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The Effects of Organizational Culture on Marketing Programs: A Grounded Theory Study

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The Effects of Organizational Culture on Marketing Programs:

A Grounded Theory Study

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We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.

We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions

required by the final examining committee have been made.

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DEDICATION

To my parents – Violet (Vi) and Lawrence (Toogy) Lynch – There has never been a day of my life when I did not know that I was loved by you. You encouraged me and told me that I could do anything in the world I wanted.

To my children – Leah (Sweetie Pie) and Sam (Lamby) Harrower – Without children, nothing in the world would be worthwhile. I will love you all the days of your lives.

To my husband – Keith (nmn) Harrower – I have been lucky to have you love me all these years. To say 'thanks' just does not seem adequate. I will love you to forever and beyond.

ABSTRACT

Marketing is an essential functional component of business and is used by organizations to communicate their messages to the public marketplace. Many corporations employ additional assistance from external marketing agencies for developing and delivering marketing campaigns. Worldwide, the spending by the top 100 companies on marketing was in excess of $117.8 billion in 2008. Spending in marketing projects is intended to generate hundreds of billions dollars in the global economy.

This study researched ten people in eight different organizations to understand their experiences have been working in partnership on marketing campaigns, and what impact organizational culture has their partnership. Using an interpretive, grounded theory methodology, this study sought answers to research questions regarding the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success. The results have implications for organizations to improve their partnerships and results when working on marketing projects.

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

Organizations use marketing programs to communicate information about their company, products, and services to the marketplace. Whether they are small companies, global corporations, non-profits, or government agencies, virtually all organizations have some level of need to make themselves known to others. Marketing programs help organizations fill that need; however, not all marketing programs are successful and many may fail due to problems such as poor communications and messaging, flawed branding, incorrect pricing, poor timing, increased competition, changing environmental factors and more. I wanted to consider a different problem with marketing campaigns and examine what is necessary to have a culture match between organizations and the marketing agencies that they hire.

Organizational and corporate cultures have long been an area of study for organization development practitioners, but little scholarly research has specifically investigated the importance of corporate culture in a marketing context (Turner & Spencer, 1997; Deshpande & Webster, 1989). From my professional experiences over the past twenty years, I have observed that external marketing agencies often have difficulty recognizing and understanding the culture of their client companies. There may be confusion on wording, vision, time, presentation, objectives and many other elements. Since marketing agencies are outside entities to client organizations, they lack the shared insider knowledge about the culture which drives the client company's strategy, vision, and actions.

This lack of understanding can significantly impact not only the performance of the marketing programs, but also affect the relationship between the marketing company and the client company. When marketing agencies and clients are mismatched because of cultural influences, it can cause a myriad of problems throughout both businesses, including

communications with employees and stakeholders of the organization, and cause damage to

relationships between organizations. These problems also can end what might have been a very

profitable, long-term business relationship between an agency and client.

As I thought about these situations, I wondered if marketing agencies saw the need for, or

even had the ability to, assess and understand their client's organizational culture before they

started to work on marketing programs. And if they did have the ability to assess, I wondered if

the performance of marketing programs was improved. If there was a good understanding of the

client's organizational culture, then would the overall relationship between the agency and the

client lead to additional contracts over time? These questions led to the germination of this

research.

The Problem

Corporate marketing programs are visible activities that communicate an organization's

value both to the marketplace and the public at large (Wilson, 2001). Marketing programs reflect

culture, regardless of whether the marketing program is long-term and strategic (i.e., marketing

strategy, competitor and environmental analysis) or short-term and tactical (i.e., advertising,

promotion and publicity).

With worldwide spending by the top 100 global advertisers in excess of $117.9 billion in

2008 (Wentz & Johnson, 2009), it is clear that companies place a high importance on developing

and implementing marketing programs. The success or failure of marketing programs may be

determined by many factors, including the match between agencies and clients' cultures. While

internal marketing departments embody and reflect their organizations' culture without having to

consciously think about it, external or outside marketing agencies likely neither recognize nor

understand their client's culture. It is the relationship between an organization's culture and the marketing agency that this research study will address.

As Schein (1999) stated quite succinctly, "Culture matters." Culture is powerful, pervasive and constant. Making decisions or implementing actions in an organization without being aware of critical cultural dimensions can cause significant problems. While employees inside of a corporation implicitly understand this, outside marketing agencies that work with strong corporate cultures may lack this insight. If those marketing agencies fail to be aware of the complexities of the client's organizational culture, the marketing programs and ultimately the relationship between the two firms may fail.

However, when the client's organizational culture is understood, marketing agencies can more clearly present the client to the marketplace and more quickly adapt as needed to meet the needs and goals of the client. Marketers need to be sensitive to the complexities of organizational culture and work closely with organizational development practitioners (Wilson, 2001). Even though culture is considered to be a critical factor in business and has been examined in regards to performance (Harris, S., 1994; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Sorensen, 2002), there is little agreement about measurements that can be used to define corporate culture (Deshpande & Webster, 1989).

With hundreds of billions of dollars spent globally on advertising and marketing, the need for marketing agencies to understand their clients' organizational cultures is critical to a successful marketing program implementation. Spending on all types of marketing programs represent a significant investment by a corporation to build an image in the marketplace and sell its goods and services. Corporations need to achieve a maximum return on their marketing

investments; marketing agencies must be able to effectively help corporations achieve their business goals.

The Researcher's View

I have had first-hand experience working both as a marketing executive internal to an organization as well as an external consultant working with multiple client firms on marketing programs. My interest in this topic resulted from my experiences in both roles.

When I worked in corporate marketing roles, I hired, and fired, multiple marketing agencies. The agencies that understood our corporate culture and how it worked, including not only the marketplace and products, but the internal operations and politics, were the ones with which I had long-term contracts. The agencies that I fired were ones that I considered ineffective – they did not show that they understood our organizational culture or how to represent the company to the marketplace. The programs developed by the agencies that did not understand our culture were often not fully implemented and the agency credibility was damaged because of this mismatch.

In my other role as an external marketing consultant hired by companies to work on strategy and tactical marketing plans, I sometimes struggled to find the optimum way to communicate with clients and provide them with successful programs. It was difficult to assess a client's organizational culture in an effective, quick, and non-threatening manner, especially when time was limited and projects were billed on hourly rates. While it seems that most clients wish to be understood by outsiders, they are seldom willing to spend time and undertake a culture survey, and indeed may not even understand the usefulness of a cultural assessment.

While working in corporations may have its challenges, by-and-large the internal marketing staffs have a solid understanding of their own organization's culture and can easily

understand "this is how we do business here" without much prompting. Because of group

socialization and training, internal staff is taught how to best operate within the organization and

maximize their results. However, outsiders are not always able to quickly and correctly assess a

client's culture and understand how the client operates in the marketplace. The external

marketing agency needs to quickly and effectively understand a client's beliefs, values,

philosophies, and how it works – in other words, the client's culture. Many agencies do this by

trial-and-error using feel, intuition, education, and experience gained over the years.

When there is a natural match between external marketing and a client, it results in a

good working relationship, and a strong marketing program can be developed as a direct result of

this match. However, when a marketing agency is unable to understand a client's culture, the

result may be both an unsatisfied client and a struggling marketing agency; the two parties are

unable to communicate effectively and productively. They are not a match and, if the mismatch

is significant enough, the client may terminate the relationship because the external agency does

not understand them and cannot perform effectively.

A True Story about a Cultural Mismatch

Here is a story to illustrate the impact of organizational culture on marketing campaigns.

A few years ago, I had a specific experience that contributed to developing this study. I wish I

could say the story ended with "they all lived happily ever after," but alas, it did not. In fact, it

was a downright painful experience for everyone involved.

At the time, I was working at a private, liberal arts, Lutheran-based University as a

faculty member. I was new to academia, having just left a large public company. Because of my

past corporate marketing experiences, I was included on a strategic marketing project to develop

the University's brand and increase its awareness in the marketplace. The University's executive

management team was specifically concerned about the increasing level of competition and

wanted to explore new marketing approaches. Because the executives were not satisfied with the

current marketing results, this project was set up outside of the University's current marketing

department and their normal operations. As the project leader, I was given a budget of several

hundred thousand dollars, along with the authority to hire a new advertising agency.

One of the cultural elements of the University was that of inclusion – many people, many

departments, all used to being involved in large advertising projects. Work usually progressed

slowly. This project was a departure from this. First, the existing marketing department was not

included in the hiring process. I was set up to operate outside the norm on this project, which was

not within the usual boundaries of the organization's culture. This was also a religious institution

– Lutheran spirituality was a core value and was prevalent in all matters ranging from the

mission statement to daily chapel services; this culture influenced its operations and marketing.

While I knew the organization's culture was very different from for-profit corporations I had

worked with in the past, I did not appreciate the depth of its impact. Not understanding the

culture was a significant factor which caused difficulties – this was my first mistake.

I had worked with several strong advertising agencies in the past, and had a good

relationship with one particular agency. I knew the caliber of their work and had great personal

chemistry working with them. I also knew that the agency wanted the chance to work on an

advertising campaign for academics. It was bound to be a fun challenge for the agency, and they

hoped it would lead to new work in that industry. However, this was all done outside of the

official University marketing department; the marketing department was not consulted on the

project and consequently, they were ignored and reacted by not supporting the new project.

While I had good chemistry with the agency, the marketing staff did not. There was resistance,

arguments, missed deadlines, deliberate withholding of data, and more difficulties. There was

little cooperation. The misunderstandings kept mounting higher.

Despite these problems, the agency developed a very creative campaign, including new

interactive Internet advertising, print advertisements, billboards, bus stops, and revised Web site.

The measurable results were very positive and there was room to grow. But at the end, the

campaign was short-lived and the agency was fired once control shifted from me to the

marketing team.

Personal Reflections

I reflected on this project during the intervening years, trying to make sense of the

experience and understand the factors that influence the outcome. This experience became a

catalyst when I developed the idea of this study.

For a long time after that project, I considered what had gone wrong. At first I considered

whether it was a turf war, but it was bigger than that. It seemed to be a nearly classic case study

of cultural misunderstanding. The organization's core culture revolved around maintaining a

Lutheran mission and spiritual growth. While the outlying layers of culture, such as artifacts,

might change to accommodate the environment, the inner core would always be the same. At the

heart of the matter, the problem was poor understanding of the client's culture by the agency.

The chemistry between the two organizations needed a great deal of work. It became clear to me

that any outside agency expecting to work with the University in the future must understand its

core values and have the right chemistry.

It is with this story in my mind that I began this research study.

The Research Question and Purpose

These experiences and musings led me to the two main research questions for this study: What are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs? What should marketing agencies know about these elements in order to develop successful marketing programs and relationships?

Research Significance

Marketing programs account for in excess of $100 billion of expenditure by corporations around the world. Of that amount, the revenue for U.S. marketing agencies was $28.4 billion in 2009, a decline of 7.5% from the previous year (Johnson, 2010). With such large amounts of money and resources being spent on all forms of marketing communications, I concluded that both agencies and corporations would find value if better communications and understanding was engendered between the parties.

Theoretical Framework

This research study will use grounded theory as the research methodology. Grounded theory begins with an area of study, conducts research which goes beyond description, and generates a theory. The theory generated is "grounded" in data from participants who have experienced the process under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Specifics about the methodology are detailed in Chapter 3.

Definitions of Terms

Marketing. Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers (Kerin, Hartley, Berkowitz & Rudelius, 2008).

Marketing projects. Projects can be individual or integrated activities which are designed to build branding, awareness and sales of an organization's product or services.

Examples of marketing projects are advertising, publicity, direct marketing, trade shows, brochures, etc.

Successful marketing projects. Success is defined in the *American Heritage Dictionary* (2000) as "the achievement of something desired, planned, or attempted." A successful marketing program would be one which has a favorable outcome. For the purposes of this study, a successful marketing project is one which achieves the desired objective of both the client company and the marketing agency.

Marketing agencies. Agencies are external vendors or consultants hired by a corporate entity to supplement or replace the internal corporate marketing functions.

Organization culture. Culture is the sum total of all the "shared, taken-for-granted assumptions that a group has learned throughout its history" (Schein, 1999).

Grounded theory. Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that uses processes and procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a particular phenomenon or research question (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature plays an important role in developing grounded theory. It assists the researcher in identifying previous findings in an area, as well as helps to identify gaps in understanding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I began this study by searching through relevant literature from the past ten years, looking for studies which examined links between organizational culture and marketing programs. There is a great deal of research that has been done on each separately, but I found little that linked the two areas.

The Importance of Marketing

There are more than 882 U.S. marketing-communications agencies (advertising, marketing services, media, direct mail, digital, promotion and events, branding, public relations, etc.) reported in *Advertising Age's* Agency Report for 2009; this number is down from 912 agencies in 2008 (Johnson, 2010). While the drop-off certainly reflects casualties from the economic climate, it is still an industry in constant flux and renewal.

Marketing is concerned with facilitating an exchange which provides superior value to both the consumer and the company (Yaprak, 2008). Marketing can be viewed as a functional group within an organization or as a set of activities (such as advertising, sales or customer service) whose placement may vary across an organization (Workman, Homburg & Gruner, 1998). At its simplest level, marketing is the exchange of goods and services for money or some equivalent unit.

Marketing requires four basic factors: two or more parties with unsatisfied needs, the desire and ability to purchase, communication between the parties, and a product or service to exchange (Kerin, Hartley, & Rudelius, 2008). In addition, the marketing concept can also define a specific organizational culture and shared set of beliefs and values which focus on the

importance of the customer in the organization's strategy. By establishing shared beliefs that put

the customer in the center of a firm's thinking about strategy and operations, marketing can

represent the whole business as seen from the customer's viewpoint (Deshpande & Webster,

1989; Turner & Spencer, 1997; Yaprak, 2008).

A consumer orientation in marketing is one which is focused on continuously creating

and delivering superior value to the marketplace. Rather than viewing marketing as a department

or function, marketing is better thought of as a company-wide integrated effort which

encompasses all of an organization's functional operations (Han, Kim & Srivastava, 1998;

Turner & Spencer, 1997). A market-oriented corporate culture is a significant factor in achieving

a superior level of corporate performance (Turner & Spencer, 1997).

The Powerful Nature of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a powerful force in corporations. It impacts leadership behavior,

thought patterns, objectives, rewards, punishments, processes, measurements and more. Culture

is pervasive and permeates throughout an organization. At its core, an organization is a social

system, comprised of component pieces that integrate into a whole that is greater than its parts. It

is socially constructed, created and reinforced by the people who work for it (Hofstede &

Hofstede, 2005; Schein, 1999).

A modest, but positive relationship exists between the strength of a corporation's culture

and its long-term performance (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Even a moderate relationship between

corporate culture and business performance should not be ignored; culture is a significant factor

in how an organization operates.

One way to regard organizational culture is that of a shared mental software of those who

work in an organization. At its core, culture is a shared, social system and is reflected at both

external and internal levels within an organization (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Culture

includes language, identity, authority, relationships, group socialization and behavior norms,

marketing messages, advertising, publicity, terminology, products, customer service strategy,

and customer focus (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Schein, 1999; Turner

& Spencer, 1997).

Organizational culture contains organizational-wide shared meanings, values, and beliefs.

Organizational leaders will use shared language, stories, rituals, jargon and images to manage

their communications and meanings. This is true for internal employee communication, as well

as for external marketing communication. Culture is a metaphor for these shared symbols and

plays a strong role in shaping the communications and interactions between internal leaders

(Turner & Spencer, 1997). The use of shared symbols allows interactions to occur without a need

for constant renegotiation of meaning. Culture therefore can play a role in shaping both the social

interaction as well as the outcome (Turner & Spencer, 1997).

Over time, an organization's culture is perpetuated with new hires through training,

rewards, penalties and more. The culture and group norms are reinforced as group members

perpetuate established practices by teaching them to new members, and by rewarding those who

fit in with praise and incentives (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Culture also is a strong influencing

factor on the actions of service personnel; marketers need an understanding of organizational

culture when discussing branding, brand promises, and customer service programs (Wilson,

2001). Because culture is so pervasive, major cultural change is rare (Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

Organizational Culture Formation

Culture is formed over time. When organizations are formed, the founders and early

employees make basic assumptions about the industry; these assumptions will help form values,

which in turn form culture (Gordon, 1991; Schein, 2004). Young and growing corporations are

still defining and establishing their culture. Since start-ups are usually still under control of the

founder, their organizational culture strongly reflects the beliefs and values of the founder

(Schein, 1999). In their early stages, industry-based assumptions about customers and

competition help form the basis of the organization's culture (Gordon, 1991; Schein,

2004).Companies in this early stage are constructing symbols, stories, ceremonies and rituals

(Schein, 1999; Turner & Spencer, 1997). In this stage the culture tends to be a positive growth

force (Schein, 2004).

As a company grows and establishes its viability in the marketplace, it may go through

changes in leadership. Founders may leave and be replaced by more experienced executives,

managers and board members. Organizational culture is therefore learned formally through

employee training programs, as well as informally from existing employees and socialization

(Schein, 2004; Wilson, 2001).

The organization identifies and keeps the cultural factors that work successfully,

discarding those that are unsuccessful. It enters a more established stage where the employees

become carriers of the culture (Hogg, Carter & Dunne, 1998; Schein, 1999). Managers use the

established symbols and rituals to motivate employees and achieve results, but they cannot

impose their own interpretations on all organizational members (Turner & Spencer, 1997).

At this point, the organizational culture is embedded and group members become carriers

of the culture (Hogg, Carter & Dunne, 1998). Change at this level will likely require a turnover

of staff and leadership, bringing in new employees who have not been committed to the old way

of operations (Gordon, 1991).

A mature organization will have an established culture which will contain both functional and dysfunctional elements; it is clinging to its old ways, despite the need for adaptation (Schein, 1999). Organizational cultures tend to change very slowly, usually as result of executive turnover, changes in the marketplace, or more general changes in society (Schein, 2004; Wilson, 2001). An entrenched culture can make implementing new strategies very difficult (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Schein, 2004). An important point for marketing professionals is that mature companies with a larger organization size do not believe that they have as great a need for marketing expertise (Pasa & Shugan, 1996).

