In their view, what makes SEDMA work for them is their previous long-standing relationship, their ability to acquiesce when need be to the other partners, their respect for each other, the culture of their organization, and the role distribution of the partnership. Are employees frustrated by this type of structure? My findings support that they are. However, for OE it works, and overall the employees enjoy working for the partners and OE, as evidenced by their extremely low turnover rate.

As noted above, I also believe the partnership is influenced by the fragmentation culture. I think they react to employees differently and make decisions differently because of the shared nature of their leadership. Any one of the partners would make some decisions differently if he or she were running the organization separately. I would argue that the family and small-town culture they promote helps them work together and influences how they work with each other and lead the organization. I strongly believe that this is a good example that while leaders influence and shape culture, culture influences and shapes leaders equally. Based on my data analysis and the sheer volume of time I spent with this organization, I do not believe they would be as successful as they are without a SEDMA partnership leadership structure. I think each partner brings something very important to the table and how they work together created the success they have now. The next several sections will discuss in more detail some of the key findings.

Shared and Equal Decision-Making Authority (SEDMA) Partnership Dynamic and Leadership Structure

Originally after gaining access to this organization, I was unaware of the unequal monetary split between the three partners. However, neither profit equity among partners nor family business was what this study was designed to examine. It was designed to examine how leadership is negotiated among partners with SEDMA and how that leadership structure both influenced culture and was influenced by culture. One of the main concerns after learning of the unequal monetary split (two partners own 80% and one partner owns 20%) was about the impact the monetary split would have on the leadership structure and if this truly was a partnership characterized by SEDMA.

After observing the culture of the organization and the partnership dynamics, I believe it is a partnership characterized by SEDMA. While John, the minority partner, at times feels the need to prove himself because of his minority ownership, he truly is an equal partner. Laura and Richard discuss all decisions with him and primarily all decisions are negotiated and made together. The three partners go to lunch daily and this is where decisions are discussed, made, and negotiated. This is widely known in the organization and is further evidence of a family-like culture. Through employee practices, such as covering the showroom floor during lunch for other employees and asking for decisions to be made by the partners at the lunch meeting, the culture is influencing and reinforcing the partners' decision-making practices. In addition, the findings show that John has equal authority to make decisions and lead employees. So, in practice, the partners' leadership structure is characterized by SEDMA.

Another key finding to note in regard to whether this partnership was truly one characterized by SEDMA is the employees' perception versus the partners' perception of how decisions are made. Some of the employees, the ones who work most closely with all three partners, recognized how the decision-making process functions between the partners. A few employees viewed Richard as the primary decision maker, whereas the partners would tell you they make all decisions together. Again, this contributes to a culture characterized by ambiguity. The partners believe the employees view them as equals who all make decisions together, when that is not the case for all employees. This perception by the partners of the employees' understanding of the partnership is a cultural element that influences their decision making.

One of the key findings about why this partnership works for this organization is that while they make joint decisions and negotiate those decisions, they have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They communicate constantly with each other, but each has defined areas of focus. However, some of their practices and norms send mixed messages to employees, creating a culture that fosters ambiguity and is fragmented. As earlier noted, not all employees see the decision-making process and thus, privilege one partner's practices over the others.

Reciprocal Relationship between Shared and Equal Decision-Making Authority (SEDMA) and Culture

Leaders shape culture and are shaped by culture (Alvesson, 2013; Eisenberg & Riley, 2001; Keyton, 2011; Martin, 2002; Schein, 2010). Keyton (2011) notes any leader influences culture and is influenced by culture through:

- Controlling resources and directing those resources
- Deciding where attention is directed in the organization
- Determining processes by which rewards are handed out
- Deciding what gets measured
- Coaching and teaching employees
- Designing systems and procedures
- Endorsing rites and rituals
- Displaying and privileging artifacts
- Instituting formal practices
- Telling and embedding stories and myths about the organization
- Using metaphors in organizational communication
- Shaping organizational norms through informal actions
- Deciding dress code and physical arrangements

Keyton (2011) reminds us that “These formal management mechanisms reinforce their assumptions and values and set in motion a series of procedures and practices that get other organizational members to do the same,” (p. 150). These assumptions and values form the core of an organization’s culture and

through shifting resources and attention to privilege one practice or mechanism over another, leaders signal a value shift in the organization that shapes and influences the culture of the organization and also shapes and influences them. This study reinforces Keyton's perspective as evidenced in the findings below.