Organizational Culture and Industry

The industry in which an organization operates also exerts pressures on its culture. For example, organizations which face greater market instability value marketing expertise at a higher level than do organizations which operate in a stable market (Pasa & Shugan, 1996). For example, when the market is volatile, forecasting is difficult and corporations have a greater need for marketing expertise (Pasa & Shugan, 1996). By contrast, a calm, stable market is easier to forecast and therefore the marketing expertise has a lower value to the organization (Pasa & Shugan, 1996).

An organization's culture can also be impacted by the industry within which it operates; within industries there may be specific characteristics which are common for many of its corporations (Gordon, 1991). Assumptions about customers, competitors, resources, and society are basic elements of a corporation's culture; however, companies in the same industry can have different cultures as long as elements in those cultures are not driven by basic industry assumptions (Gordon, 1991).

Different industries have different levels of competition, ranging from no competition, to a large number of similar organizations. A highly competitive marketplace is one factor that causes market volatility. Corporations with strong culture excel at incremental change, but if the environment is volatile or extremely competitive they may encounter difficulties if their culture does not match the marketplace (Sorensen, 2002).

Market volatility can affect both an organization's performance and profitability. This variability in the corporation's performance in turn affects organizational behavior and culture (Sorensen, 2002). The more complex and volatile the market environment, the more likely it will be that the organizational culture will be oriented toward dealing with high levels of uncertainty from competitors, customers, products, technology and more (Gordon, 1991). For example, consider the differences between technology organizations and utility organizations. Technology organizations operate in a highly competitive and volatile market that values organizational strengths in innovation, speed and flexibility (Gordon, 1991; Han, Kim & Srivastava, 1998), whereas utility organizations operate in a stable environment which values reliability and stability of operations (Gordon, 1991).

Organizational Culture and Adaptability

Seldom does the environment in which an organization operates stay the same. Organizational members may find that over a period of time, actions which were once successful are no longer successful. If an organization becomes unsuccessful over time, then the organization will search for new methods; value changes may be possible and the organization will adapt (Gordon, 1991). An organization's ability to adapt to its environment may require a cultural change in order for the company to continue to succeed. Although change may usually follow a crisis, it is not guaranteed to result in a cultural change (Gordon, 1991).

Kotter and Heskett (1992) posited that organizational cultures which adapt to changes in the environment will be associated with superior performance over the long-term. More adaptive organizational cultures held values that cared about customers, stockholders and employees, as well as valued people who could create useful change (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Adaptive cultures are more customer-centric, paying attention to their customers and seeking to promote customer closeness (Han, Kim & Srivastava, 1998; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Schein, 1999; Sin & Tse, 2000; Turner & Spencer, 1997). There is a high level of fit between the organizational culture and the context within which it operates in the marketplace (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Sin & Tse, 2000).

Not all organizational cultures have the ability to adapt. Commonly observed behaviors in those cultures are that managers care more about themselves, their work group or product, and they behave in an insular fashion with an emphasis on politics and bureaucracy (Cespedes & Piercy, 1996; Kotter & Heskett, 1992). High levels of office politics and conflict have been linked with lower levels of market orientation and market neglect (Harris & Piercy, 1999).

Organizations which are not adaptive tend to be low-performing, showing evidence of arrogance, and even hostility, to values such as leadership or engines of change (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). These attitudes create barriers to marketing, and may be overt and identifiable, or include covert issues such as organizational inertia, myopia, resistance to change, political interests and flawed information flow (Cespedes & Piercy, 1996; Harris & Piercy, 1999; Kottter & Heskett, 1992).

Organizations which are market-oriented use innovation to develop unique ways to deliver superior value to customers and gain competitive positioning (O'Cass & Nego, 2007). This type of approach builds success based on a corporation's ability to innovate solutions and

products. Cultures which value innovation work to leverage internal competencies to gain an

advantage in the marketplace (O'Cass & Nge, 2007).

Organizational Culture and Communication

Important factors of an organizational culture are its communication types and patterns.

In order to function effectively as a group, the employees of an organization need an efficient

language and way to pass knowledge (Schein, 2004). Internal communications to employees

helps to build trust, provide timely information, and improve employee morale and mood

(Dolphin, 2005). The internal communication in an organization makes a significant impact on

performance in all areas. Increased communication to employees has been shown to strengthen

the employees' dedication, increase trust, and help with strategic initiatives (Dolphin, 2005).

Organizations are also more successful at developing new products and services if there

is greater communication among multi-disciplinary departments such as marketing,

manufacturing, and engineering (Cespedes & Piercy, 1996; Griffin & Hauser, 1992). Effective

communication with customers also produces higher value in the marketplace (Han, Kim &

Srivastava, 1998; Sin & Tse, 2000). Two-way communication and dialog, including words and

deeds, are indicators of high performing organizations (Kotter & Heskett, 1992).

Communication is a language and category system that helps socialize new members and

clearly defines meaning (Schein, 2004; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The language that an

organization uses to communicate are considered symbols which belong to the surface level of a

culture, this is the way in which thinking is transferred (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

Invisibility of Organizational Culture

Despite the importance of organizational culture, it is relatively invisible to those who are

not part of the group (Schein, 1999). Culture is a set of powerful, and often unconscious, forces

that determine the behavior, thought patterns, and values of organizational members. Culture

matters because decisions which are made "without awareness of the operative cultural forces

may have unanticipated and undesirable consequences" (Schein, pg. 3, 1999). Schein described

organizational culture as being comprised of three interacting levels: artifacts; espoused values;

and basic underlying assumptions (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

Three Levels of Culture
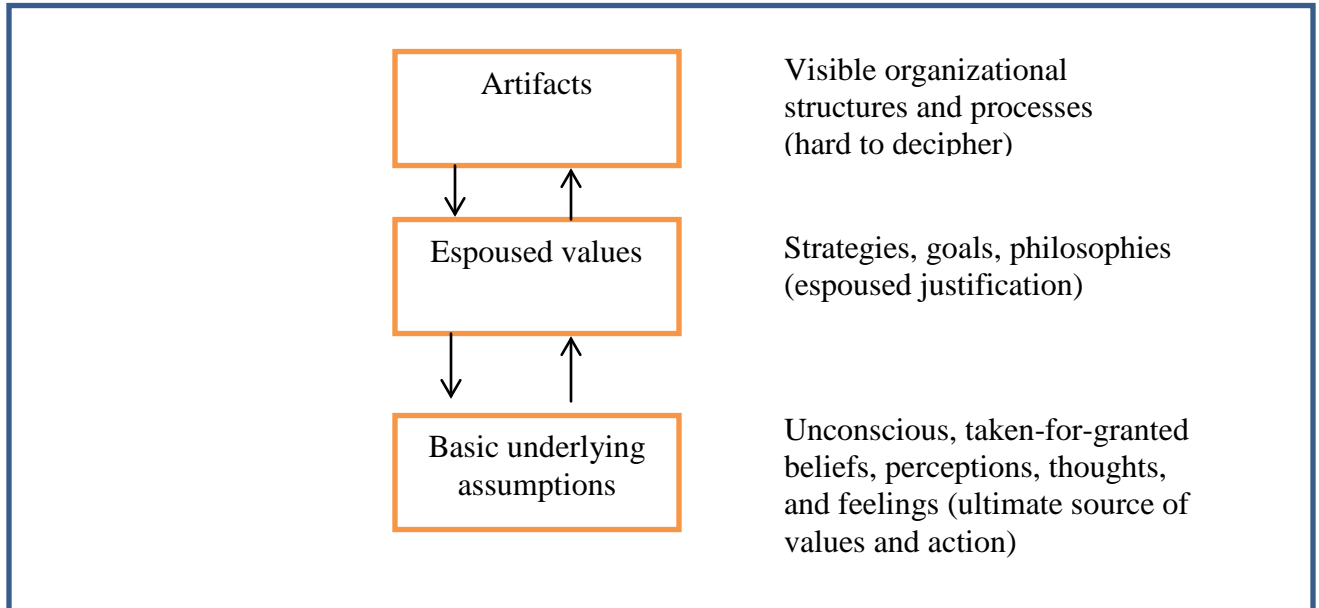
Schein (1992; 1999) explained each level of culture.

1. Level 1: Artifacts. What someone sees, hears, and feels as they experience the organizational culture. This is seen as how the members talk, present themselves, and interact with each other. It is experienced, but not necessarily understood (Schein).

2. Level 2: Espoused values. The organization's goals, strategies, and philosophies. At this level, the behavior is seen, but again, not necessarily understood without explanation by the group insiders (Schein).

3. Level 3: Basic underlying assumptions: These are the values, beliefs, and assumptions of the organization's founders and key leaders. These are what make the organization successful and are the source of the group's values and action (Schein).

Schein's (1992; 1999) model illustrates how culture is the accumulated learning of the group – the way the group thinks, feels, and interacts with the world. Culture is the shared mental

model held by the members of the organization (Schein, 1992; 1999). The organization culture is

shared, but it is also invisible. The members cannot tell an outsider what their culture is as their

culture is the sum of all the shared, taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions that the group has

learned throughout the history of the organization.

An organization's culture is a type of mini-society that has its own values, rituals and

beliefs (Morgan, 1998; Schein 1999). An outsider to an organization could easily ignore, or be

confused by, the key cultural elements since the outsider has not experienced the same

phenomenon as the insider. And, the individuals inside of the organization are not really able to

explain the basic assumptions and patterns because these basic assumptions have dropped from

conscious awareness; the assumptions are taken for granted by those inside.

National Culture. Organization cultures are a different phenomenon than national

cultures, yet the model for organizational culture shares some similarities with the model for

national cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Morgan, 1998; Schein, 1999). Since so many

organizations are global in their operational scope, I therefore thought it important to include a

brief review of a national cultural model in this literature review and note the similarities.

As do organizational cultures, national cultures also use symbols, rituals, values and

practices to define themselves. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) incorporate four interactive layers

into their model of national culture (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

 The "Onion" Model of National Culture
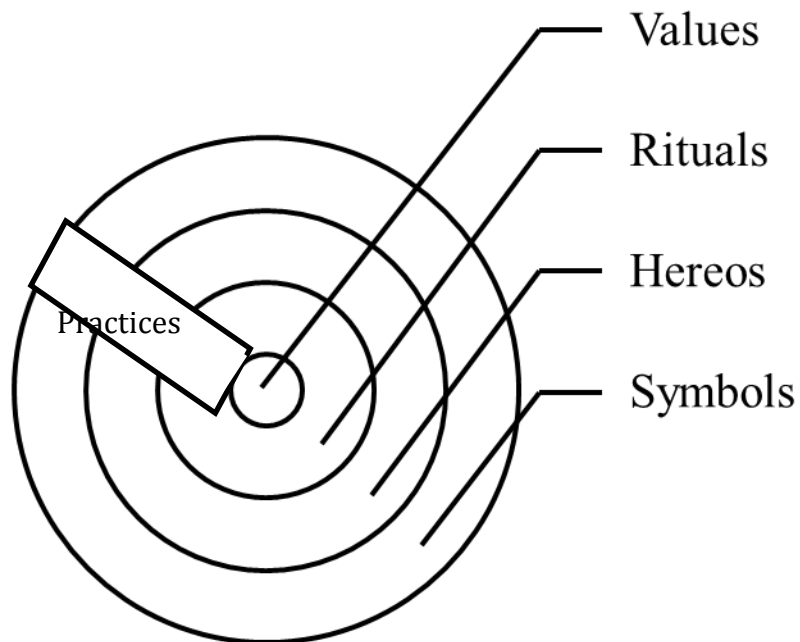
1. Layer 1: Symbols. The words, pictures, objects, and gestures that convey a particular meaning which is recognizable only to other members of the culture. Symbols are the outermost, superficial, layer (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

2. Layer 2: Heroes. In this layer are the persons who characterize what is highly prized in a culture; they serve as models for behavior (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

3. Layer 3: Rituals. These represent collective activities which are considered to be socially essential, such as greetings, ceremonies, and discourse. They are not necessary in order to reach the desired ends, but they reinforce cohesiveness in the group (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

4. Layer 4: Values. At the innermost core of the culture, values indicate broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others. Values are acquired very early in our lives and represent feelings and beliefs (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

5. Practices. The layers of symbols, heroes, and rituals are subsumed under practices. While the practices are visible to outsiders, the cultural meaning is invisible. The cultural meaning is assigned, or interpreted, by outsiders to the culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

In a similar manner as illustrated by Schein's (1992; 1999) model of organizational culture, the core values of national culture are also invisible to an outsider. An observant outsider can see the practices, and perhaps recognize the values, but will not interpret them in the same manner as will the insider. The mental software is not shared.

Linking Organizational Culture and Marketing Programs

An organization's marketing programs can help illustrate its culture and values through the use of language, visual appearance, and presentation. Examining an organization's marketing programs can provide a view into its customer focus, competitive environment, strategic orientation, and corporate values. The marketing concept helps to define the firm's distinct culture and set of shared beliefs and values that may, or may not, put the customer in the center of the firm's strategy (Deshpande & Webster, 1989; Sin & Tse, 2000;).

Marketing provides a direct conduit between the marketplace and the corporation in an exchange process; marketing experts can have a strong influence on organizational strategy and decision-making (Pasa & Shugan, 1996). Organizations that have a strong market-oriented culture focus more on value creation strategies. Conversely, organizations with a lower market-orientation are more internally focused on costs and standard processes, and less aggressive with regards to value creation and market/customer responsiveness (Dobni & Luffman, 2000).

A popular notion has been that the proper execution of the marketing strategy brings about superior organizational performance; however, this is not always the case. While some

research does show a positive relationship (Kotter & Heskett, 1992) between marketing and performance, results are not clear-cut. Some researchers state that the relationship is a modest one (Kotter & Heskett), while other researchers view that a market-oriented culture is a significant factor in achieving corporate performance (Han, Kim & Srivastava, 1998).

Organizational culture is the glue that holds managers together for an effective organization (Han, Kim & Srivasta, 1998; Sin & Tse, 2000). There is evidence that culture influences an organization's marketing decisions (Armstrong, 1996). Sin and Tse (2000) surveyed 388 enterprises and found that marketing efficiency was positively related to three components of organizational culture: 1) customer closeness; 2) an identifiable set of corporate values; and 3) a market-oriented focus.

In a different research study, Hogg, Carter and Dunne (1998) found that market orientation had a positive effect on business performance and employee commitment, but they questioned whether market orientation was a determining factor of the culture or a result of it. Among the barriers to market orientation are factors such as communication, inexperience or lack of management ability, incomplete integration of marketing functions, and power-related or political problems (Harris & Piercy, 1999).

Another conclusion was reached by Kotter and Heskett (1992) in their research on corporate culture and performance. They concluded that while there are positive relationships between the strength of corporate culture and long-term performance, the relationship is a modest one. Considering that strong cultures can include dysfunctional elements as well as functional ones, it is easy to understand how success can also reinforce a culture that is arrogant, inwardly focused, politicized and bureaucratic.

An organizational culture can be considered strong when the norms and values are widely shared and intensely held; strong culture increases consistency in how individuals act and view their participation (Sorensen, 2002). Strong organizational cultures also have a high level of commitment to the way in which they understand the marketplace and the world (Sorensen).

Organizations with strong cultures may still have members who show active resistance to the market focus of their company (Harris, 2002; Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Indeed, organizational members may feel fully justified and even compelled to sabotage programs that they consider to be politically motivated or ill-conceived (Harris). These employees may create barriers to market orientation development that include passive and intentional resistance to strategies. Employee behavior and attitudes may act as obstacles to improving an organization's market orientation. In particular, market-oriented change was resisted when the initiatives or demands were believed by employees to be unreasonable, subjugating or emasculating (Harris).

Although marketing strategy development and implementation are usually seen as separate activities, marketing professionals must pay attention to the process of how these areas are integrated. Difficulties can occur when the market strategy development and integration are separate processes (Cespedes & Piercy, 1996). Organizations that demonstrate superior profitability are also those organizations that have higher marketing efficiency (Sin & Tse, 2000).

Summary

The literature clearly indicates that organizational culture is an important element in corporate performance, and it also shows the critical role that marketing plays for organizations in order to communicate their offerings to the marketplace. Regardless of whether the relationship of organizational culture to marketing is strong or weak, there is nonetheless an

acknowledged impact of an organization's culture on the way it conducts business and on its

orientation to the marketplace. Since marketing programs represent the visible manifestations of

an organization's culture, then the presentation of marketing programs to the public is important

to an organization's well-being and success. Marketing programs can provide a window about

how an organization views itself.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory has long been commonly used in research in sociology; it has also been

successfully used to explore management issues such as culture, consumer behavior, competition

and other management research topics (Goulding, 2002). My viewpoint for this research study

was based in the ontology of social construction. Based on my business experiences, I believe

that in business, the truth is formed by our relationship and engagement with the world and each

other. Meaning is not necessarily discovered, but is instead constructed by the social groups or

an organizational culture (Crotty, 1998). I selected grounded theory as the research methodology

for this study because my intent was to generate a theory about the impact of organizational

culture on marketing programs.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an interpretive research methodology that uses a systematic set of

procedures to develop a theory grounded in rich data about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin,

1990). Rich data goes deeper than the surface information and provides details, focus, and a

fuller explanation; rich data are reflected in thick descriptions (Charmaz, 2006). In order to be

considered well-constructed, a theory must meet the criteria of fit, understanding, generality, and

control (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The theory must fit the substantive area, be comprehensible

and make sense, include sufficient variation to be applicable to a variety of contexts, and be able

to provide control with regard to action related to the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Grounded theory can present challenges to researchers. In particular, I had to be able to

set aside my own theories and ideas relative to the phenomenon being studied, so that analytical

and substantive theory could be developed (Creswell, 2007). It must be noted that I do have a

great deal of experience in marketing, including B.A. and M.B.A. degrees in marketing, and

have worked with both corporations and marketing agencies during my career. I had to

consciously set aside my own pre-conceived notions about organizational culture, marketing, and

the need for assessment of culture. I kept foremost in my mind that I was seeking to develop a

theory, not prove one.

However, personal experiences are a recognized source of theoretical sensitivity that

helps give researchers insight and meaning to the data uncovered (Strauss & Corbin, 1990;

Charmaz, 2006; Dey, 1999). Therefore, my work experiences also had positive impact on this

study. Because I was familiar with the topic through my own work experiences, research, and

education, I had a solid understanding of how things really worked in marketing at both

corporations and agencies. This knowledge helped me to quickly understand actions and events;

I could relate to the stories told by my participants.

Participant Selection

This research study began with convenience sampling; I contacted several individuals

who I knew had extensive experience in marketing programs worked on by a client and agency.