One of the main overall findings is that leadership characterized by SEDMA does influence the culture at OE in a significant way and that leadership structure is also influenced by the culture at OE. Through the partners' decision-making process, they have developed cultural practices, norms, and policies that have fostered ambiguity in the organization. Each partner privileges different norms, utilizes different practices, and enacts different policies. Thus, even though the partners jointly make decisions, each partner sends different cultural messages about what he or she finds important. Each partner does not privilege the same cultural elements consistently. As discussed in depth in Chapter IV, this leads to ambiguity and confusion for organizational members and creates a culture characterized by fragmentation (Martin, 2002). I believe this, in part, leads to some resentment between employees. As noted in Chapter IV, some employees do not feel they are treated the same as other employees. A few employees feel that others get special privileges. This feeling is in part tied to how the partners make decisions and then each privilege a cultural practice or norm differently through their actions, even though they made the decision together. They are each enacting the practice in a different way. This creates an environment in which employees are unclear of "how things work around here." One of the main elements of culture is that it communicates the standards and norms of how things operate to organizational members

(Keyton, 2011; Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Through the partners' non-transparent decision-making process and deciding on different outcomes for different employees, they have fostered ambiguity in the culture. While this happens in organizations all the time, in this small organization it has fostered a culture that there is ambiguity around some practices and norms, such as the time required to be in the office, time off from work, and dress code. Again, a fragmentation culture is not inherently dysfunctional, but it can lead to situations such as this one at OE where some employees do not think there is fair and equal treatment for all. However, I will note that there is a strong sense of loyalty to the partners and loyalty mitigates this resentment.

Reciprocally, the partners are influenced more than they realize by the culture of the organization. For example, given the long-term loyalty from the employees and the feeling that the employees are part of a strong family culture, the partners often let behaviors go unaddressed, such as smoking in the wrong places, dress code violations, taking too long of breaks, and showing up late. Not addressing policy violations has become accepted as a norm and a practice that influences how the partners lead and make decisions. In addition, while the partners share decision-making authority, as long as one of them is okay with the behaviors of an employee, the other two partners will not address the issue. This cultural element impacts the way in which the partners negotiate decisions.

I do not think they are aware of how much the culture of the organization is impacting their decision-making process. After reflecting on my observations and

discussion with the three partners, I believe they see themselves as shaping the culture and, yet, not being impacted by the culture. It is impossible to be embedded in a culture and not be influenced by it (Alvesson, 2013; Eisenberg & Riley, 2001; Keyton, 2011; Trice & Beyer, 1993). However, based on the data from my observations and interviews, the relationship between the partners is so close that they are often insulated from truly understanding the culture of the organization and its impact on their leadership.

The Three-Perspective Cultural Analysis Approach

Utilizing Martin's (2002) three-perspective approach to interpret my findings, as I noted earlier, I determined this is a culture that is characterized by a fragmentation perspective. A fragmentation perspective is characterized by a lack of consensus on cultural elements and inconsistent interpretations of relations among manifestations and acknowledges ambiguity (Martin, 2002). There were many cultural elements about which the employees of the organization were very ambiguous and lacked consensus on, thus the findings support a culture oriented toward the fragmentation perspective. In the sections above, I discussed in depth the ways in which this fragmentation culture is influencing the organization and its leadership. In this section, I will discuss how Martin's (2002) other two perspectives are evidenced in the organization. While the culture is characterized by fragmentation, Martin (2002) advocates for examining the culture through the lens of all three perspectives and highlights that this provides a deeper understanding of the cultural phenomena in the organization (2002). Thus, I also evaluated the findings from both integration and differentiation perspectives.

Although the organization is characterized as a fragmented culture, there is also evidence of cultural integration. There were cultural elements upon which the members of the organization clearly agreed and had consensus. Some of these included a strong family culture, the partners care deeply about their employees, the small town location influences how they do business, and the need to keep spotless working environments because they work in a showroom. The integration perspective is characterized by organization-wide consensus and consistency in interpretation of cultural elements, and it excludes ambiguity (Martin, 2002). While these two perspectives may seem to be in contrast with each other, they can both present in the same organization at the same time. Some aspects of the organization culture represent the integration perspective and others the fragmentation perspective.

I believe that the close relationship among the partners and their caring nature toward their employees fosters some of these integrated cultural manifestations. I also believe, in this instance, because they do share decision-making authority, they are a united front on these few cultural elements listed in the previous paragraph, which leads to the employees' consistent interpretation of these elements. All three partners routinely help employees with either extra time off to handle personal issues or by loaning them money. I observed them deciding together that these practices have become normal operating practice for the organization or in cultural terms, norms. They truly care about their employees and this comes across in their decision making. Thus, in this instance they are all privileging the same cultural elements leading to integration.

While both the integration and fragmentation perspectives were strong in this organization, the differentiation perspective was not. Cultural differentiation is recognized by consensus at a subcultural level; it has inconsistent relations among manifestations, and it challenges ambiguity around subcultures (Martin, 2002). The data do not support a finding of a differentiated culture. I believe this is due in part, to the size of the organization as well as the length of tenure of many of the employees. While there is a small clique within the organization, it did not qualify as a subculture. Given the lack of subcultures, the differentiation perspective in this organization was not strong.

Organizational Cultural Findings

Given this study was an ethnography trying to understand one organization's culture and its reciprocal relationship to leadership, I would be remiss not discussing the findings about cultural manifestations or forms or how culture is seen and evidenced in the organization (Keyton, 2011; Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Some organizations exhibit strong, dominant cultural manifestations (Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993). However, this organization did not have dominant cultural manifestations. I had to delve deeply into the organization to find the main forms, other than the obvious physical arrangements. The main cultural forms evidenced, which this study focused on, were practices, norms, narratives, policies, dress, and physical arrangements. There were not strong stories, metaphors, celebrations, ceremonies, jargon, symbols, artifacts, legends, myths, or taboos.

I found this very curious given the small nature of the organization and the loyalty of the employees. I would have expected more legends given that most of the employees had been with the firm since near its founding. The only predominate story was the founding story, and not all employees really knew the founding story all that well. In addition, I would expect more gossip and rumors given the dominant family culture of the organization. While there was one employee who was seen as a gossip, none of the other employees really engaged with her in that gossip and were careful what they said around her. So the culture was not characterized by a lot of rumors and gossip. While I anticipated that the family culture would foster rumors and gossip, after examining my findings I posit the opposite is true: The family culture of the organization actually minimized the rumors and gossip.

One last cultural manifestation of note is celebrations. Richard was actively against celebrations. This was a topic that was negotiated between Richard and the other two partners. Laura wanted more celebrations and Richard did not want any. In this instance John played the mediator between the two to find a compromise. The organization has a Christmas party and that is it. No birthday celebrations, work anniversaries, or significant events are celebrated in the company. The findings indicate that this negatively influences the employees' morale. I think having no celebrations impacts the partners' morale as well, because they are not acknowledging their business success. I would argue that the culture of no celebration, at times, is making the partners' decision-making process harder because of the effect that culture is having on their employees. Thus, this is another example of the reciprocal relationship between

leadership and culture. Overall, I would not characterize this organization as having dominant cultural manifestations.

Negotiated Leadership

Another finding from this study is how leadership can be negotiated. The partners at OE have a very structured partnership agreement that gave controlling interest to one of the three partners; however, they operate and make decisions as equal partners. This decision-making structure clearly affected the organizational culture. This leads me to believe that theoretically, a leadership structure characterized by SEDMA, regardless of the formal partnership agreement, can have very different cultural impacts than other types of leadership. The nature of the way decisions are negotiated changes the culture of the organization and how an individual in a partnership leads. Individuals no longer make individual leadership decisions, but they must consider their partners as well. In that consideration process, they think through elements of the decision they may not have considered as an individual making that decision. This structure also forces the leader to build an argument for his or her decision to convince his or her partners. Thus, he or she must more fully think through that decision. This was evidenced in my findings. The three OE partners considered their point-of-view and brought that to the discussion and negotiated a solution to whatever was under discussion. Another positive of this type of leadership structure is that the three leaders can equally share authority and blame and balance the workload.

Why Shared and Equal Decision-Making Authority (SEDMA) Leadership Works for Office Experts (OE)

Another major finding was how the organization's SEDMA leadership structure works for OE. Even though it led to a culture heavily characterized by the fragmentation, it worked for this organization. As previously noted, a fragmentation perspective is not a judgment on the success or efficacy of an organization. It is simply a way to understand the cultural phenomena of the organization. Although the partners in this organization have room to grow in many areas, they form a cohesive leadership unit. I observed them actively negotiating decisions on a daily basis. They share authority equally and it works for the three of them and their organization. Their practices do create ambiguity for the organization (Martin, 2002; Trice & Beyer, 1993); however, it works for OE. They are successful; they have been in business for many years and have found a way to survive during rough economic times. During those rough economic times, the strength of their culture was evidenced by employees being willing to take pay cuts so the partners would not have to fire any other employee. This was a difficult decision-making process for the partners, but they made it together.