From those interviews, I used theoretical sampling to collect additional data. Theoretical

sampling is purposeful selection that also responds to the developing categories and emerging

theories (Goulding, 2002; Creswell, 2007). Using theoretical sampling in grounded theory

methodology meant that the data collection and the analysis proceeded jointly; I was able to use

data from each interview to uncover new patterns and concepts which could be explored in

subsequent interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2007; Goulding, 2002). To take this

approach, I had to remain flexible in my subject and approach. This brought me into contact with

people who had rich experiences in organizational and marketing disciplines, in both large

corporations and small practices. Another reason for using this theoretical sampling method was

that it enabled me to maximize both opportunities to develop concepts as well as identify

relationships between concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The population for this study included participants from marketing agencies and client

organizations. Having participants from both sides of the partnership was important; I wanted the

data collected to reflect the viewpoints and experiences of both types of organizations. Without

this balance, I believed the theory would only account for a portion of my research objective.

My initial contacts were several people with whom I was acquainted at both client

organizations and marketing agencies. Participants from client organizations were individuals

who had hired agencies and evaluated the work. For the agency participants, my research design

required that they be individuals who were responsible for marketing projects and client

relationships; these individuals managed and participated in the marketing projects undertaken

for a client. Client job positions were at director and vice-president levels; all had hired

marketing agencies, managed budgets, evaluated program results, and coordinated resources.

The agency participants ranged from account executives to a company president; all had multiple

clients in multiple industries, and all were responsible for client satisfaction on a daily and long-

term basis.

To gain participant involvement, I approached each person, described my research study

process and risks, and asked if they would like to participate as interview subjects for the study.

All of my original contacts readily accepted. At the end of each of these initial interviews, each

interviewee provided me with additional contacts who met my critiera, thus providing the

theoretical sampling which is so important to grounded theory research. (The recruitment letter

for agency participants is in Appendix A, the client recruitment letter in Appendix B, and

snowball sampling recruitment letter is in Appendix C.)

All of the participants were experienced managers and executives who were used to working on complex organizational and marketing problems. I had worked with some of these individuals in various capacities during my professional career: they were past employees, former peers, and agency executives. I selected them as participants because I was familiar with each of their backgrounds and thought that each would be able to help inform my understanding of the research problem.

Interview Process

In grounded theory, the interview process is quite intensive, but it uses only a few broad, open-ended questions, thus allowing the researcher to be flexible and delve deeper into the topics (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Goulding, 2002). This design provided me with detailed information and gave me the opportunity to request more depth and explanations of events than would have been possible with other research methodologies.

It was critical for me to be able to form a bond with the participants; the questions I asked dealt with sensitive, real-world, experiences at organizations and businesses that are well-known at a national level. The marketing projects ranged from small campaigns which cost tens of thousands of dollars, to national campaigns with multi-million dollar budgets. I had to establish trust immediately with the interviewees. They had to be confident that I would protect their confidentiality; if I did not do so, the risk was that their future business relationships might be jeopardized. Therefore, the first thing I did in each interview was to cover the topics of confidentiality and risks. I discussed the requirements of the University of St. Thomas for dissertation studies, including the consent form (Appendix D), which gave the participants additional assurances about the professional nature of this research study. (While there were no concerns voiced, I wonder if some of the interviews I requested from the theoretical sample

population, but did not receive, were declined because of participants' unease about disclosing

insider viewpoints regarding high-value contracts and partnerships.)

I requested that I be allowed to record the interviews and explained how, in grounded

theory research, it is the participants' experiences and stories that drive the theory construction

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In essence, the participants already held the keys to answering the

research problem. My role was to delve deeply into the topic and generate a theory to account for

the patterns of behavior and interactions (Dey, 1999; Goulding, 2002). To convert the interviews

into documents, I employed a professional transcriptionist. In accordance with the University of

St. Thomas' Institutional Review Board, the transcriptionist signed a confidentiality agreement.

As this transcriptionist is a certified medical transcriptionist and abides by all HIPAA

requirements, I felt confident that all information would be kept private.

In regards to the interview locations, all but one interview were conducted at the

participants' work places. In each case, we met either in their office or in a conference room. The

interviews were private; each lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. One long-distance

interview was conducted and recorded via a conference call service.

An interview protocol was developed (Appendix E). However, it should be noted that in

grounded theory, the researcher needs to stay flexible and be able to redirect or delve deeper into

topics (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Goulding, 2002). The intensive interviewing

used in grounded theory allows for the fluidity needed to have a deeper exploration of an

experience or topic (Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002). And, as Charmaz stated, by using a few

broad, open-ended questions, I had the ability to focus questions to solicit detailed discussion

about topics. I was able to go deep into the described experience, request detail or explanation,

shift topics, and explore statements.

There were three primary questions in each interview:

1. Tell me about some of the recent projects you have worked on. What types of projects were they? How did you determine whether the results were successful or not?

2. Tell me about a project where the relationship between the agency and client was good. What happened?

3. Tell me about a project where the relationship between the agency and client was poor. What happened?

Because of the very tight focus of the interviews on the participants' experiences, I was able to explore their stories in great depth. Most people like to tell stories about their work experiences and are only too glad to share their tales with an interested audience. In addition, each interview participant expressed an interest in the research study topic. They have all seen first-hand the impact of organizational culture on establishing a long-term, mutually successful and beneficial partnership. And, as could be expected, each has also experienced the negative results from a corresponding lack of understanding of culture.

I interviewed ten participants. While this is not a large base, the participants' comments quickly became repetitive and I believed that the data reached saturation. I did not believe that increasing the participant base would change the findings. Four of these participants were from my original contact group and six were referred to me as part of the theoretical sample. I felt privileged and honored to be the recipient of the participants' confidences. Their trust enabled me to gain a rare, behind-the-scenes glimpse into the hiring, building, maintaining, and sometimes the break-up, of client-agency relationships.

Data Analysis Process

Constant Comparison and Memo Writing

In essence, grounded theory evolves totally from the data collected. And since there is a great deal of information obtained during the interviews, interpreting the data has the potential to be an enormous and confusing task.

Although this was my first grounded theory study, I immediately grasped the importance of memo writing to the data analysis. In grounded theory, memo writing consists of the researcher recording her thoughts following interviews and throughout the data gathering and analysis process (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To fall behind in writing memos could have been disastrous. The sheer volume of pages of transcripts necessitated that I stay current in the process as each interview informs the researcher for subsequent interviews (Charmaz).

Therefore, I routinely practiced a critical technique of grounded theory study: constant comparison of data. I continually thought about and compared interviews to each other. What words were I hearing; what concepts where being discussed; what was important to the participants? In addition to digital recordings of the interviews, I took field notes during each interview. I listened to the recording of each interview within several hours of completing it. After that, I wrote additional memos about what I had heard from each participant. I listened to each interview multiple times. I looked for both new and repetitive ideas, categories, themes, descriptions, similarities and differences.

As I conducted the interviews, the volume of transcripts and memos grew and I continued to constantly compare notes. By staying current, I was able add additional queries into the interviews in order to gain new details from each participant. An example of a new query was

that an early participant mentioned that it was important to have a budget match between client and agency. This sparked a new line of thinking for me regarding budgets and financial issues. I was able to ask other interviewees about their own experiences with budget matches and mismatches.

Another example of a new query triggered by a participant was her mention of the importance of chemistry in a relationship. This led me to add questions about the meaning of chemistry to each person. In a similar way, the impact of geographical closeness of an agency was raised by a client participant. Before this, I had not considered the importance of operational location. Throughout the interview process I considered new ideas, some of which wound up being germane to my research objectives.

Open Coding

Data analysis began with the interviews – both during and afterwards – using grounded theory memo techniques. Analysis then continued with reading and rereading the transcripts. As I read the transcripts, I used line-by-line analysis and open coding. Open coding is the process of assigning units of meaning to the data discovered in each interview (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Goulding, 2002). It's the *meaning* that holds the value of the words for the researcher. The process of uncovering that meaning begins in open coding.

In the open coding phase, I began assigning preliminary conceptual labels. I kept a running list of concepts from each interview which helped me identify patterns and recurring concepts. These labels will be detailed in Chapter 4 Findings.

Axial Coding

Open coding and axial coding go hand-in-hand during the data analysis phases. While open coding breaks data in individual categories, axial coding is the process of pulling data

together in new ways. In grounded theory, I had to be able to move between open and axial

coding (Goulding, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There is not a strict process *per se*, but there is

a flow between these phases which helped me to build higher level concepts and gain new

insights. Using a grounded theory methodology required that I be able to identify how the

categories were related at a higher level of abstraction. By using constant comparisons and

memos, my analysis viewpoints broadened and flowed between open and axial coding, thus

helping me to make connections between categories.

Data Storage

Maintaining confidentiality is critical in research, especially in a study such as this where

sensitive client data was discussed by the participants. All tape recordings and transcriptions are

secure in my home office in a locked storage cabinet. All transcriptions and documents are

secured in a password protected file on my home computer. No mentions of participants or

companies have been made in such a way so as to allow a reader to identify them. Research

findings, memos, diagrams and the like do not disclose participant names or organizations. When

I use quotes in this report, the real names of participants are not used. My list of participants and

their companies are also kept in a secure, password protected file on my home computer. I

understand that the participants have placed their trust in me for these sensitive and candid

interviews.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

When designing marketing campaigns, clients and agencies enter into a business relationship in which both parties expect to receive certain benefits. A client gains an experienced marketing team, with fresh insights, to help develop marketing campaigns designed to increase sales or awareness. An agency gains increased revenue and expands its own level of experience, which also results in growth and a continued revenue stream. Marketing campaigns can cost in a range from thousands of dollars to millions of dollars, and can be in place for multiple years. Therefore, given the high levels of expense, understanding, creativity, communication, and commitment that are required from each party for a successful marketing program, both parties would likely benefit from having a strong cultural fit.

The purpose of this research study was to develop a theory which identified important elements of organizational culture that impact marketing programs designed by marketing agencies for client organizations. The research questions were: (1) What are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs? (2) What should marketing agencies know about these elements in order to develop successful marketing programs and relationships?

This chapter presents findings, explains my analysis process and describes how the theory emerged from the research data. It has been a fascinating process and given me new insights into two areas that deeply interest me: organization development and marketing. It has also challenged my analysis process as I moved from using linear thinking and a positivistic approach, to a more fluid, interpretive approach which helped me explain the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

It is not unusual in grounded theory for the researcher to apply prior experiences to gain more awareness of the concepts that might be used with the data (Charmaz, 2006). During the study, I continued to reflect on my own work experiences. These experiences helped me to shape this study and better understand the importance of the concepts and stories from the participants. I could understand the participants' views and comments because I lived through similar experiences. Per Charmaz's (2006) advice to researchers, I worked to keep my own viewpoints from coloring this analysis and from making assumptions about data. Nonetheless, my experiences gave me valuable insights into the phenomenon and helped me to develop the research questions and theory. Finally, at the end of the process, if I had ever doubted how important a good cultural fit was between business partners, this study rid me of that notion.

Participant Selection

Recruiting the research participants was critical to this study. It would be their experiences and insights that informed the study. Therefore, they needed to be business professionals with experience on marketing campaigns. This study included ten participants in eight different client and agency organizations. They contributed stories about their experiences when working together on marketing campaigns, and what impact organizational culture has had on their partnerships. Their levels of experience in business were impressive. Participants included: company owners, agency partners, executives in marketing, vice president for customer experience, and account executives. The organizations included an industry-leading health care insurance company, a global manufacturer of construction products, an innovative financial services company, a national restaurant chain, and several agencies with award-winning credentials.

All participants were working in organizations with business inside and outside of

Minnesota, giving them a national marketing scope. I was honored that the participants talked

openly about their experiences working on marketing campaigns. They had all experienced big

marketing project wins, and also big project losses. Several participants had experience as both

client and agency employees. One participant was currently employed part-time on staff at a

client organization while also working as an independent consultant. Table 4.1 provides an

overview of participant roles, pseudonyms, industries, and years of experience.

Table 4.1

Participant Pseudonym, Industry, Role, and Experience

Participant pseudonym	Industry	Role at time of interview	Years of experience
Pamela	Health care National scope	Client	20+
	Marketing consultant Local market	Agency	10+
	(Currently in both roles)		
Michael	Event production and marketing National scope	Agency	20+
Violet	Health care services National scope	Client	12+
Patrick	Health care services National scope	Client	15+
Lawrence	Public relations agency National scope	Agency	20+
Margaret	Advertising agency National scope	Agency	12+

Harold	Advertising Agency National scope	Agency	20+
James	Restaurant chain Regional scope	Client	15+
Helen	Financial services National scope	Client	12+
Janet	Manufacturing company National scope	Client	20+

The data from these interviews are the basis of my theory. I sought to understand what were key elements of organizational culture that would impact the implementation and success of marketing campaigns. One of my original research questions was "what should agencies know about organizational culture in order to develop successful campaigns and relationships."

Data Analysis

The data analysis began during the interview process itself. Every participant had personal stories which helped to illuminate the topic. In addition to recording and transcribing each interview, I also took field notes, jotting down key phrases, concepts and patterns that I wanted to remember and explore. Following the interviews, I wrote memos describing my thoughts about the interviews and topics. As the interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed, I began to recognize patterns in the stories.

When reviewing and analyzing the transcriptions, I used a constant comparison method of analysis, making comparisons at the analytical level (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As I analyzed and coded individual interviews, I compared them with previous interviews. I continually wrote memos over several months of interviews.

Going into this study, I knew that I had to put aside my preconceived notions and let the data guide the analysis and discovery. I anticipated that there might be hundreds of individual codes and categories; however, I was surprised at the level of overlap of concepts that quickly emerged. It is possible this concentration was because of the focus of the participants on the topic of study; they clearly viewed chemistry and cultural fit as an important requirement of working together. It might also have been because of the high level of expertise and experience that each participant had. All of the participants had worked in multiple organizations on multiple marketing campaigns – they were all experts in their fields. Data saturation emerged very quickly, after roughly six interviews. This may be due to the large number of stories shared by each participant during the interviews. Despite differences in their organization types, industries, or business scope, the participants' stories were very similar.

Memo Writing

In grounded theory research, the researcher is encouraged to write memos throughout the process. The memos can occur at any time, on any topic, be structured or random. The format itself is not the important part; what is important is to write about the data and learning throughout the process. Writing memos gives the researcher the opportunity to analyze data early in the process; they reflect the researcher's thoughts (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

In my research process, I wrote memos on different topics throughout the information gathering and analysis. I wrote memos after each interview, typing them up and referring to my field notes. I also wrote memos at odd times, and when doing initial data coding. Some memos were hand-written while sitting at a local coffee shop, reading over the interview transcripts. And there were even times when I just noted a stray thought on a post-it note during the day. The important element of memo writing is not the formality, but the thought process.

To illustrate my memo writing, Table 4.2 includes excerpts from two memos: one written after a participant interview, and one written at the end of the interviews about culture and chemistry.

Table 4.2

Excerpts from Memo Writing: (1) Interview and (2) Concepts

Excerpt 1: Interview Memo – Harold

One of the first things that Harold mentioned was "chemistry." When there is good chemistry, the projects flow. And chemistry refers to both inside and outside of the agency. Harold talked about a great relationship with ___. They worked on this for years until the execs changed and there was a change in agencies. However, ___ kept the digital account.

When the execs are on a power trip, then it's a poor relationship. (This comment was echoed in another interview also.) Clients have to treat the agency staff fairly. He talked about one client who would yell and berate the agency staff. This is a power trip.

___ has resigned client accounts. There was one that was resigned 2 years ago – Harold cited financial issues. From this, I took it as the client was questioning spending and trying to nickel-and-dime. After 5 years on the account, and with a successful campaign, the client put the account out for review and selected another agency.

Harold also talked about shuffling of the team in order to improve the client relationship. Have to find a way to be flexible. They want to stick with clients.
Good clients have leaders who are focused on numbers and relationships. Poor clients have leaders who are insecure about their abilities. This leads to conflict, challenges, and eventually to a lost (or resigned) account.

Excerpt 2: Memo – Thoughts on culture and chemistry

I'm surprised that everyone I've talked to so far seems to have a general understanding of culture and how organizations have unique cultures, but no one mentions any specific cultural elements. I don't give any definition for culture because I don't want to lead them into a specific direction. They all talk about the importance of chemistry though. I think chemistry is being used as an explanation for cultural fit by many of them. Chemistry seems to imply that there are elements that mix together and give a result – sometimes good and sometimes poor. When one company's chemistry matches well with another company's chemistry, then it's a good relationship. But when the relationship is poor, they attribute it to chemistry that doesn't match. I hear the words" match" and "fit" a lot also. But I don't hear culture specifically mentioned very often.

Another benefit of writing memos was that it provided me with a history of my research and ideas as they occurred. I could look at memos from different points in time, and they would help me to recall thoughts and incidents. Without memos it would have been very difficult to keep track of all the data and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Open Coding

Open coding was the beginning of the process of assigning conceptual labels to the data. For coding, I followed a process that assigned code names to the data with a label that categorized each piece of data (Charmaz, 2006). The codes stayed closely related to the data. I named the data with a word that I believed represented the meaning of the participant. The initial code stayed close to the data (Charmaz).

In this study I did a line-by-line analysis of the transcripts, assigning initial codes to track the data and concepts. This was the first step in discovering patterns. I used the viewpoint that coding breaks the data into manageable pieces (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Initial codes were assigned during the first analysis of the interview transcripts. These initial codes are listed in alphabetical order in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Initial Codes

1. Ability to evolve	2. Ability to integrate operations
3. Abusive	4. Adaptability
5. Advisor	6. Appreciation
7. Approval process	8. Arrogance
9. Balance	10. Branding
11. Budget fit	12. Challenges
13. Chemistry	14. Choosing
15. Client growth	16. Collaboration

17. Communication	18. Compatibility
19. Confidence	20. Connections
21. Consistency	22. Contracts
23. Courtship process	24. Creative input
25. Cultural understanding	26. Customers
27. Decision-making	28. Dialog
29. Ego	30. Emotional intelligence
31. Energy	32. Engagement
33. Enjoyment	34. Execution
35. Executive turnover	36. Expenses
37. Fairness	38. Fear
39. Flexibility	40. Forward-thinking ability
41. Fun	42. Generations
43. Geographic location	44. Goals
45. Hired vendor	46. Hiring new agencies
47. Hook-and-eye	48. Industry experience
49. Insights	50. Internal communications
51. Internal power	52. Internal reasons
53. Leadership	54. Listening skills
55. Long-term relationships	56. Loyalty
57. Market understanding	58. Marketing expertise
59. Match	60. Measurements
61. Member fit	62. Midwestern values
63. Mismatch	64. Modesty
65. Nickel-and-dimed	66. Office décor
67. Office politics	68. Operations/processes
69. Opportunity	70. Other clients
71. Partnership levels	72. Performance
73. Planning	74. Poor projects
75. Power struggles	76. Problem-solving
77. Product knowledge	78. Professional services
79. Relationship types	80. Research
81. Respect	82. Results
83. RFPs	84. Sensitivity
85. Service	86. Shared commitments
87. Strategic partnerships	88. Strengths
89. Structure	90. Success
91. Support	92. Team dynamics
93. Technology	94. Terminating contracts
95. Time	96. Transparency
97. Treatment of clients	98. Trust
99. Understanding brand essence	100. Value-added
101. Values fit	102. Velcro
103. Weaknesses	104. Wrist

I used *in vivo* codes for two of the initial codes in Table 4.3 – *Velcro* and *wrist*. *In vivo* codes are terms that use the participant's term to capture the experience; a type of insider shorthand (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Two participants used the terms quite specifically in two separate interviews, and I thought that both the terms accurately described the participants' meaning. *Velcro* was used to indicate that there are many points of connection between teams, but not all points have to hook together in order to have a good team. *Wrist* was used to indicate when a client wanted the agency to just be an extra pair of hands and do the work as directed. I retained the participant's exact term as each was quite innovative and had distinct meaning. (These terms will be used later in this chapter in the data from the participants.)

Concept Development

After reviewing the initial list of 104 open codes, I wanted to reduce the amount of data and provide language for discussing the data. I therefore grouped the codes into concepts. Concepts are the words that represent the main ideas in the data. As Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 160) stated, "All concepts, regardless of level, arise from the data." As the researcher, my role was to understand the essence of what was being expressed by the participants. As I continued to analyze data, I also used the memos and field notes that I had been writing during interview and analysis phases to help me group the codes into concepts. The concepts were given conceptual names that represented the ideas that were contained in the data (Corbin & Strauss).

To determine the conceptual names, I first grouped codes which were similar. I went through several iterations of grouping data into concepts. I considered the relationships that existed between the codes and the concept groups. While some concepts (such as measurements) were relatively straightforward to determine, other concepts (such as chemistry and compatibility) required more analysis and reflection. I started with a number of different

concepts. However, several concepts were not unique enough to warrant remaining separate;

they overlapped with other concepts and did not add enough unique differentiation to remain

separate.

From the data, I arrived at eight primary concepts: 1) values, 2) collaboration, 3)

chemistry, 4) compatibility, 5) leadership, 6) communication, 7) creativity, and 8) results. These

words describe conceptually what I believe is indicated by the data. Table 4.4 lists the concepts

and their associated initial codes.

Table 4.4

Concepts Derived from Initial Codes

Concepts	Initial Codes
Values	- Abusive - Appreciation - Arrogance - Cultural understanding - Ego - Fun - Generations - Midwestern values - Modesty - Office décor
Collaboration	- Collaboration - Fairness - Hired vendor - Long-term relationships - Partnership levels - Professional services - Strategic partnerships - Support - Value-added - Wrist
Chemistry	- Ability to integrate operations - Balance - Chemistry - Connections - Emotional intelligence

	• Energy • Enjoyment • Fear • Hook-and-eye • Loyalty • Match • Member fit • Relationship types • Respect • Sensitivity • Trust • Values fit • Velcro
Compatibility	• Ability to evolve • Adaptability • Choosing • Compatibility • Contracts • Courtship process • Engagement • Flexibility • Geographic location • Hiring new agencies • Mismatch • Other clients • Shared commitments • Structure • Team dynamics • Terminating contracts • Treatment of clients
Leadership	• Executive turnover • Internal power • Internal reasons • Leadership • Marketing expertise • Office politics • Operations/processes • Power struggles
Communication	• Advisor • Communication • Dialog • Internal communications • Listening skills • Planning

	• Technology • Transparency
Creativity	• Approval process • Branding • Challenges • Confidence • Creative input • Customers • Decision-making • Forward-thinking ability • Industry experience • Insights • Market understanding • Opportunity • Problem solving • Product knowledge • Research • RFPs • Understanding brand essence
Results	• Budget fit • Client growth • Consistency • Execution • Expenses • Success • Goals • Measurements • Nickel-and-dimed • Performance • Poor projects • Results • Service • Strengths • Time • Weaknesses

The following table (Table 4.5 below) provides an example of a coded transcript which shows the progression from raw data, to initial codes, and concepts. Initial codes were assigned in the first round of data analysis. Concepts were assigned following the grouping of initial codes

(Table 4.4 above). After the concepts were determined, I returned to the transcripts and applied

the concept codes.

Table 4.5

Excerpt from Interviews Showing Initial Codes and Concepts

Interview Transcript	Initial Codes	Concepts
For our agency, <u>choosing the wrong client, and the clients choose the wrong agencies and it mostly is culture.</u>	Mismatch Cultural understanding Compatibility	Compatibility
Yeah it's… the answer is yes you absolutely… <u>agencies are more and more trying to pick their clients.</u> And it's been harder because of the economy. Because you know you gotta keep the lights on. But…	Choosing Courtship	Compatibility
Agencies these days are… the agencies that are strong are the ones that have the latitude to do this are very much <u>looking at whether philosophically the client has… is in alignment with the agency. And that begins in the courtship process.</u>	Match Values fit Courtship	Chemistry Compatibility
And you can tell all the way through the <u>courtship process whether or not this is going to be a good fit client or a bad fit client. And it comes down to a couple of things. One is communication philosophy, does that client have the same understanding of the value of communications that you do.</u> And the second is the work with them, how they work. You can tell it's gonna be a bad client <u>if you have difficulty setting the first meeting. You know. Or you know you say we're available Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday from 9 til noon and they choose 4 o'clock on Wednesday.</u> You know that there's going to be a <u>chemistry problem there. So it's… it's both philosophy on the work and also</u>	Match Communications Values fit Challenges Respect Chemistry	Chemistry Communication Compatibility Problem solving

philosophy on the working relationship related to areas. So yeah and where it becomes a really big issue is in our fees.	Relationship types Expenses	Measurements

Data Analysis – Concepts

In interpretive theory building, the researcher works to understand the phenomenon under study (Charmaz, 2006). Examining the eight concepts became the next step in the analysis process. As suggested by grounded theorists such as Glaser (1998) and Charmaz (2006), at each stage of analysis, the researcher should ask "What is this data a study of?" This point guided me to analyze each of the concepts with respect to their impact as organizational cultural elements on the implementation and success of marketing programs. I went back to the data and examined the participants' stories in each of the eight concept areas: 1) values, 2) collaboration, 3) chemistry, 4) compatibility, 5) leadership, 6) communication, 7) creativity and 8) results. The following sections explain the data and findings in each area.

Concept 1: Values. In the interviews, the participants spoke of their organization's values, often mentioning culture in the same comment. From the data, the participants had an understanding of what culture meant, but they did not, or could not, clearly define culture. Instead, they often referred to culture as being the reflection of their organization's values and principles.

An example from the data: Janet, a marketing communications executive at a national manufacturing company, spoke about the relationship between values and culture at her organization.

> We have a very, very conservative culture. So if you get some kind of high flying agency types in there it never works. The other thing about my company is we have some pretty strong values. And loyalty and partnership are two of them. It's a very difficult change

process because our culture is just so strong. And a lot of it is driven by the founders and the top execs. That's stable, culture does not change.

Providing a similar perspective on values and culture was Helen, the chief executive of customer experience at a national financial services firm. She spoke about the values and culture at her organization.

Quite honestly I think we have a gem of a culture. The people are just really great people, grounded in their values, strong orientation toward families, a love for this company, a willingness to work super hard to make something happen, a willingness to help each other.

Another quote from data in an interview with Lawrence, an executive at a national public relations agency, also reflected on the values by which his organization operated. As with other participants, Lawrence related values to culture.

So it's very much that kind of Midwestern family sort of environment. Don't call too much attention to yourself. Call attention to clients, but don't call too much attention to yourself. And always think that you're just maybe a half a beat less special than you really are is really kind of where we're at. I mean we never toot our own horn. It's very much, you know, honest day's work honest day's pay. We expect people to police themselves. Finish your vegetables and you'll get your dessert. You want to play outside and do the fun thing; make sure that you're getting your chores done and your homework done. And that goes for cool projects. You know, you want to work on that cool thing over there; you better make sure your homework is done.

He was not the only participant who spoke of values as closely associated with culture. Lawrence's remarks reflected a strong work ethic coupled with Midwestern values and modesty.

From these data, it seemed that participants looked for a solid match in values and principles when working with another organization on marketing projects. When a good match occurred, they believed that the relationship was stronger, and that better results would be achieved from the marketing programs. Additional comments from Lawrence reinforce this point.

The reason why agencies choose the wrong clients, and the clients choose the wrong agencies is mostly culture. How do you judge the client's culture? Good question. It's a bit subjective… one of the things we look at is cultural fit… The cultural thing is really related to mutual respect and an understanding of what each of our roles are.… And we have to deliver on those transactions in order to build a trust with the client to where then you start to become more of a strategic counselor.

When I began each interview, I told participants the purpose of the study, but I chose to not define the term "culture" as I wanted to hear their perspectives about culture without influencing their comments. James, a former vice president of marketing at a regional food franchise, commented on culture as being more about comfort and unique attributes.

Did I think overtly about culture? Not exactly in that term, but certainly from a personality standpoint. I wanted somebody that everybody would feel comfortable working with and that I would certainly feel comfortable working with basically top to bottom.

Values become visible in actions. Sometimes, actions taken by client managers, while reflecting their values, would have negative impact. The data showed that a higher level of office politics, executive turnover, and lack of customer focus did hold negative implications for a successful marketing project. Margaret commented on this in her interview.

As soon as it gets political, you know that you are not going to be able to solve the problem. You're either not going to play the game and give them what they're asking for, or it's a losing situation because you don't know the politics.

From the data, respondents equated culture with values such as work ethic, respect, understanding, and trust. This was a common theme voiced by participants. They spoke of the importance of culture, but never defined it outside of values. However, all participants did recognize its importance in forming work relationships for marketing projects.

Concept 2 – Collaboration. This concept was one with direct implications on the working relationships for all the participants. Regardless of the individual participants'

organizations or roles, the type and level of collaboration was critical to the marketing projects.

Perhaps it was due to the participants' executive level positions and responsibilities, but each of

them viewed collaboration as extremely valuable to the success of marketing projects. One

participant, Michael, the owner of an event production and marketing agency, remarked about

the importance of collaboration with his clients.

> The whole vendor versus collaborator is a big deal. A lot of times if they are not
> collaborative they'll come to the table with pretty much everything already set or not
> open to ideas, and we can sense that not being open to our ideas. I think what makes it
> good is when we're asked to collaborate real early on. We do our best work when our
> customers come to us with broad based challenges. Our best projects come when we are
> invited in early into the process without a lot of preconceived notions or ideas or
> directions from our clients. We get to be more creative when we actually get to help
> define a solution with our clients and of course anytime something can come out of
> collaboration I think it is a lot more effective.

This was by no means a unique viewpoint. Other participants also had strong feelings

about the importance of collaboration. The level of collaboration also had bearing on the

longevity of the partnerships. Janet's comments showed how a strong collaboration between

client and agency led to a long-term partnership with an advertising agency.

> And loyalty and partnership is one of them. So for example, in our advertising areas we
> worked with ____ for over 72 years. We're looking for collaboration and partnership
> over time. Not just an order taker and not just project driven. Typically we're more
> relationship driven.

Janet's example with their advertising agency was by far the longest partnership of the

study, but lengthy collaborations spanning multiple years was not unusual. Michael related how

a solid understanding of organizational culture, along with high levels of collaboration, as

contributors to long-term relationships.

> All of those clients we have somewhere north of 15 years with. And you know each one
> of those is different, but we have come to understand what their corporate culture is.
> We're a lot more effective. In some cases, we are able to look at a large multinational

company like _____and actually at some points in time probably know more about what's going on organization wide than any particular division might do. And that's a big advantage we have.

Collaboration got a slightly different reception from Margaret, an account executive at an advertising agency. In her view, having clients request collaboration might be cause for concern because of ambiguity about the concept.

And in all honesty, the word collaboration was a fluffy nice word, but it was scary from our perspective because it also can say lots of time. You see with a big group of people and that doesn't always say you make decisions quickly.

Margaret's comments about collaboration continued with an *in vivo* phrase: "wrist." She spoke of the difference between collaborative problem-solving and being directed to just accomplish a marketing task.

Many clients start to use us as a "wrist" and in our industry, that's when we do just what they say. You run into clients that are dictating. Do this, do this, do this, do this, versus saying I'm having trouble with this… this isn't working for me. I really need you to solve this problem. And you can see how very quickly that… that changes a relationship… It leaves us in this role of just taking care of those wrist type meetings… those daily dictated meetings… And it limits what we can do… it limits our thinking… from a human nature perspective, it puts you on edge a little bit.

Margaret's comments reflected the frustration she felt with clients who were not collaborative. The work would get done, but the level of creativity and problem-solving was lower, and so was the energy level.

The overwhelming response from the participants was that collaboration was a critical component to a successful project. The data from Helen also strongly supported the need for collaboration, and summed up the viewpoint of the participants about the need for collaboration.

This is top of mind because I feel very strongly about this. I expect there to be the recognition that the relationship is a reciprocal one. They are bringing a certain expertise

and we respect and are excited about that expertise. We also are bringing an expertise and that together we are producing something great.

The data showed the desire for collaborative relationships when working on marketing projects. The greater the level of collaboration, the greater the satisfaction seemed to be with the relationship and the marketing results. The data showed that there was power in collaboration. Working solo on projects, and directed activities such as "wrist," were treated with frustration. The data showed the value of collaboration in bringing new insights and skills to the marketing projects.

Concept 3 – Chemistry. Chemistry appeared frequently in the data. It was among the most discussed topics by the participants. Support for good chemistry was unanimous among the participants, as was intolerance for poor chemistry in the relationships. When I interviewed Janet, she immediately brought up chemistry when asked to provide an example of her experiences working with agencies.

> I think it is all about chemistry. And I have always said that for my whole life in working with agencies. It is whether you connect with the people. Do you have the same kind of working styles?

> Other participants expanded on the importance of chemistry. As Lawrence commented:

> You look at how they are going to be to work with. You ask questions about who would the primary contact be, what been your experience with agencies in the past, what have you liked and what have you not liked about them. And look for things that they may have thought were pet peeves and you really find out whether or not these are people we can work with. It is a little bit challenging because maybe it might not be people that I could personally work with, but maybe someone else on our team could. So chemistry can also relate to who you put on your project as well.

Comments from Harold reinforced this perspective:

> Chemistry is so critical to the success of any project. Chemistry inside the agency and chemistry outside the agency. We got along pretty well even though we had our pretty distinct and different personality types. The people generally respected what we did.

When the chemistry was bad, it was clearly destructive to the working relationships and to the projects. Data from Violet, a marketing vice president at a top national healthcare organization, provided a specific story about the results from poor chemistry.

> I will give you an example. We were putting together an internal brand video with them and one of the pieces in there had a coffee pot in it and they put in a French Press. We're not French Press. It just doesn't match who we are as an organization. We are not a French Press kind of company. We don't spend money on coffee here. We like the Folgers type level of coffee. Not that we don't like good coffee, but it just isn't who we are. We ended up getting through it and we got the product we needed, but it was really painful getting there. It just isn't who we are. It just was really painful… It was like pulling teeth every step of the way. And I will never forget this… they came in with the second video which… we had pain, pain, pain, pain, pain…They presented the video and the video was horrible. It was horrible. But it just didn't fit us. It was just awful. And it is so hard to tell an agency that because you know it's like their baby.

James also had specific examples of what happened when there was poor chemistry with an agency with which his organization had worked. In that example, the agency "rubbed everybody wrong" and while the work from the agency was acknowledged as being good, it still was not enough to maintain the contract.

> They had an agency that had done some very creative work for a long time, but it was a hard to work with agency and they basically made a lot of demands on the management team. He was frequently late in delivering and it made everybody a little bit crazy, but his work was so good. And so in spite of feeling not very great about the agency relationship, the work really was carrying the day. Finally the CEO said enough. That was a case where that agency never connected with management team, never connected with the franchisees and I don't think really got into our business. It was a group of really hot creative people who with very little involvement in the business. Ultimately you have to say is this going to work long term or not?

Chemistry was used as a category to reflect on different styles of working, philosophies, personalities, and attitudes. From the data, the type of chemistry became a ruler for evaluating

how positive the working relationships were, and could eventually become one of the

measurements of success for the projects.

    Concept 4 – Compatibility. As I continued to gather and analyze the data, compatibility

emerged as another important concept. Compatibility indicated how well, and at what levels, the

organizations and team members got along while working on marketing projects. There were a

variety of factors that participants mentioned when judging compatibility, including social status,

age, location, experience, attitudes, and individual team members. From the data, compatibility

with team members was not always consistent, but it was certainly an evaluation factor for

understanding the culture of organizations. Violet's remarks highlighted the importance of team

members getting along.

> One of the things we did that I thought was smart was we required the agency to bring the
> people who would be working on our account to the interview. We want the people
> presenting and speaking to be the people we are going to be working with day-to-day.
> The first person who worked on our account totally matched us as an organization really
> good. He didn't leave the organization, but he took on another role in the agency and
> they gave us a different account person and the second account person just didn't get it.
> He did not get us… We had a great working relationship with them and then they
> changed. He probably was a great fit at the agency… he was not a good fit for us as a
> customer.

    The importance of compatibility between organizations and individual team members

was echoed by Lawrence as he explained how his organization evaluates their potential clients

during the courtship process.

> The agencies that are strong are the ones that have the latitude to do this, are very much
> looking at whether philosophically the client is in alignment with the agency. And that
> begins in the courtship process. And you can tell all the way through the courtship
> process whether or not this is going to be a good fit client or a bad fit client… They
> basically use the first phase to narrow down capabilities, but then they make a final
> choice based on chemistry check. Because 80% of this field can be done by 100% of the
> agencies. Everybody can produce a website, can do a brochure, can write key messages,
> can do whatever. It's the 20%, that magical 20% that separates the agency from all the
> others and creates a good client relationship.