I believe this is one of the strengths of a SEDMA leadership structure. When difficult decisions have to be made, they can be negotiated among the partners, different solutions and perspectives are brought up for consideration, and the partners share the burden of those decisions. In this instance of making a difficult decision that would seriously impact their employees, the culture largely influenced the partners' leadership and decision-making process. Considering the family culture of the organization, the

partners felt they could ask this sacrifice of the employees feeling confident that everyone would be willing to make the sacrifice. This was one of the strongest examples I found in the data that supported the strength of this organization's family culture. They also have very loyal employees, as evidenced in part by their extremely low turnover rate, as well as the findings in this study.

The partners realize that at times their structure and decision-making process is ambiguous and creates ambiguity in the organization's culture. They recognize that and lead their employees accordingly. I do not think, however, they recognize to what a degree the ambiguity exists in their organization or that their own decision-making process is being influenced by that ambiguity. Understanding leadership actions and how they impact culture is one of the reasons understanding organizational culture is important (Alvesson, 2013; Martin, 2002; Schein, 2010). Through understanding the organization's culture, the partners are able to navigate that culture and its ambiguity and lead successfully. I do, however, believe the OE partners need to understand the degree to which the ambiguity exists in their organization and they could then perhaps be a stronger leadership team.

Why Richard, John, and Laura's Partnership Works

Another important finding is why the partnership does work. All three partners noted that they would never recommend a partnership to anyone, yet they said they would not want to lead OE any other way unless forced to do so by circumstances out of their control. A key factor that allows this partnership to work is that they consciously formed it based on each other's strengths and weaknesses. I also believe they

consciously focus on their areas of strengths and weaknesses when negotiating decisions and that this is a conscious decision on their part, which makes the shared decision-making process work well for them. I observed this many times while at the organization. This successful shared decision-making process influences the culture, in that the practices and norms established stem from a decision-making process based on areas of expertise. The three partners balance each other through their strengths and weaknesses and their personalities and skill sets as well. Each has a clearly defined role in the organization that leads to very little conflict among the partners. Furthermore, they had a long-standing prior friendship and relationship. Knowing each other as well as they do allows them to negotiate their leadership in such a way that works for them and their organization.

It is very challenging to make a SEDMA leadership structure successful. However, when it does succeed, it can be extremely successful. One of the keys is to understand the dynamics of the partnership and the relationships between the partners. The partners have to be very self-aware in the partner relationship in order to negotiate leadership effectively. The OE partners are able to achieve that balance. They also strive to be aware of how their partnership impacts their organization, which is another major factor in making a SEDMA leadership structure work. While not always successful in understanding their impact on the culture and its impact on their leadership, they attempt to be aware. It is also important for the SEDMA partnership to understand how the organization's culture influences their practices, not just how they influence the practices of the organization. I am not sure the OE partners are at that level of

awareness at this point, however, they realize their employees do influence how they make decisions for the organization.

I believe SEDMA leadership structures only work in certain types of organizations, such as smaller, privately held businesses or law firms. This is an assumption on my part based only on this study that would need to be researched to see if it holds true. In addition, I think that the individuals involved in the partnership make a big difference in its success. Again, this is an assumption supported by this study, but would obviously need to be researched further. One of the keys to this successful SEDMA leadership structure was the personalities and skill sets of the individuals involved in the partnership and their long-standing relationship.

This is a difficult and challenging leadership structure to enact successfully. It works for OE because of the nature of the existing relationships and the fact that the partners were mindful in how they put the partnership together. Furthermore, over the years, the nature of the partnership has grown and changed based on the needs of both the organization and the partners. This is a key element of a potential theory of SEDMA leadership: examining how the partnership needs to grow and adapt to the challenges facing the individual leaders as well as the organization.