As an independent marketing consultant, Pamela was also very cognizant of the need to establish a compatible relationship with her clients, and, another telling aspect of compatibility was the level of experience of the marketing executive.

> Finding out the triggers of the person calling the shots in marketing is my end road to success. And if I can establish a rapport with that person, and I can understand what their brand is and what their brand essence is. What they are trying to relay as an organization to their external audiences. The other really, really important thing is getting back to the whole subject matter expert thing is how well they know their audience. My worse client nightmare is the client who cannot articulate what it is they want… I am constantly switching my hat to accommodate the culture of that particular company. I know that what works at one client is not necessarily going to work at another client.

Janet discussed compatibility with regards to an entirely different area: the age of team members. For Janet, age corresponded to experience level, language, and social positioning, all of which impacted the compatibility between her organization's culture and that of a potential partner.

> And if I brought in a couple of 35 year olds they wouldn't have that feeling. So there's a lot of… I don't even know what the word is… but sort of positioning of who we work with on certain projects. It's like I want to talk to somebody who speaks my language right? And they are advising me about marketing and I thought… please…How could a 20 year old possibly understand a multimillion dollar business? We like to socialize with our vendors so that relationship is very strong.

James introduced another factor with which to judge compatibility. He established requirements for his organization that any marketing agency hired must be within his organization's operating territory.

> I wanted someone that was in our operating territory, and that was one of the very crucial hard line criteria that I had set. I wanted somebody who saw our restaurants every day, could literally eat in them every day, could see their work, could feel their work and be accountable for facing that on a daily basis. I looked at agencies that were basically in our operating footprint.

Janet also had strong criteria regarding geographic location as well as experience level.

 I get calls five times a week from agencies across the country saying we'd love to work with your company. And in my thinking those long distance relationships are really hard to manage. They might be the best agency in the country, but there is something about sort of that face to face… it especially works here because we are so relationship driven.

However, not every participant considered location as a factor; several participants

worked very successfully with partners who were remote, including Helen.

The main reason I think about geography is only because of convenience. I like face to face meetings. We often have meetings at their place because I like to get away. And I don't need another airplane. It does occur to me that cost is less. On the other hand, I have a long term partner who I use in our research projects who I think very highly of and he's in Colorado. Now my cell phone reaches his cell phone… you know we are constantly in contact… it has never occurred to me that I wished he lived here. If I were hiring a firm and all else was equal, I would choose the local one, but only if all else was equal.

The data included the need for flexibility and adaptability as well. Respondents spoke

about having the ability to adapt to changing conditions. From the data, the ability to recognize

different emotions and feelings was another useful skill. Michael commented about the

importance of being able to understand the emotions and feelings in a room.

It's really even difficult to explain. You just have to be real sensitive to everybody's emotions and feelings. And we talked about that here about reading the dynamics in the room. Whether it is a brainstorming session, or a status meeting, or actually on-site. We need to be sensitive to what our clients are feeling. I think it is something that comes from experience. I think it is something that comes from experience, you know, for me… for me personally it's just knowing the personalities of the different people we're dealing with. It is real interesting to sit in a meeting with a bunch of clients and a bunch of _____ staff and you're talking, and you're back and forth, and this and that, and you will notice the one person, you know, kind of off in the corner…

Matt provided information about compatibility at not just the organizational level, but the

individual team member level.

> You look at how they are going to be to work with. You ask questions about who would the primary contact be, what has been your experience with agencies in the past, what have you liked, and what have you not liked about them. And look for things that they may have thought were pet peeves, and you really find out whether or not these are people we can work with. It is a little bit challenging because maybe it might not be people that I could personally work with, but maybe someone else on our team could.

He continued, providing a perspective about the benefit of having many team members working on a project.

> It's more Velcro than it is a point-to-point connection. There are a dozen people here who work on one particular client and they work with probably 75 people at that company. So, you're not going to get a cultural fit with a client if you have one client contact. Here you have a cultural fit if your 12 people are working with their 75 people.

This concept included the overall compatibility of the organizations, plus their ability to adapt to each other throughout the life of a marketing project. Respondents discussed how important it was for their teams to get along, to be able to recognize differences, and remain flexible. A key distinction to recognizing compatibility, versus chemistry, was that the participants noted that the team first had to recognize when there were differences, and second, be able to adjust and adapt to the differences. Consider the metaphor of chemistry as being infatuation, compared to compatibility as a long-term commitment. From the data, it appeared that a higher compatibility level was an important evaluation factor used to judge overall fit and success.

Concept 5 – Leadership. Participants had many stories about leadership of teams and projects. When there was a strong marketing manager in place, someone who had the insight and confidence to explain the product, brand, and marketing, and make decisions that benefitted the team, there were positive results and attitudes. Conversely, if the marketing manager was weak or insecure, negative office politics and turmoil were the result. Data from Harold's interview explained his experiences with strong and weak leaders.

People who are insecure with their abilities use other factors to judge things. I think that a great leader has to be unbelievably secure about who they are. Sometimes clients don't have right resources. They don't have the right respect. The CEO or board doesn't believe in marketing.

Insecurity or inexperience could have a negative impact on a project. Harold explained it further, shedding light on how strongly the team was impacted by a poor leader.

She was not confident in her abilities. She was extremely political and felt that she had to do that do move up in an organization. I have never dealt with anybody that bad in the past. She finally got taken off the business. And I have never done this in my life – I went and got a bottle of champagne. And we had champagne in our conference room – the witch is gone! I mean she was just horrible.

Margaret echoed many of Harold's comments, and related a similar story in her interview.

It takes a very strong leader, very strong internal marketing department to say we're doing it this way because it's good for the consumer. It takes a thick skin and a very strong leader to say this is what we're doing everyone. This is why we're doing it. As soon as it gets political you know that you are not going to be able to solve the problem. You're either not going to play the game and give them what they're asking for, or it's a losing situation because you don't know the politics.

Organizations going through turmoil, perhaps due to layoffs, re-organization, or financial pressures, may show different behaviors than more stable organizations. From the data, office politics rose to a new level of dysfunction during high-profile marketing projects. This impacts the client organization, as well as the agency relationship. As an internal marketing executive, Janet had experienced her share of negative office politics.

So there's a lot of politics. And so if you're not under her command you don't matter… And so there would be some clashes. He wasn't a leader for one thing. And he wanted to shake things up, and he was kind of lead around by the nose by somebody who was a much stronger personality. So for example, in our advertising area, we worked with one agency for over 72 years. And that relationship continued through several administrations. Then we brought in a new head of marketing who said let's just shake

things up a little bit, and we terminated our relationship with that agency and things

actually went downhill.

The data also showed the impact of the marketing executive on the agency side of the

relationship. Pamela spoke of one client where the marketing executive dramatically influenced

the teams.

A new marketing executive showed up, and she hated everything that had been done before because it wasn't born with her. So much depends on who the executive is you are reporting to as an agency. It is a huge difference. It is who the executive is and how much power they have.

Pamela continued her remarks, expressing displeasure with the organization and a leader who

discouraged dissent.

They are just arrogant. They are arrogant assholes to work with. She is big on Kool-Aid. It is a big Kool-Aid organization. Big Kool-Aid. You either drink their Kool-Aid or you just stand on the sidelines and shake your head… They don't like confrontations. That's bad. Therefore people are constantly on edge and uncomfortable. Awkward and uncomfortable is the best way to describe their staff meetings.

Clearly, leaders set the tone for the teams in their organizations; unfortunately, Pamela's

observations were not unique. Michael had experience as well with senior executives who

wanted people to follow them without question.

There are times where hierarchy plays a bigger role than I think it should. I've seen examples of a junior person who will say something and just get lambasted by someone further up the chain for that idea. And there are companies where senior executives suppress creativity, which is a little tough to take quite frankly.

However, not all of the data was negative. Michael also gave examples of leaders who

welcomed input from the teams.

And then there are organizations where we have brainstorming sessions and they bring in a cross section of people. Whether you are the person working the front desk or you are the senior executive, everybody has equal weight.

The good leaders have the ability to connect with others, and be truly interested not only in the business, but in the individual. Harold relayed a story about a strong executive he admired and had enjoyed working for as an agency.

> I think that a great leader has to be unbelievably secure in who they are. One of the best clients I ever worked with was a gentleman at _____. He became the CEO of that company at about 36 or 37. He had the ability to connect with people that I haven't seen with that many people. The first time we met, he had me come up to his office and we spent an hour talking about our past. He wanted to know everything about my past. Where I came from. What my friends were like. What my family was like. That was his way of understanding how I worked. And therefore he was able to get me to bend over backwards and work as hard as I could because he understood me.

 From this data, a good leader is someone who builds rapport, listens, encourages input, welcomes ideas, and cares more about the team and the business than he cares about his own progression through the ranks. Strong, fair leadership can get the best from the teams, making the projects more enjoyable, and eventually more successful.

Concept 6 – Communication. In the interviews, all of the participants had stories and insights into the need for communication during marketing projects. The clarity of communications was a critical category in understanding culture, creating successful campaigns, and forming partnerships. From the data, communications was not only about specific project direction and activities, communication also included sharing of attitudes and insights. James discussed how two-way communication was needed to build trust with partners.

> Frequent communication is important and some of that face-to-face is important. The sharing of information is important. They need to know how we are feeling about results and how we're reflecting on their involvement in that. And certainly allied with that is, you know, being very frank and honest in those elements of conversation.

Participants also believed that communication led to education. This was remarked upon by several participants. They wanted to gain knowledge from their partner; they wanted to learn. This was an important point for Helen. She wanted two-way communication and real discussion about ideas, not lip-service.

> This is top of mind because I feel very strongly about this. I expect there to be recognition that the relationship is a reciprocal one… They are bringing a certain expertise and we respect and are excited about that expertise. We also are bringing an expertise and that together we are producing something great. So the reason I say that is because I can think specifically about my great relationships and my not so great ones… The thing that I would argue differentiates those is I expect to walk away from a relationship smarter than I was before. We want feedback on our opinions. We'll have some ideas that we will shoot to the agency, and we will expect the agency to either come back and say… Let me tell you why these are not good ideas and we will be totally fine with that. But we need to walk away smarter. What we don't like is when we get no feedback on our ideas or we don't see the rationale. Otherwise we've made no progress… And second, don't protect me from myself. Come back and say, hey, how are you feeling about this? Maybe they're right, but allow me to have a voice.

Patrick put it even more succinctly in his comments about the need for communicating and transferring knowledge.

> I think they could have done a better job of educating the people who were driving that.

The respondents realized that each partner had valid ideas, and that listening was quite critical to the relationship and campaign. Feedback was an important element. The information needed to flow both ways, and had to be valuable and informative.

The data showed that good communication started with listening. When partners listened, and then responded with honesty, it was well-received. Violet expressed a great deal of satisfaction about her organization's current agency.

> It's listening, too. They are so good about listening and hearing that and going back and implementing it. You know, putting it into the design. I also think that there is an erroneous assumption that agencies make. I think some agencies who are less savvy… think that if they share too much knowledge that they will no longer be needed. And I will argue that I think that it is totally and completely 180 degrees different than that.

Margaret, who had earlier spoken of being just a "wrist" to clients, contributed her experiences on how the opposite of wrist was in the best interest of a successful marketing project.

> I think part of my job is to help train clients to be better communicators. What is the problem? What are you trying to solve, versus this is how you solve it. Because we're paid for our thinking. You are paying for me to think, to be creative. So, if you dictate it, you're really wasting your money essentially.

Not all communication was positive. Disrespectful communication was not a rare event. Nearly every participant had a story about being yelled or sworn at by a partner. Lawrence gave several examples of abusive communications:

> A client who, no matter what we do, is telling us what we have done wrong, and says they value our work, but then kicks on us when they're not happy internally. Abusive. And if philosophically they're asking us to do things that we just don't believe in… we got to get rid of that. And we resigned one last year that was easily a top five client. It was 40 grand revenue per month. We resigned it because the entire team that was working on it was hating their jobs.

Continuing on the theme of abusive communications was Harold, who also had examples of abusive communications to his staff.

> I have had clients that berate agency people. Do you think that that person is going to work that extra half hour for you because you just berated him? Maybe that worked for you four years ago… a fear mentality. It's not that way anymore, especially with the generation younger than us. It does not work at all with them.

A greater, and more respectful, level of communication was viewed as yielding a more positive match and a more successful marketing campaign. Finally, data showed that communication was critical to forming a collaborative partnership in order to generate a successful campaign.

Concept 7 – Creativity. The concept of creativity can relate to other concepts, most notably to collaboration and partnership, but it has a narrower focus. Not every marketing project needs the same level of creativity; some projects may need only routine activities completed, such as a media purchase; while other projects require the creation of an entirely new advertising or branding campaign. As the level of creativity and problem-solving varied, so did the views on collaboration and partnership.

Margaret spoke excitedly about creativity, linking it to not just solving a problem, but also to the level of partnership needed. Her face lit up when she spoke of a specific client and their desire for creative, collaborative work.

> They say… I love your creativity. I love your thinking. I love your strategic thought on this. Can you give me more? Can you help me solve this problem? And then they are really looking for that partnership. So that says success and everybody feels good. I have right now a client that I am working with… they are such a fantastic example of this. When we first started working with them, they said we're collaborative. We want someone that will collaborate, but will work in teams that will value every opinion. And in all honesty, the word collaboration was a fluffy nice word, but it was scary from our perspective because it also can say lots of time. But at the end of the day they have been a shining example of really bringing in key team members and making decisions right there. They make decisions quickly. So all the fears we have in our collaboration just didn't turn out to be true. They bring out great ideas. And in terms of building depth in a relationship, I can feel us go above and beyond for a client that is appreciative. When you have that you have a client that feeds on energy that you want to do work for… I mean you're really happy to deliver and do more and you go above and beyond.

Data from Margaret and other participants reflected their desire to do a great job for their partners on marketing projects. Adding weight to this point were stories highlighting the positive aspects of creativity, from Michael's experiences.

> We do our best work when our customers come to us with broad based challenges. We get to be more creative when we actually get to help define a solution with our clients, and of course anytime something can come out of collaboration, I think it is a lot more effective. Conversely, if we are given an opportunity to sit down with the client and they give us a laundry list of things that they have already decided on, and want very little input, we are not as effective, and in fact we might not even be a good fit for that

particular project… A lot of times, if they are not collaborative, they'll come to the table with pretty much everything already set or not open to ideas, and we can sense that.

Some participants expressed dissatisfaction when their partner could not deliver the high level of problem-solving needed. Janet explained what happened when she did not get the level of creativity and problem-solving that her organization had desired.

> We ended up being far more directive of the agency. Where initially we were asking them to give them to give us some direction on how we would build effective campaigns and so we ended up shifting our dollars to different kinds of tactics and being more directive to them. So we were… then we were sort of a constant push. They had expansive ideas and we had to contract their ideas. We had to push them down and simplify what they were suggesting to do because they would still operate under really a model of complexity.

Although creativity in marketing project can be very important, it is only one factor. Violet tied the concept of creativity back to culture, commenting on several previous partners with which her organization had worked.

> They kept coming back with campaigns that were just… you know they were really beautiful… really high-end kind of looking campaigns, but they didn't match our culture. They didn't match who we were. [Our current agency] They do get us. And I think part of the reason they get us so well, they are people who I think could work here. They just match us so well. We had other agencies that we thought were equally as creative, but we just felt didn't fit us culturally, they didn't fit us.

Creativity includes insights and problem-solving as well. Helen spoke of a marketing project that was not successful, even though it had great creative design.

> I'd say that the agency didn't bring insights. So they had their good writers… They could creative fairly good design creative, but they didn't bring… they didn't bring insights.

Concept 8 – Results. All of the participants included measurements and results in their stories. There was no data of a marketing project being judged successful unless the project objectives were also met. Every participant measured the projects in some sort of objective

manner, usually relative to sales, revenue, brand awareness, or growth. All used quantitative

measurements such as dollars, units, and response rates. Patrick's comment summed it up nicely:

"It makes the conversations work easier because we're talking about results."

Measuring success in marketing was a very important topic. James's organization was no

exception.

> We had an annual tracking study that I put in place that would help us understand
> awareness, trial, frequency… Probably the most burning thing is are we driving sales,
> and are we driving transactions? So those two things really beyond anything else have to
> make sense. You could say that all people love this advertising and we are getting
> awards, and the Chief Financial Officer and the President look you in the eye and say
> yeah, but our sales are down 3%, this stuff sucks change it.

Violet's comments about her organization reinforced this viewpoint about feedback and

sales growth.

> We get feedback in a lot of different ways, but the formal way that we get feedback is we
> do a brand study every year. We test brand attributes and we test recall of our ad
> campaigns. We measure it every year. We have a huge jump in awareness and a huge
> jump in attributes that we were trying to push. The ultimate test is do you grow in
> volume? And, in the last four years we have had record growth every year. Even this past
> year, despite the economy, we have had record growth. So we feel like the campaigns are
> working. We're headed in the right direction. We are really happy with the results.

Helen commented about her organization's measurements as well. She added data that,

while the business results were critical, the immediate metrics were not the only measurements

and her organization measured long-term growth as well.

> We measure everything, but some of the things that I refer to as measures are more like
> indicators or gauges. Not everything is numbers in my world. The work I am involved in
> is very rarely kind of direct response. It's not a 30-day, here we go, let's see what
> happens. We may measure it that way, but typically we're talking about anywhere from 9
> to 24 months to see any kind of movement. The reason I highlight that is because that is a
> constant battle in a company that financially operates quarter to quarter. I am constantly
> justifying long term efforts in a short term way. Because no matter what… how you
> position it… we operate monthly, we operate quarterly from a financial perspective.

Helen continued with quite a succinct statement about the importance of measurements at her organization. "There is zero tolerance for not knowing the numbers."

Closely related to the project's results and performance measurements were the budgetary elements of the marketing projects. Participants frequently mentioned budget and expense issues. Their organizations were willing to spend when necessary for specific expertise and experienced help, but they were still very conscious of expenses, and expected a high level of awareness and financial control. Data showed that participants expected cost control as a routine matter. Violet related her organization's viewpoint on expenses.

> The worst experience I have had was that agency that helped us with our internal campaign. We ended up getting through it and we got the product we needed, but it was really painful getting there. Part of the issue was that they just didn't acknowledge or recognize that we're not the kind of company that is going to spend thousands of dollars on a photo shoot. It just isn't who we are… And then they nickel-and-dimed us over the video and the rights to it. I mean, it was awful. And so, by the time we parted company, it was bad. They had just-nickel-and-dimed us to death and it soured the whole relationship.

Cost-containment was an important indicator. Not respecting the financial commitment was certainly a problem – and one that was usually quickly addressed. Whenever I asked participants about conflicts, budgets and costs were always an important consideration.

Budget levels were also a determining factor in choosing a partner. James used clear budget criteria for hiring marketing agencies.

> I wanted somebody that was midsized so that I could manage the cost, agency cost. I wanted someone ultimately that had a very good fitting personality. Of course, that's a second stage once you get past the other things… With due respect they are a very big shop with very big budgets; we are a small player with very small budgets. This isn't going to work. And so there was a fairly kind of blindsided attitude towards the reality of the circumstance, and as it turns out, the advertising that they produced was absolutely horrible.

James also explained how the size of the available budget also affected the partners he could hire. He related a bait-and-switch experience his organization had with an agency.

> We signed them on and then discovered that we really only were only going to get their account team half the time. That what the money could buy you was the B-team, and not the A-team. We didn't get the top cabin people, we got the B-team and they worked hard at it, but it just wasn't a good match.

Janet had similar comments about matching budget with agency.

> But ___ is very, very expensive. And I can't afford it on a day-to-day basis. [Another agency] have kind of a sense of who we are as a company, and they're very fast and they are inexpensive, and that's working really well. But, I wouldn't bring them in to meet with our CEO if we had a crisis. Our leaders need to feel like they're being advised by wise people.

The data showed that it takes both positive results and a good relationship to succeed long term. Harold told me his philosophy, which combined both chemistry and results as an evaluation of success.

> You have to hit it out of the part all the time. That's part of the risk of our business. As much as want it to be about measurements and results… relationships aren't measurement. Relationships are about connections with people. How you connect with somebody. How you do this. It's always going to be tied back to personal things.

Numbers are the visible measurements for the successfulness of a marketing campaign. But, even if a marketing program had successful results, it did not always mean that the agency would be retained for future projects. From the data, it was apparent that in addition to the quantitative and financial criteria being used, there were other, softer criteria which were also very important. Financial issues alone might not seem enough to terminate the relationship, but when combined with other factors, finances were the straw that broke the camel's back. Measurements were another way to judge the cultural fit.

Developing the Theory

In the interviews, the participants said that values, collaboration, chemistry, compatibility, leadership, communication, and creativity were the reasons that they worked well together. And that by working together, they could achieve more successful results from the marketing projects. As Lawrence put it, "The reason why agencies choose the wrong client, and the clients choose the wrong agencies is mostly culture." Michael echoed, "When we have come to understand what their corporate culture is, we are a lot more effective."

From my analysis, the data has shown that a stronger understanding of each organization by the other will benefit both partners when working together on marketing projects. If a marketing agency can understand a client organization's 1) values, 2) collaboration, 3) chemistry, 4) compatibility, 5) leadership, 6) communication, and 7) creativity, then the 8) results will be achieved. However, my research questions were about the cultural elements that needed to be recognized by the partners, and these eight concepts were clearly not cultural elements. This presented me with a dilemma as I worked on developing the theory. These concepts were from the participants' data and could not be ignored. Although they were not cultural elements, they were the visible manifestation of the organizations' cultural values and beliefs when the two interacted with each other during marketing projects. I therefore continued to consider these concepts to be important elements in the theory development.

There was no single concept which operated alone to achieve success. Each concept had a role, and interacted with the other concepts, until results were achieved and projects were evaluated as to their level of success.

From the data, the success of marketing campaigns was determined based on a combination of factors. Chemistry between the organizations was very important, but it was not

determined by a lone area or action. Multiple values were considered for forming a match –

principles, work ethic, and attitudes among them. Collaboration between the teams,

communication models, leadership, and creativity were all part of the mix. Adaptability was a

necessary component in order for the partnership to evolve. Measurements were used at various

times during the project.

A successful marketing project required that the marketing agency understand, and most

likely adapt to, all of the concepts within the scope of the project and client organization. The

concepts were not evenly weighted, or even similarly judged. As defined by the participants, a

successful project was one which not only achieved the project objectives, but also yielded

feelings of satisfaction, partnership, and achievement, by both organizations.

A successful project held future benefits as well; it could lead to additional work between

the two organizations and a mutually beneficial partnership which might span many years. An

unsuccessful marketing project was defined by participants as one that did not meet the

objectives. The most important evaluation point was achieving the desired objectives (results).

There was no case when any project was judged successful if it did not meet the project

objectives. However, even if project objectives were met, if there was cultural misunderstanding,

conflict, or dissension among the teams, then the project might still be judged as unsuccessful.

The data showed that both the marketing agency and the client shared responsibility for

selecting each other as partners, and building a successful relationship and project. However, the

burden of adapting was on the marketing agency. The client was also the ultimate judge of

success for a project. The client has the money and pays the marketing agency; they therefore

have the power to hire and fire an agency. Although it does occasionally happen, only rarely will

an agency decide to terminate a relationship. While the data showed that it does indeed occur, it

is a difficult decision for a marketing agency to terminate a client since the agency must then

find another client with which to replace the lost revenue.

Theory Foundation

These eight concepts were the foundation of the theory being developed. Based on my

interpretation of the data, I next developed definitions for each concept to reflect the participants'

meanings of each concept. Figure 4.1 illustrates the eight concepts that are necessary for a

successful marketing project, followed by a definition and summary statement of findings for

each.

Figure 4.1

Eight Concepts Required for Successful Marketing Projects
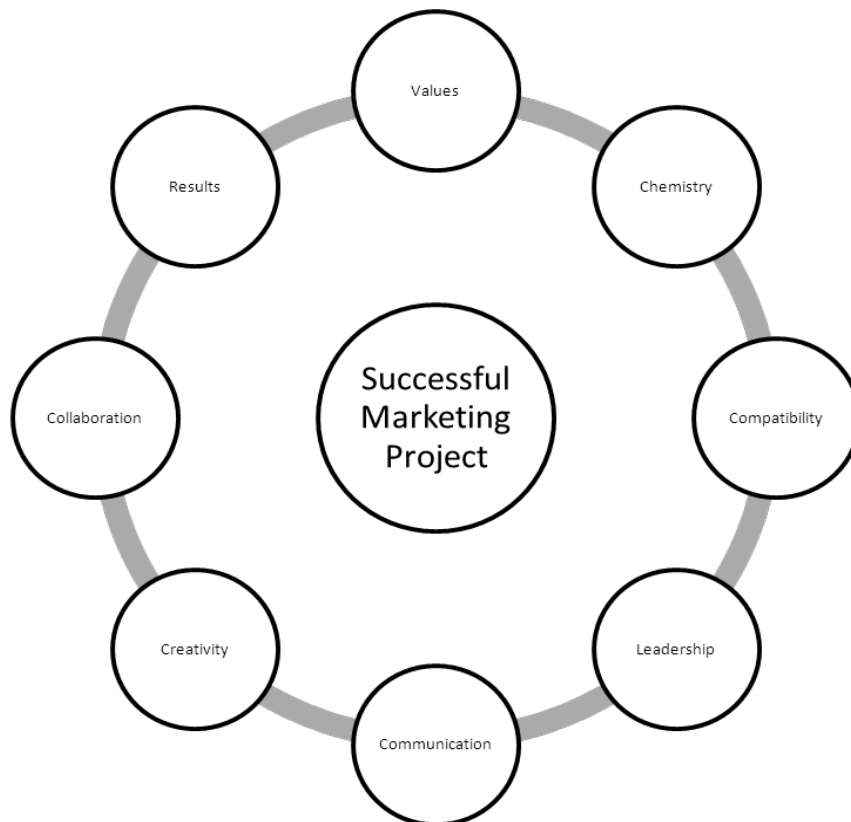
1. Values: "*Who we are.*"

  a. Definition: An organization's principles, ethics, and culture:

  b. Finding: The more closely aligned the organizations' values were, the more successful was the organizational match. The project was also judged as more successful when values matched.

2. Chemistry: *"How we fit together."*

  a. Definition: The ways in which the organizations connect, and get along, at multiple levels. This may be at the individual, team, or organizational levels.

  b. Findings: While recognized as a subjective judgment, good chemistry creates goodwill and good relationships. Poor chemistry creates a negative, and sometimes adversarial, relationship.

3. Compatibility: *"What it takes for us to get along."*

  a. Definition: The level of match between organizations' team members with respect to age, experience, location, status, and attitudes.

  b. Findings: The more compatible the members were with their counter-parts at the other organization, the easier it was to understand each other and work together. Adaptability also played a strong role in forming compatible relationships.

4. Leadership: *"How we move forward."*

  a. Definition: Ability to direct team members productively; includes aspects such as experience, intelligence, confidence, personality, and emotional intelligence.

b. Findings: Strong, confident leaders were instrumental to forming successful projects and relationships. Weak leaders were a warning sign that project success might be at risk.

5. Communication: *"How we listen to and inform each other."*

   a. Definition: The ability to clearly and respectfully listen, share information, provide directions, give and receive feedback, and educate others.

   b. Findings: In successful projects, good communication needs to go beyond relaying information, to having the ability to exchange knowledge and educate others.

6. Creativity: *"How we will create a solution to the problem."*

   a. Definition: Insightful and innovative problem-solving that meets the project requirements and achieves a successful result.

   b. Findings: Creativity was necessary to meet project requirements, but it was not sufficient to judge a project as being successful if it did not meet the objectives, or if a good relationship was not achieved.

7. Collaboration: *"How we will work together."*

   a. Definition: Level of partnership desired for the project.

   b. Finding: A high level of partnership was not necessary for all projects, but the level of partnership needed to be at such as level so as to meet agreed-upon project requirements.

8. Results: *"What we must accomplish."*

a. Definition: The measurement of a marketing project's success using objective,

quantifiable data, including measurements of financial responsibility and

marketplace results.

b. Findings: Results were the ultimate measurement for judging project success.

If objectives were met, then additional elements were considered to judge

project success. If objectives were not met, projects and relationships were

usually terminated, regardless of other elements.

Each of the eight concepts played an important role when organizations worked together

on marketing projects, but not all the concepts were equally weighted. The most important

concept was achieving measurable results. Indeed, without positive results, there was no project

success. The rest of the concepts needed to be present, but they could be present at variable

levels, depending on the organizations and the projects.

When I returned to the original research question of "what are the elements of

organizational culture that impact the success of marketing programs," it was clear that all of

these concepts did not fit into the category of culture. Yet, I could not ignore that based on the

data, all were important to the respondents and contributed to project success.

Theory Evolution

The eight concepts represented the respondents' experiences, but as stated earlier, they

did not fit into the category of cultural elements. I considered how they might fit together,

influence the organizations' actions, and impact project results. I worked with my dissertation

advisor, who encouraged me to think deeper about possible theories. We discussed which

concepts were parts of culture, and which concepts were not. We considered how the concepts

might intersect with each other, diagramming what their impacts might be on the organizations

and project. The theory began to evolve.

Step One. In the first model, I had visualized the concepts as linked together around a

central theme of project success (Figure 4.1 above). However, there was no particular sequence

or flow between the concepts in that model. Values did not clearly lead to Communication, nor

did Collaboration lead to Leadership, and so on. They all exerted some level of influence which

could improve the success of marketing projects; the theory would need to incorporate them. The

theory would also need to account for project success as more than just a quantitative result;

from the data, success clearly was impacted by aspects of the organization's values, chemistry,

collaboration, compatibility, creativity, communication, and leadership.

Step Two. An organization's values are an element of culture; therefore in the next

evolution of a possible theory, I considered what happened when the client and agency

organizations held similar, or dissimilar, values. The data showed that when the values

overlapped between the two organizations, the respondents described it as having a good

chemistry (Figure 4.2).

When participants spoke of chemistry, they used the term to refer to an automatic match

between the two organizations. This conveyed to me that it was a natural overlap – or chemistry

that resulted from the intersection of the two values. This natural overlap was inferred from

many comments used by participants, such as "it's all about chemistry," and "you just know it

when it happens," and "what separates us from the other 80% of the organizations is the

chemistry," and "it's always about chemistry," and "they just fit us."

Chemistry was an automatic response from participants; there were no comments about

needing adjustment or adaptation to arrive at chemistry, without thought or work chemistry just

"is." I therefore used chemistry as the label for the intersection of values as that was the phrase

most often used by participants when they discussed values and culture.

Figure 4.2

Intersection of Client and Agency Values: Chemistry
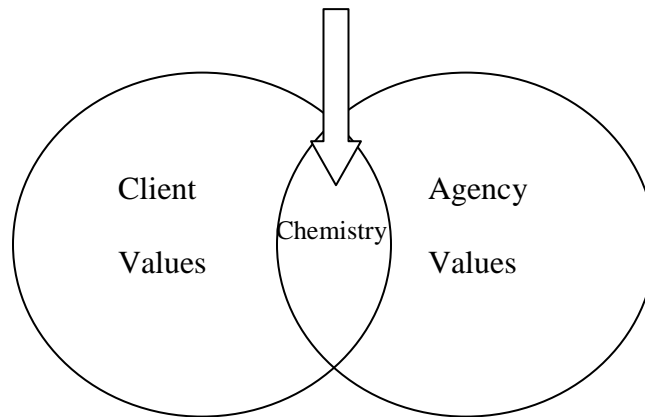
When the values of the organizations matched, the respondents believed they had good

chemistry. When the chemistry was good, the projects had better results and were more

successful. When there was little intersection of values, the chemistry was viewed as poor, the

projects were not considered successful, and relationships were eventually terminated. The

amount of values overlap indicated how strong the chemistry was between the organizations:

The greater the overlap in values, the better the project results.

In the interviews, I consciously had not provided a definition of culture; I wanted to hear

how the respondents defined and explained culture in their own terms. None of the respondents

could clearly define the meaning of culture. Nor could they fully explain their own

organization's culture. When I asked them to describe their organizational culture, respondents

said "we have a gem of a culture," "our Midwestern values," "we are family," and "we are hard

working." They described their culture and values as "conservative," "solid," "energetic," and

talked about values such as "finishing our homework before playing." From their stories, it was

clear that although they could not clearly define culture, they believed they could definitely

recognize cultural fit and chemistry between their organization and another organization.

Step Three. The analysis of how respondents defined culture led me incorporate what

happened at the intersection of organizational values into the theory. I started by including the

concepts that seemed to indicate culture: values and chemistry (Figure 4.3). The additional

concepts of leadership, communication, creativity, compatibility, and collaboration did not fit

into the intersection of the organizations' values. However, those concepts could not be ignored;

the data had shown them as having significant impact on the success of the marketing project. I

considered how the additional concepts might apply to the theory, and determined they

represented actions which could be used to influence the chemistry, and thereby improve the

project results (Figure 4.3)

Figure 4.3

Possible Relationship of Concepts
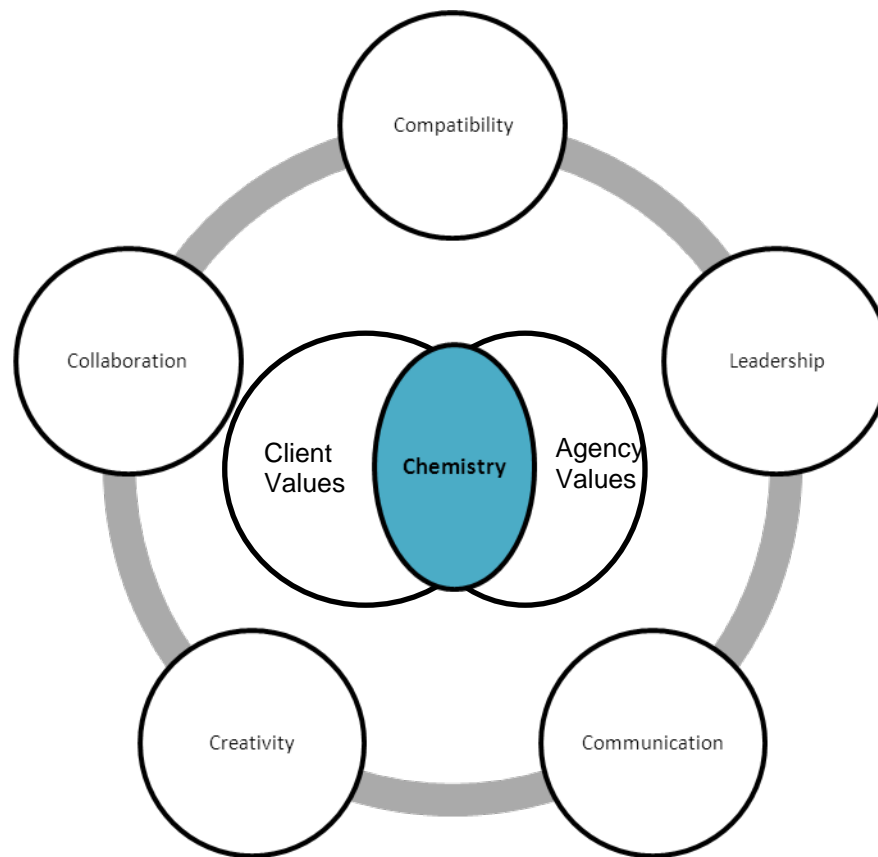
Step Four. Next, I examined the names of the concepts. The words I had been using were not conveying the depth of meaning I had heard from the participants. I returned to the definitions and findings of each of the concepts to evaluate their meaning and relationship.

Working with my committee chair, we discussed several of the concepts with respect to the definitions and findings. As I explained the data and meanings from the participants, and related the concepts to each other, I realized that some of the words I had used as names were too narrow and restrictive; they did not fully describe the data. We discussed the concept meanings further, and arrived at several phrases to describe the concepts more fully. There were four

concepts that were renamed at this step: *Collaboration* was renamed *Level of Partnership; Compatibility* was renamed *Ability to Adapt; Communication* was renamed *Information Exchange;* and *Creativity* was renamed *Creative Problem-Solving*. I explain these changes in the following sections.