This has the potential to be a very strong and beneficial type of leadership for both the organization and the partners. Consequently, as we begin to develop theory around this type of leadership, I believe it is necessary to look at the elements that characterized this successful SEDMA leadership structure. The following elements

emerged from this study and I believe they are the building blocks of a potential

SEDMA leadership theory:

- mutual respect,
- existing relationships,
- balancing strengths and weaknesses,
- clearly defined role distribution,
- a willingness to negotiate,
- awareness of how the partnership influences the members and culture of the organization,
- an ability to be reflective and self-aware,
- a willingness to admit to being wrong and defer to the other partners, and
- complementary skills and abilities that help form a cohesive partnership.

I will now revisit some of the literature to address how this study addresses some of those gaps.

Addressing the Literature Gap

In Chapter II, I discussed the gap in the literature around leadership characterized by multiple partners with shared and equal decision-making authority. Given the lack of research in this area, I named this leadership style SEDMA leadership. While there are several theories that discuss shared/collective leadership (e.g., co-leaders [Heenan & Bennis, 1999], shared leadership [Pearce & Conger, 2003], team leadership [Northouse, 2016], LMX theory [Northouse, 2016], and distributed leadership [Gronn, 2008]), I argue that none of those theories adequately address leadership structures characterized

by SEDMA. Other researchers have noted the paucity of research in the collective/shared leadership area (Yammarino et al., 2012; Grille et al., 2015), thus creating a gap in both the collective/shared leadership area and the general body of leadership literature. With this study, I have begun to address that gap. I believe the findings of this study presented in Chapter IV and discussed in depth previously in this chapter represent interesting avenues toward beginning to create a theory of SEDMA leadership. Obviously, much more research in this area is needed, but I believe this study begins to address a gap specifically in the area of collective leadership.

The second gap follows logically from the first. If there is a gap in the literature on SEDMA leadership, then there is also a gap in the literature on its reciprocal relationship with organizational culture. While conducting my literature review, it is still hard to find current work being done on the link between culture and leadership from a non-prescriptive perspective, in general, especially on the relationship between SEDMA leadership and organizational culture. Researchers have continued to do organizational culture work, including Keyton (2011), Alvesson (2013), Buble (2012), Popa (2013), and Kusy and Holloway (2014) to cite a few. However, much of that work, as discussed in Chapters I and II, is still very prescriptive in nature and does not adequately address the reciprocal relationship between the two concepts. I identified a gap specifically in regard to the relationship between SEDMA leadership and culture. I believe this study has begun to address that gap as well, through providing initial data about the relationship between the two constructs. Next, I will move from addressing

how this study addresses gaps in the leadership and organizational culture literature, to discussing how it specifically contributes to the field of HRD.

Contributions to Human Resource Development (HRD) Research

Organization Development (OD) Research

This study contributed to the body of OD research by introducing a new form of leadership and showing how that leadership interacts with culture. It provided information about a unique form of leadership. From an OD perspective, it adds to the body of knowledge to draw on when encountering unique leadership structures. It also provides a model for how to utilize Martin's (2002) cultural theory, which could be useful in uncovering deeper understandings of the organization's cultures during the assessment process. In addition, these findings point to the importance of understanding the reciprocal influence of leadership and culture. This understanding is important to consider when diagnosing an organization, planning OD interventions, implementing change, and evaluating the success of those changes. This study also demonstrated how to use an underutilized qualitative method in HRD research: ethnography. Ethnography research is a very helpful tool in understanding and assessing organizations, which is a vital part of the OD process. Finally, it adds to the body of OD knowledge by demonstrating how leadership decisions can be successfully negotiated and offers reasons why these partners were able to lead successfully in this type of organization.

Training and Development Research

The contribution to the training and development research is not as immense. I believe the study contributes valuable knowledge to training and development practice more than the research. However, from a training and development perspective this study highlights the importance of understanding the reciprocal relationship between leadership and culture both before conducting and while designing training. In addition, this study adds to the body of training and development research by highlighting the different types of shared/collective leadership that one may encounter in organizations, which is useful information during the leadership development process. Finally, this study offers information on a different leadership style, which is informative when designing and delivering training in unusual leadership structures.

Career Development Research

This study adds to the body of career development research by offering a different perspective on the skills needed in a partnership. These findings also demonstrate successful ways to negotiate, which are valuable skills to develop. It highlights the importance of understanding the reciprocal relationship between culture and leadership. Finally, it offers information on how to study and understand one's own cultural environment through studying cultural manifestations. In addition, it offers Martin's (2002) framework as a way to interpret and understand an individual's work environment and perhaps how to navigate that environment.

Contributions to Human Resource Development (HRD) Practice

Organization Development (OD) Practice

As previously noted, this study introduces a new form of leadership and discusses how leadership is negotiated in that structure. From an OD practice standpoint, this could be helpful when diagnosing organizations with unusual leadership structures. The findings could also be helpful when suggesting structural changes at the leadership level and/or designing organizations, old or new. The study also offers a cultural framework that could be utilized in diagnosing organization's cultural elements in a deep way that could provide helpful information for designing, implementing, and evaluating OD interventions. Finally, the study discusses and illuminates the reciprocal influence between culture and leadership, which is an important element for OD practitioners to assess and be aware of while designing, implementing, and evaluating OD interventions.

Training and Development Practice

In regard to training and development practice, this study offers information on how to successfully navigate a multi-partner situation characterized by SEDMA. This information could be used while designing and conducting leadership development training. This study also offers a new form of leadership that training could be developed for and provides information about how these leaders successfully work in this type of leadership structure. The leadership structure in this study could be used as a model to teach negotiation in leadership, how to work in multi-partner situations, and

how to handle shared and equal decision-making authority. These findings highlight the importance of understanding the reciprocal relationship between leadership and culture. As a result, when designing either leadership development or cultural training this study is a reminder to assess that relationship during the assessment and development phases, as well as during delivery and evaluation. This study is a reminder that developing leaders understanding culture and how that culture impacts them is an important element of any leadership development or training program.

Career Development Practice

From a career development practice perspective, this study offers insight into negotiation skills that could be developed. In addition, it provides a unique structure that a practitioner could suggest and use to coach an individual to develop skills to work in this type of leadership structure. This study highlights the need for understanding the culture one works in. For a career development practitioner, it provides lengthy information on how to understand cultural environments through the use of Trice and Beyer's (1993) cultural manifestations and Martin's (2002) cultural framework. These are tools career development practitioners could utilize themselves to help coach individuals on how to navigate their cultural environment and/or provide these tools to the individuals with whom they are working. The study shows the practitioner how to utilize those tools to gain cultural information in order to not only help individuals, but to help design career development systems in organizations. Also, by highlighting the reciprocal nature of culture and leadership, it gives the practitioner another consideration when designing leadership advancement structures and highlights additional skills that

need to be developed to help an individual recognize the relationship between the constructs of leadership and organizational culture.

Areas of Future Research

I would like to conduct similar studies in other organizations characterized by SEDMA partners. Again, I face the challenge of entry, but I do believe I can find additional organizations willing to let me study their leadership structure and organizational culture. There is a need to conduct more research on how the decision-making process works in a SEDMA partnership, without the cultural element in order to work toward a theory of SEDMA leadership. A future study designed to specifically study the negotiation and decision-making processes would be of value. On the other side of that, it is important to conduct more studies on how organizational culture influences that decision-making process. Again, this study did discuss this, but more study on how culture influences SEDMA would add to the body of knowledge in this area.

Another area for future research is to compare and contrast organizations characterized by this leadership structure. This will add to the theory base, broadening the understanding of how SEDMA leadership impacts organizations on multiple levels, not just culturally. Another question I would like to study further is if SEDMA leadership only works in certain types of organizations (e.g., small, privately held firms, law firms, etc.) or if it is a leadership structure that could work in any organization. An additional area of future research is looking at the individuals in SEDMA leadership structures themselves to investigate if there are any common personality traits, skill sets,

etc., that either make them successful or not in a SEDMA leadership structure. Finally, I would like to interview partners from multiple organizations with SEDMA leadership. Such a study would broaden the understanding of what is important to successful SEDMA leadership and what challenges partner leaders face.

Reflection on the Study

Overall, this study, while a challenge, was extremely interesting. I believe with any ethnography, one leaves the organization with a sense of nostalgia and loss as well as an obligation to that organization to represent it the best way possible for a researcher. During my time spent with OE and its employees, I worked hard to be a participant observer and believe I achieved the right balance. One of the biggest challenges was not getting too close to the members of the organization but at the same time gaining their trust. I became a part of that organization for a little while and began to care for the people there.

Another major challenge was the volume of information I collected. The data analysis process was very prolonged because of the sheer volume of data. However, during data collection I wanted to gather as much information as I could in order to paint an accurate picture of OE. The method where I learned the most about the organization was the observation process. The interviews provided valuable information, but during my time as an observer I began to discover more of the culture of the organization and see how it impacted the partners and their decisions and how their decisions were shaping the OE culture.