Collaboration. From the data, my definition of collaboration was the level of partnership desired for the project. Not all marketing projects require high levels of partnership or collaboration; some projects were directed activities. To better represent the data, *Collaboration* was renamed *Level of Partnership.*

An example of a high collaboration project was a branding campaign. This is a complex project which requires a great deal of time, resources, research, message development, interaction, and implementation. The level of collaboration and partnership between a client and agency for a branding campaign is very high. A respondent spoke of this level of partnership in her stories about creating a brand for her organization.

Contrast a branding project with a marketing project which required only a routine media purchase – the "wrist" type of project that another respondent described in her stories. The routine project was much lower in complexity and work; budgets were given by the client to the agency, and the agency procured the media placement. A lower level of partnership was required.

Compatibility. The definition of this concept was the level of match between the team members working on the project; how well they got along. When there was not a good match, then the organization needed to adapt to increase the area of match. For example, if team members could not adapt, then some might need to be replaced in order to maintain good

relationships. Without the recognition that they needed to adapt, overall project results might be less successful. *Compatibility* was renamed *Ability to Adapt*.

One respondent told of her experiences when an agency replaced a very compatible team member working with her organization; in her words, "he got us." The compatible person was replaced with someone who was not as compatible; he could not adapt to the values of the client's organization. The chemistry match declined, and the eventual result was that the respondent terminated the agency contract. Another respondent told of a similar experience when an agency team member "rubbed everyone the wrong way." The person's inability to adapt his behavior eventually became an issue, and the agency contract was ended. One more example: another respondent told me a story where his agency resigned an account because they could no longer tolerate the abusive behavior of a client. He bought a bottle of champagne and his team celebrated that "the witch is dead." Adaptability and flexibility were missing in all these experiences.

Communication. I had defined this concept as the ability to listen, share information, provide directions, and educate others. The communication that was valued went beyond just relaying information; it included the ability to exchange knowledge and educate. The form and frequency of the communication was not an issue; what mattered to respondents was the information in the exchange and the desire to share knowledge. *Communication* was renamed *Information Exchange* to better represent the meaning of the concept.

To explain: One respondent spoke of the desire to "become smarter" because of her interaction with an agency organization. For her, each interaction was an opportunity to learn. She expected a "reciprocal" relationship of give-and-take. This contrasted with another respondent who discussed a client who just wanted her to "drink the Kool Aid" and avoid

confrontation; the exchange of ideas was not welcomed. Yet another respondent told me that part

of her job was to help train her clients to be better communicators. She believed her agency was

"paid for our thinking."

Creativity. I had defined this concept as insightful and innovative problem-solving. Many

marketing projects commonly require elements of artistic design and clever writing, but those are

often the final steps of a project. Before arriving at design, problem-solving abilities and insight

are needed. *Creativity* was renamed to *Creative Problem Solving* to include innovation and

problem solving abilities along with design in the concept.

As an example, one respondent discussed how pleased he was when clients asked his

agency to help "define a solution" to their problem. This gave the agency more opportunity to be

creative and innovative. Another respondent told of an agency that brought "beautiful, high-end

looking campaigns," but they didn't match the organizational culture or who they were. That

agency was replaced with another agency that utilized their insight to design marketing

campaigns that reflected the values of the client organization. Creativity was more than writing

copy and designing graphic elements.

Step Five. As more clarity about the theory began to emerge, I moved closer to

answering the first research question: What elements of organization culture impacted the

success of marketing projects? In step three of the theory development, I determined from the

data that the concepts that were most closely linked to culture were *values* and *chemistry.*

However, only *values* could be clearly defined as part of organizational culture. Chemistry is not

an element of culture; chemistry is the result of the intersection of the client's and agency's

values. In answer to the first research question: The elements of organizational culture that

impacted success of marketing projects are the client's and agency's organizational values.

The second research question was: What marketing agencies should know about cultural elements in order to increase the success level of projects? To answer this question requires several components. First, the marketing agency must understand its own organizational values; and second, it should work to understand the client's organizational values. This understanding could help the agency to determine how the two value sets might fit each other. Once the agency understood the level of commonality of values, it could determine if there was a strong enough chemistry to deliver a successful project.

If there was little or no commonality of organizational values and the agency wanted to accept the contract, then an understanding of the client's values could help the agency to adjust behaviors in the following areas: ability to adapt; leadership; information exchange; creative problem solving; and level of partnership. Acting upon these five concepts might improve chemistry and increase the likelihood of a successful project. Note that the actions cannot change the organizational values, but the changed behaviors might improve the overall chemistry between the two organizations (Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4

Behavior and Actions Influencing Chemistry and Results
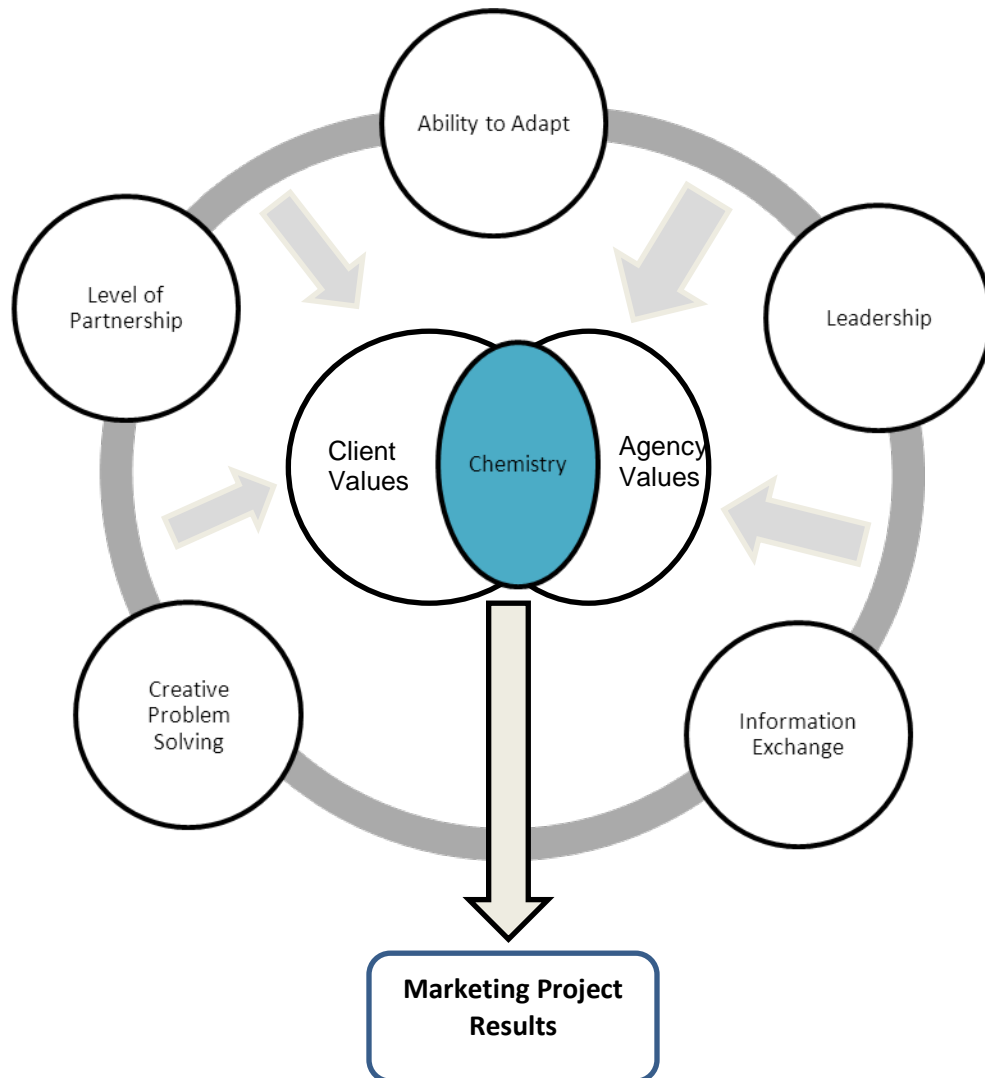
Agencies should understand that if the intersection of their cultural values with the client's cultural values yielded a small overlap, then there are additional behaviors which might be acted upon to improve the chemistry with clients, in essence moving the client and agency organizations closer together.

Final Theory and Answer to Research Questions. The theory had gone through several iterations, taking into consideration different concepts, conditions, types of marketing projects, and partners. Although this study did not make organizational culture more visible with respect to its individual elements, the data from the study did help guide me to recognize the importance of an organization's values, whether those values were unconscious or espoused. I now believed I could answer the research questions posed in this study and propose a final theory.

Question 1: What are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs?

Answer: The elements of organizational culture that impacted success of marketing projects were the client and agency organizational values.

Question 2: What should marketing agencies know about these elements in order to develop successful marketing programs and relationships?

Answer: Agencies should understand that if the intersection of their cultural values with the client's cultural values yields a small overlap of similar values, then there are additional behaviors which might be acted upon to improve the overall chemistry with clients. To improve the chemistry, the agency might act on any of the following areas: increase its ability to adapt, increase leadership, improve information exchange, expand creative problem solving, and apply a different level of partnership.

Grounded in the data, the theory that emerged from this study was that there was a natural intersection between client and agency values. That level of intersection represented the commonality of the two organizations' values. When the intersection of values was large, then the two organizations recognized shared values and a kindred chemistry. They developed an ease in working together and had successful project results.

Conversely, if the organizational values did not have sufficient commonalities of values, then the chemistry between the organizations was weak. The organizations were not able to easily work together, and they were likely to experience problems which adversely impacted the project results.

However, if the organizations recognized that there was not a sufficient commonality of values, then they could take action and change behaviors with regards to: ability to adapt; leadership; information exchange; creative problem solving; and level of partnership. While such actions would not change the organizational culture, it could change behavior and improve the level of chemistry between the organizations. Increasing the level of chemistry would help to increase the success of marketing project results.

> **Theory 1:** The intersection of client values and marketing agency values indicates the level of the match between the organizational cultures.
>
>> **Theory 1a:** If the level of match between the two organizations' values is high, then the organizations will have strong, positive chemistry, resulting in a more successful marketing project.
>>
>> **Theory 1b:** If the level of match between the two organizations' values is low, then the organizations will have weak chemistry, resulting in a less successful marketing project.
>
> **Theory 2:** The intersection of the client values and marketing values cannot be changed, but the organizations can take actions to improve chemistry by changing behaviors with respect to: ability to adapt, leadership, information exchange, creative problem solving, and level of partnership.

Member Checking

The process of member-checking is an acceptable practice in grounded theory research. Member-checking refers to taking ideas back to the research participants in order to get their confirmation of concepts and theories, or to expand on the categories (Charmaz, 2006).

After developing the theory, I contacted each research participant to review the theory with them. I provided each with a summary of the findings, main concepts, development of the theory, explained the final theory, and asked each participant three questions: 1) Does the theory fit your comments to me? 2) From your experiences, do you think it reflects what happens during collaboration of marketing agencies and their clients? 3) What do you think is missing in the theory? Half of the respondents responded, all with positive reinforcement of the theory; several had points that they wished to highlight in the study.

Violet responded that the theory "makes a ton of sense. It's clear and definitely reflects my experience in working with agencies." She did not have any areas that she wanted to highlight or change.

Pamela also responded positively to the study, stating that "the theory you are presenting is spot on based on my experience and background." She also commented about how interesting it was that the study turned something (culture) that is intangible, into something that is more concrete. In her experience, she has not seen any organization sit down and really analyze their relationship with an agency. She agreed that if things were not working between an agency and client, it would "definitely be due to a lack of mutual values." Pamela also encouraged me to take the results of the study and evolve the findings into a tool that could be applied during an agency search and evaluation.

In a conversation with Michael about the theory, he agreed with the theory and commented that it fit what we discussed as well as reflected his experiences. Michael and I

discussed the importance of trust in building a strong relationship between clients and agencies.

His viewpoint was that without a prior, strong relationship between a client and agency, the

marketing projects are more difficult to obtain. He gave as an example that in the last three

contracts that his firm has bid on when they did not already have a relationship with the client,

then they did not win the contract. He stated, "if there is no relationship, there is no deal."

Lawrence also agreed with the theory, and thought it was a great idea to look at the

intersection of the client values and the agency values. He stated that he had not thought of the

intersection of values as representing chemistry, but he liked the model and it made sense to him.

Lawrence also reiterated some of the comments he had made to me during the interview process.

During his interview, he discussed the need for the client and agency teams to work together, and

for these team members to have positive chemistry. I concurred, and explained that I had

included a section about the importance of the team members having similar values.

Lawrence also commented that in his experiences, when the intersection of values is

small, it is a problem for the relationship. He stated that the additional concepts I included in the

theory are extremely important and are needed to enhance the relationship and chemistry. When

the chemistry is weak, "you need good discipline, processes, and systems" to improve the overall

relationship.

Janet commented that she felt the theory and model accurately reflected her comments to

me, and also described her experiences in marketing. She noted that from a client perspective, "it

is more incumbent on the agency to adapt to the client's style." I agreed with this point; it is

included in my findings. Janet's viewpoint was that since an agency works with many different

clients, they cannot have a "one size fits all" philosophy. Because the agency is the organization

that gets paid, it is the responsibility of the agency to be the more flexible party and adjust to the

client. This point was also included in my findings.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the data from the participants to answer the research questions and

develop a theory applicable to organizations which are working with partners on marketing

projects. I also revisited how the cultural model of organizations fit the findings of this study.

Chapter 5 will further discuss these findings, along with implications for practitioners and

suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a summary of the research methodology, delimitations, limitations, and analysis process. This is followed by a discussion of the theories developed in the study, the significance of the study, implications, and suggestions for future research.

This was a difficult study; I tried to research something that is important to all organizations, yet is essentially invisible. Culture at any level is difficult to define, explain, and measure. Those who are the 'insiders' of an organization learned about the organizational culture not through explicit lessons and books, but implicitly, perhaps through mentoring and observations made over time within the organization. And, those who are 'outsiders' to an organization are not likely to ever fully understand the culture of that organization. Nonetheless, despite the difficulties of examining culture, there were significant findings from this study.

Summary of Research Methodology

When I designed the study, I considered what epistemological approach would be most appropriate. After examining both positivistic and interpretive research approaches, I determined that the research approach that served this study best would be grounded theory based on interpretive epistemology and the ontology of social constructionism. According to Crotty (2003, p. 42), social constructionism is "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context." The subject of the study was how organizations worked together to create successful marketing projects. From my own experience, I knew that working on marketing projects requires intense interaction between teams within a social context.

Prior to, and after, the study, I did a literature review, but was unable to find or develop a theory which specifically addressed this topic. Therefore, since I did not begin this study with a preconceived theory, I needed a research methodology which would assist me to form a theory from the data. I decided to use grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is an interpretive research methodology that uses a set of procedures to develop a theory which is grounded in rich data about a phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006; Goulding, 2002; Dey, 1999). As a methodology, it has been used to explore many management issues, including culture, consumer behavior, and other business topics (Goulding, 2002).

Delimitations

I selected research participants who had worked on marketing projects at various types of organizations. This group of experienced professionals was able to provide me with rich data about their organizations and experiences. Organizations were from a variety of industries including health care, financial services, manufacturing, restaurants, public relations, marketing events, and advertising. Having worked on numerous marketing projects in their careers, these participants had the experiences needed to provide context and details.

All of the participants had a minimum of 12 years of experience in marketing. Marketing projects discussed by participants included public relations, customer conferences, marketing events, brand development, video production, employee communications, television and radio advertising, direct mail, Internet promotions, Web site development, social marketing, print advertising, and billboards.

The organizations represented by the participants were of various sizes. Six participants worked at organizations with more than 1,000 employees; one person worked at a large

organization and also worked part-time as an independent marketing consultant. The agencies were smaller than the corporations; agency size ranged from 50 to 200+ employees.

Limitations

There are several limitations and potential weaknesses of the study. These limitations should be considered when addressing the study implications for a wider organization base.

Sample Size. The size of the study included ten respondents. Although the respondents were few in number, they had worked in numerous positions over their careers and had managed a large number and variety of marketing projects. Yet, the small number of participant could be considered a relatively small sample size from which to generate a theory.

Organization Types. The sample studied was representative of marketing projects undertaken for large, public organizations. Non-profit, educational, and government organizations, and small businesses with fewer than 100 employees, may have different experiences. There were five industries represented in the study; additional industries could also be added in future studies.

Design of study. Grounded theory methodology is not uncommon in business and management research, but it is not as widely used as quantitative methodologies. Use of grounded theory and intepretivism is sometimes regarded with skepticism by academicians who utilize positivistic epistemology and quantitative research for studies in marketing disciplines. This is the first time that I have used grounded theory methodology. While I rigorously followed the protocol of the grounded theory methodology, it is possible that my lack of experience in employing this methodology might have influenced the study results.

Assumptions

I have assumed that the responses given by the participants accurately reflected their experiences and opinions, and that participants answered the interview questions openly and honestly.

Review of Analysis Process

Chapter 4 detailed the analysis process I used in this study. I began with memo writing and open coding where I developed 104 codes analyzing the participants' interviews. Following that phase, I grouped the codes into eight concepts which represented the main ideas in the data: 1) values, 2) level of partnership, 3) chemistry, 4) ability to adapt, 5) leadership, 6) information exchange, 7) creative problem solving, and 8) results.

Research Questions, Answers, and Theories

Research Question 1: What are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs?

Answer: The elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs are client's and agency's organizational values.

Research Question 2: What should marketing agencies know about these elements in order to develop successful marketing programs and relationships?

Answer: Agencies need to know the values of the client organization, and the level to which agency and client values are similar. Agencies should understand that if the intersection of their cultural values with the client's cultural values yields a small overlap of similar values, then there are additional behaviors which might be acted upon to improve the overall chemistry with clients. To improve the chemistry, the agency might act on any of the following areas: increase its ability

to adapt, increase leadership, improve information exchange, expand creative

problem solving, and apply a different level of partnership.

The answers to the research questions led to development of several theories which can be used

assess cultural fit and take actions to improve marketing project results.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), any theory resulting from a grounded theory

study would need to fit the substantive area, be comprehensible, make sense, include sufficient

variation so as to be applicable to a variety of contexts, and be able to provide control with

regard to action related to the phenomenon.

Theory 1: The intersection of client values and marketing agency values indicates the

level of the match between the organizational cultures.

Theory 1a: If the level of match between the two organizations' values is high,

then the organizations will have strong, positive chemistry, resulting in a more

successful marketing project.