One of my biggest frustrations with the study was finding an organization that would let me be on site for months at a time. I am grateful to OE for their cooperation. A challenge for future research in this area will be finding partner organizations that fit the criteria of SEDMA and that also will allow a researcher access. However, I am confident those organizations that will allow a researcher in to conduct this type of study exist and I look forward to finding them.

I still do not believe I had the full trust of all the employees when I finished my time with them. A couple of employees were just too distrustful of someone trying to understand their organization. I also believe a major barrier was that this study was for a doctoral dissertation and the educational barrier with a couple of employees was just too great for them to fully trust me. However, I do think the majority of the employees did trust me and believed that what I was doing was going to help their organization.

I think I did a good job not letting my own bias influence the study. While, at times that was challenging and I was tempted to pre-judge the data both during data collection and analysis, I strove hard to control my bias. I truly believe my investigator's diary helped me control for that bias. I would periodically go back and review the diary and it helped me uncover some assumptions I was making. I believe no study is assumption or bias free, so I am sure there are still embedded assumptions in this study, however, I feel I worked hard to recognize and minimize my assumptions and bias.

At the end of the day, I enjoyed conducting an ethnography and look forward to doing another one. My time at OE sparked some new questions to investigate, helped

me begin to examine a new type of leadership, allowed me to further explore the relationship between organizational culture and leadership, and overall helped me further develop my own research skills. For all those reasons, I am eternally grateful to the 12 individuals at OE that allowed me to become part of their world for a short time.

Conclusion

This ethnographic study of SEDMA leadership and its reciprocal relationship to organizational culture provided some new insights into a unique form of leadership. It also provided more evidence for the need to move from a prescriptive view of the relationship between culture and leadership. I provided an example of how to utilize Martin's (2002) cultural framework. I also provided rich cultural information about the firm and about how the two constructs, organizational culture and leadership, work together. In addition, the partners at OE highlight how to make SEDMA leadership successful and that was a key contribution from these findings. One of the key elements that make OE's SEDMA leadership work and why it has a profound influence on the organizational culture is the quality of the people in the partnership. They truly care for their employees and it shows in the success of the organization. It was a pleasure to get to know them, their employees, and their organization. It is my hope that this study contributes to the understanding and the theory and research base about leadership and organizational culture.

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APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How long have you worked at this organization?
2. What is your role(s) in this organization?
3. What do you think makes this organization unique?
4. If you do not think this organization is unique, why is it not?
5. What events or regular occurring activities typify this organization?
6. What do you know about the founder or history of this organization?
7. What stories do people tell to newcomers about this organization?
8. What stories do people tell to people outside of the organization about the organization?
9. What stories do people tell to current clients about this organization?
10. What stories do people tell to potential clients about this organization?
11. What is the slogan or emblem that signifies this organization?
12. What are the values or beliefs that underlie how this organization works?
13. How would you describe how things operate here on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis?
14. What is the most memorable event that has happened in this organization since you have been here?
15. What is the most difficult experience you have had to handle while being at this organization?
16. Describe how you deal with problems in this organization.
17. Describe how the leadership of this organization deals with problems as they arise.
18. What do you think is this organization's biggest current challenge?
19. What do you think will be this organization's biggest challenge 1 year from now? 5 years? 10 years?
20. How would you describe the future of this organization?
21. How would you explain or describe the structure of this organization to someone unfamiliar with the organization? To someone familiar with the organization?
22. How would you explain or describe the leadership of this organization to someone unfamiliar with the organization? To someone familiar with the organization?
23. How are decisions made in this organization?
24. How does this organization deal with challenges?
25. How does this organization celebrate triumphs and accomplishments by the organization as a whole? By individuals?
26. How does the leadership of the organization deal with challenges?
27. How does the leadership of the organization celebrate triumphs and accomplishments by the organization as a whole? By individuals?

28. If you had an issue or a challenge, who would you go to in the organization for advice on how to handle the situation? Why?
29. If you had accomplished something or had a major success, who would you go to first in the organization to share your news? Why?
30. Do you believe you can walk into anyone's office in the firm and discuss your daily work? Why or why not? Who would you feel uncomfortable approaching? Why?
31. How do things get done here?
32. How would you describe the dress code of this organization?
33. How would you describe the physical arrangement of this office and does that arrangement affect your work in any way?
34. What do you see as your future in this organization?
35. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

SECOND ROUND SEMI-STRUCTURED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What do you think makes this organization unique?
2. If you do not think this organization is unique, why is it not?
3. What events or regular occurring activities typify this organization?
4. What are the values or beliefs that underlie how this organization works?
5. How would you describe how things operate here on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis?
6. What is the most memorable event that has happened in this organization since you have been here?
7. What is the most difficult experience you have had to handle while being at this organization?
8. Describe how you deal with problems in this organization.
9. Describe how the leadership of this organization deals with problems as they arise.
10. What do you think is this organization's biggest current challenge?
11. What do you think will be this organization's biggest challenge 1 year from now? 5 years? 10 years?
12. How would you describe the future of this organization?
13. How would you explain or describe the structure of this organization to someone unfamiliar with the organization? To someone familiar with the organization?
14. How would you explain or describe the leadership of this organization to someone unfamiliar with the organization? To someone familiar with the organization?
15. How are decisions made in this organization?
16. How does this organization deal with challenges?
17. How does this organization celebrate triumphs and accomplishments by the organization as a whole? By individuals?
18. If you had an issue or a challenge, who would you go to in the organization for advice on how to handle the situation? Why?
19. If you had accomplished something or had a major success, who would you go to first in the organization to share your news? Why?
20. Do you believe you can walk into anyone's office in the firm and discuss your daily work? Why or why not? Who would you feel uncomfortable approaching? Why?
21. How do things get done here?
22. How would you describe the dress code of this organization?
23. How would you describe the physical arrangement of this office and does that arrangement affect your work in any way?

24. What do you see as your future in this organization?
25. What initial training did you receive to do your job?
26. What ongoing training have you received to do your job?
27. Is the training you have received helped you to do your job more effectively?
28. How is information distributed in the organization?
29. Do you socialize with your co-workers outside of the office? If so, how often?
30. Did you pick your office? Office furniture? Layout of office? Décor?
31. How often do you communicate with your co-workers via e-mail?
32. What is your main form of communication with your co-workers? The partners? Your clients?
33. What is your preferred form of communication? How do you like to find out about things?
34. Describe a day in your life here.
35. How many interruptions do you have during a day? How do you feel they impact your work?
36. How secure is Office Experts (OE)? Is your office secure? Do you lock your file cabinets? Door? Why or why not?
37. What would you tell a newcomer to your organization about OE to illustrate how things are done here?
38. Describe a “taken for granted” practice in your organization. (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
39. What is the climate for diversity here? Do you think any specific group would feel uncomfortable? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
40. How does the community influence your values and practices? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
41. “If you heard a rumor about layoffs or a major change, how would you check it out?” (Driskill & Brenton, p. 109, 2011)
42. How would you prefer to be rewarded for excellent work or an outstanding accomplishment?
43. What written materials would tell an outsider about OE?
44. Are there identifiable cliques? How are they identifiable? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
45. Think of the most influential people here. In what ways do they embody the values and character of the organization? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
46. What are the favorite topics of conversation? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
47. What rewards systems are in place? What do those systems communicate to you about what is valued at OE? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
48. “What language dominates everyday conversation? What word do you hear that you wouldn’t hear in another organization?” (Driskill & Brenton, p. 108, 2011)
49. What are members recognized for? Are there any ceremonies that take place? Do other organizational members know when someone has done something outstanding? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
50. “What are the main norms operating here? What could people be fired for? What could limit one’s career success?” (Driskill & Brenton, p. 108, 2011)

51. What should visitors see and to whom should visitors speak if they want to understand OE? What would they need to know to get along here? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
52. If you wanted to explain the spirit of OE to an outsider – both positive and negative—what incidents would you describe? What do these incidents say about this organization? (Driskill & Brenton, 2011)
53. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

For the purposes of this study, I followed the following observation protocol as recommended by Driskill and Brenton (2011):

- I wrote notes on the daily activities of the organization.
- I observed and noted metaphors in order to make non-obvious connections.
- I asked “why” and “what function” questions of daily operations observed.
- I took notes after observations if I was unable to take notes during observations.
- I observed meetings and rituals as well as informal interactions.
- I used brackets in my note taking to note my own thoughts and distinguish them from basic observations.
- I also used brackets to note further questions I had stemming from my observations.
- When I did not understand jargon, I clarified with employees what the terminology meant.
- I reviewed the notes routinely.