Theory 1b: If the level of match between the two organizations' values is low,

then the organizations will have weak chemistry, resulting in a less successful

marketing project.

Theory 2: The intersection of the client values and marketing agency values cannot be

changed, but the organizations can take actions to improve chemistry by changing

behaviors with respect to: ability to adapt, leadership, information exchange, creative

problem solving, and level of partnership.

These theories fulfill the criteria specified by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The participants

for the study were from various industries and organizations, yet they all described similar

problems with marketing projects and partners (i.e., information exchange, level of partnership,

financial responsibilities, problem solving, etc.). The problems were not specific to any particular

industry. Nor were the problems specific to a particular type of marketing project. Participants

had discussed a wide range of marketing projects in their interviews (i.e., branding, advertising,

events, public relations, Web, etc.). While there may be some difference due to organization size

and industry type, I do not think it would be likely to change the main findings or theories.

The ability to provide control with regard to actions related to the phenomenon has

different implications for the theory, but I believe the theory does account for it. In my answers

to the research question and the proposed theories, I stated that the cultural element impacting

the project success is the values of the organizations. While organizational values cannot be

changed within the scope of a marketing project, once the organizational values are understood,

the partner could take actions to improve the chemistry. Theory Two stated when there is not a

match of the cultural values, then the partners can still improve their chemistry by taking actions

such as improving information exchange, more creative problem solving, developing leadership,

adapting, and adjusting the level of partnership.

Linking Theory with Model of Organizational Culture

In chapter 2, I reviewed literature about the nature of organizational culture, noting that

culture is a set of unconscious forces that determine the behavior, thought patterns, and values of

the members of organizations. And, although organizational culture exerts a strong force on its

members, it is invisible to those who are not part of the group (Schein, 1999). This was

reinforced by the data from the study participants. Throughout the study it was clear that,

although the participants believed that they could recognize culture, they were unable to define it

in any depth.

I returned to the model of culture defined by Schein (1992; 1999) to examine how my data corresponded to the three level of organizational culture, and how the model helped to inform my theory.

- Artifacts: This are what someone sees, hears, and feels as they experience the organizational culture. It can also be seen as how the members talk, present, and interact (Schein, 1992; 1999). While this is the most visible level of culture, it is still hard to decipher. There were many statements made by participants that reflected this level of culture. These statements are ones which give a clear picture of who the organization is and how it appears. Some specific examples are included throughout this study:
    - "We are not a French Press company. That is just not who we are."
    - "We are like Folgers coffee."
    - "Really high-end campaigns that didn't match our culture."
    - "I bought champagne, the witch is dead."
    - "Really hot creative people, but with little involvement in the business."
    - "How could a 20 year old understand a multimillion dollar business?"
    - "They had to be in our restaurants every day."
    - "The client swore at us on the phone."
    - "They berated us and then expected us to work harder."
    - "He became harried, obstinate, and belligerent."
    - "They showed up late and the work was late."
    - "Condescending client, and brutal time frames."

There were also visible artifacts which I could observe during the interviews. Some examples of this are as follows:

- One company had a hodge-podge of offices and cubicles; it was difficult to find my way around the building. Employees were formal in greeting; time was clearly monitored. I did not feel welcome in the office area. I was kept waiting for more than 15 minutes for my appointment and was not offered refreshment.

- Another company had a strict security process. No one was admitted to the office areas unless they were accompanied by an employee and wore a visible "visitor" name badge at all times. The lobby was filled with signs which extolled the company's accomplishments.

- A third company was full of creativity in its floor plan, office walls, bright lights, and colorful prints. I was greeted cheerfully by any employee who walked by me. I could roam the office areas and they made an office, phone, and refreshments available to me.

- At a smaller company, I was warmly welcomed by name when I walked in the door, even though I had not previously met the receptionist.

- Espoused values: This level is the organization's goals, strategies, and philosophies. The behavior may be seen, but it is not necessarily understood by outsiders (Schein, 1992; 1999). At this level, the data in the study included statements from the participants whereby their organizational cultures became slightly more clear and visible. There were many statements made by participants about their values, philosophies, and culture. Examples of espoused values by participants:

  - "We have a gem of a culture."

  - "We value hard work."

  - "We have Midwestern values."

- o "We are a family."

- o "We balance work and play."

- o "We have a conservative culture."

- o "We have strong values of loyalty and partnership."

- o "There is a tremendous amount of ego."

- o "We are caring."

- o "We are bright."

- o "We are whimsical."

- Basic underlying assumptions: While this level is the ultimate source of an organization's values and actions, it represents the unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs of an organization (Schein, 1992; 1999). Given that the definition states that these values are unconscious and difficult to determine, there was little data in which the participants explicitly stated the beliefs held by their organizations. I therefore considered what the underlying beliefs might be in the organizations, and used the participants' comments, dress, body language, expressions, and environment to attempt to understand some of the underlying assumptions.

  - o One participant gave me a perception that her company was very conservative and that their underlying philosophy was paternalistic. The organization changed very slowly, holding on to the values of the founders. The dress code was very conservative with business suits and formal attire. No jeans or tee shirts; even business casual was not appropriate. While some of this, such as dress, fits well in artifacts, I placed it in this section as an indicator of a deeper, underlying philosophy.

     o   Another participant gave me the perception that the company was very creative, fun, and energetic. He spoke of willingness to take risk, and the ability to decline business when it was not in the best interest of his employees. He spoke also of the need to be agile and make fast adjustments in the marketplace.

I make these statements quite cautiously since it is very difficult for an outsider to make an accurate judgment of an organization's underlying, basic assumptions. Despite this, these assumptions certainly exist for the organization's insiders.

Significant Findings

There were several areas of significant findings in the study which I believe add to the general body of knowledge about organizational culture and marketing. Some of these findings, such as the difficulty of defining culture by insiders, are not necessarily surprising, yet they still add to our understanding about the invisible nature of culture. Other findings, such as the impact of the client marketing executive on a project, shed new light on the importance of positive chemistry between partners. Organizational culture may be invisible, but actions of the organization can be clearly analyzed. By consciously considering the findings listed below, clients and agencies may be able to eliminate misunderstanding which could derail a project.

1. Culture is difficult to define.
2. Partnership agreements and collaboration levels impact project success.
3. Chemistry and compatibility are impacted by many factors.
4. Client marketing executives can make or break a project.
5. Creativity in design is not as important as the total problem solving effort.
6. Success is more than the measureable project results.

Culture is Difficult to Define

Organizational culture is not a new topic; the relationship between the culture and functioning of organizations has been a recurring theme in the social sciences for over 50 years. Studies suggest that organizational culture does have a strong impact on organizational effectiveness (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Culture and values are integrated, which means that the components are connected. The intent is not to define culture in all its richness, but to define the components so that we can produce an appropriate analysis of the culture (Baligh, 1994).

As discussed in previous sections, not only is an organization's culture difficult to define, it is also nearly invisible to insiders. As such, the ephemeral nature of culture makes it hard to label. The essential elements of it are taken for granted (Schein, 1999). Asking employees about a shared phenomenon is inefficient, and possibly invalid; it is difficult for anyone to access shared tacit assumptions (Schein).

Considering my data from this study, and adding findings from other researchers, I believe that understanding an organization's culture would provide a marketing agency with greater insight into a client. This insight would provide guidance on how to partner with, and provide more successful programs. The difficult part is to understand what culture is; as stated earlier, it is difficult for most business people to define. They say that they "know it when they see it," but they cannot provide details or specific attributes. From my data, the most common definition participants used for culture was values and principles.

Types of Partnerships and Collaboration Impact Project Success

Many organizations partner with external agencies in order to achieve their goals. In fact, collaboration with an appropriate partner can be a mechanism for improved innovative capabilities. However, it can also be difficult to establish a collaborative relationship (Ahuja, 2000). Well-executed collaborations can improve performance, but this can occur only for those

firms that obtain partners in the first place (Ahuja). This means that the client organization must recognize the need, and be willing to accept partners. The level of collaboration and partnership can vary significantly among organizations and projects depending on the need that the acceptance level.

According to this viewpoint, an organization's ability to collaborate can significantly improve its market position. My findings support this view; the organizations which encouraged collaboration and partnership seemed to be more satisfied with the marketing project and the results. However, the level of collaboration must be agreed upon by both parties. Several participants spoke of their desire for collaboration, but their excitement and efforts quickly died down if the partner did not value their insights and input. On the other hand, when the organization desired high levels of collaboration, the partner spoke of going beyond the normal level of work in order to help the partner.

Chemistry and Compatibility are Impacted by Many Factors

To have a successful project, having positive chemistry between partners is important. However, the chemistry, compatibility, and general fit can be difficult to measure. When considering fit in terms of performance, if there is a higher level of fit, then the level of performance will usually be higher (Baligh, 1994). Therefore, when selecting partners, organizations do better when they select partners with similar values and attributes. Bucklin and Sengupta (1993) found that partnering between organizations which viewed themselves as equal led to optimal results.

While I did not find it worded quite this way, my findings reinforced this viewpoint. Participants stated that they sought partner organizations that were close to them in age, industry, or in similar positions in their own market space. For example, a high-end marketing agency

would be hired by large, well-funded client organizations. Smaller client organizations usually hired smaller-sized agencies. Participants told of times when their smaller, more modest organization, with lower budgets, erred by hiring more elite and expensive agencies; these pairings did not have successful project results.

Closely related to size of organization and budget, compatibility was another necessary component for successful marketing projects. Participants sought to work with other organizations, and individual team members, with whom they felt comfortable. They wanted someone who spoke their language, understood their needs, and acted in similar ways.

This was remarked upon by respondents at both business and personal levels. Participants talked about the importance of being able to socialize with partners outside of work settings. When the partners were in the same social strata, they felt more comfortable. A level of compatibility in values, personalities, and working styles can ease difficulties and help projects be more successful.

I was surprised during the interviews when participants told me that the age and the location of partners were important considerations. They felt comfortable with people in their own age cohort and with similar experiences. Recurring themes were about comfort, chemistry, and compatibility. When those factors were in sync between the teams, then projects were judged as more successful. It takes time, patience, and hard work to get along with partners; having a common ground for both teams helps relationships and work.

Impact of Marketing Executive on the Project

The role of senior management is one of the most important factors in a market-oriented organization. The impact of top managers on an organization is very powerful (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Harris and Piercy (1999) found that when people are the barriers to the

development of integrated marketing, it is usually due to inexperience, a lack of management

ability, and power-related problems.

My findings agree with these studies about the impact of poor leadership. Participants

told many stories about leadership abilities, and the lack thereof. When the leader in a marketing

project was inexperienced or insecure, he or she caused damage to the project because of poor

actions, or sometimes the lack of action. Strong, experienced leaders brought confidence to their

teams, and lack of leadership destroyed them. Many participants spoke of the positive and

negative leaders with whom they had worked on marketing projects. The data reinforced that

good leadership can make a project more successful, and that poor leadership can so adversely

impact a team that there may be no way to redeem a project.

Creativity is Part of Problem Solving

Organizational culture is a clear determinant of innovative and creative strategy

(Naranjo-Valencia, Jimenez-Jimenex, & Sanz-Valle, 2011). In particular, they found that

organizational culture can affect the innovation or imitation orientation of the firm in both

positive and negative ways. Advertising and marketing projects require creative design and

writing processes, as well as innovative problem-solving. Clients and agencies collaborate on an

institutional level; clients supply the funding and strategic direction for creating marketing

messages, which are then prepared by agencies (Hirschman, 1989). It is the agency's job to

generate innovative, creative marketing. Too little change may not be enough to generate sales

growth; too much change could risk upsetting the customer and their brand (de Waal Malefyt &

Morais, 2010).

However, creativity is not just about the artistic aspects of marketing. During the

interviews for my study, the graphic design of marketing projects was mentioned infrequently.

This is not to imply that design is not an important aspect, it was viewed by respondents as very important, but design is only one element of a creative marketing campaign. Beautiful designs, creative writing, and compelling art were not enough to keep a client and have the project considered successful. Success requires more from the agency; it requires creativity plus problem solving ability.

Success is more than a Number

Out of all the concepts generated from the data, the most important one was 'results'. Results are the bottom-line in business. Results are how organizations measure progress to their goals. This is particularly true in marketing projects; poor results automatically means that the project will be judged as not performing to expectations. Without strong results, the marketing projects were not successful.

However, results are clearly not an element of organizational cultural. Results are a combination of quantitative measurements, plus understanding an organization's culture, plus compatibility, plus the ability to form a match. By understanding an organization's culture, the marketing agency gains the ability to deliver a higher quality, more successful project.

From the data, there were many comments that told me results were the most important factor and, without positive results, the partnership would not continue. This should not be a surprise to anyone in business. What was a surprise was that the data also showed that it took more than positive quantitative results to keep a relationship going.

1. Positive Results only = Unsuccessful Project

2. Chemistry Only = Unsuccessful Project

3. Positive Results + Chemistry = Successful Project

If either operand was missing, the project was not successful. Both parts are necessary for success. For me, who heretofore measured all business results using only quantitative scales, this was a surprising finding from the study.

Significance of Study

This study is an interdisciplinary project incorporating organization development and marketing concepts. I began this study because of a desire to study potential ties between the two disciplines. I had worked in marketing for most of my professional career before embarking on doctoral studies in organization development. I had long felt there was some essential element that I was missing in my understanding and implementation of marketing principles. I found myself considering what these missing elements might be, and how I might contribute to new knowledge that might pertain to both disciplines. That line of questioning was the genesis of this study.

While there are implications of the study for the individual disciplines of OD and marketing, I believe that there is a stronger need for these disciplines to work together. Marketing scholars and professionals need to be sensitive to the importance of organizational culture and the strong impact it has on business performance. OD scholars and professionals needs to be sensitive to the need that businesses have to understand and improve their internal operations. Each discipline has much to learn from each other.

Implications for Organization Development

While OD has long been recognized as an important factor in businesses, there has been little research on its specific effect in operational areas such as marketing. The significance of this study for OD is in the theories of how organizational culture influences the success of marketing projects when developed by outside agencies for a client.

OD practices can make a significant difference in business by showing organizations how to recognize their own cultural elements, strengths and weaknesses. OD also has a significant role to play when organizations partner for mutual gain or benefit. Consider the impact that OD has on performance and job satisfaction in all types of organizations, including marketing agencies and marketing departments within corporate entities.

In this study I found that organizational culture was a poorly understood concept. The participants relied on their gut instincts to judge culture and chemistry. They did not have a clear understanding of the nature of culture, nor of how they might evaluate it when working with other organizations. I have no doubt of the benefit that an increased understanding of culture would bring to organizations. I believe that one implication from this study for OD is a widespread need for relatively simple tools and descriptors that could be used by those not fully trained in OD principles. I am more of a working professional than I am a scholar; professionals need tools.

In my work experiences, I have found that many businesses are impatient. The business organization must be able to first understand a need for change, and second, be able to evolve and react as needed to the changes. Some areas of business change slower than others; one of the areas that needs to be able to change rapidly is marketing. Customers and markets change rapidly; their needs evolve and their expectations grow. OD could make a significant contribution in a fast-moving functional area.

Implications for Marketing

The study of organizational culture has significant implications for marketing scholars and professionals. Culture permeates an organization; culture impacts its leadership, performance, market orientation, innovation, hiring, thought processes, language, relationships,

and much more (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Schein, 1999; Turner & Spencer, 1997; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Deshpande & Webster, 1989). The literature clearly indicates that organizational culture is an important factor in corporate performance and the way it conducts business.

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of knowledge about organizational culture and its impact on marketing programs. Specifically, there are implications for marketing scholars and practitioners who are interested in how organizations partner on marketing projects. This is a business problem: Consider that the spending worldwide by the top 100 global advertisers exceeds $117.9 billion (Wentz & Johnson, 2009). And, in the United States alone, the revenue for U.S. marketing agencies exceeds $28.4 billion (Johnson, 2010). There is no research that estimates the amount of money which is lost due to inefficient or unsuccessful marketing projects. However, when I consider these dollar amounts, there is no doubt that marketing projects are a significant expenditure of money, time, and resources. Improvements and efficiencies in marketing projects would undoubtedly be welcome by organizations.

This study does not address the processes used in developing and implementing marketing projects; however, it does address how organizations partner with each other for the purpose of developing and implementing those marketing projects. The implications of this study are that there are core elements of partnering on marketing projects that should be understood by the potential partners, particularly in respect to how the values of organizations intersect and affect performance.

Marketing research has traditionally used quantitative methods. This can be seen by reviewing some of the leading academic marketing journals, such as the *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Academy of Marketing Studies*, etc. The contents are virtually all generated from positivistic and quantitative research methodologies. Please understand that I do

not mean to imply that the research published is lacking in any way; it certainly is not. The

published research is thorough and valuable information for marketing scholars and practitioners.

This study used an interpretive epistemology to understand the phenomenon of

organizations when they develop marketing projects in partnership with outside agencies. The

results of the study include new findings and insights relative to partnering on marketing

projects, and new theories which, when tested, may lead to tools for enhanced project success. I

hope that this study encourages more qualitative research in marketing.

Suggestions for Future Research

I believe that this study is one piece of the interdisciplinary research that is needed in

marketing and OD. Too often in research, academia, and business, the silo approach is used to

examine one functional area at a time. Systems theory links the silos, processes, and functions

into a comprehensive entity, yet often research is of only one area at a time. Granted, it is

difficult to research across disciplines. Perhaps an expanded use of interpretive research

methodologies can help fill that void, and build new theories which cross traditional

organizational boundaries.

Positivistic case studies should be used to test the theories developed in this study. In-

depth analysis of a few organizations would provide new insights and valuable data, as would a

case study analysis of marketing projects from their beginning as ideas, through the hiring of an

agency, the development of the project, and the evaluation of results. Action research would fit

into this area as well, studying the differences that specific actions might yield to an

organization.

Future research should also include and expanded scope to additional industries. In

particular, non-profit and government industries work differently than do commercial

organizations. We need to understand these organizations in regards to values, influences, adaptation, and measurements in regards to culture and marketing programs.

This project included only U.S.-based organizations and marketing projects within the borders of the United States. Future research projects should examine the partnership between U.S. and non-U.S. organizations for marketing projects. I have had experience working with marketing agencies in France, Germany, and Great Britain, and they all added an additional layer of cultural complexity with regards to understanding the non-U.S. customers and the marketing to those customers.

Finally, I would like to have the theories developed in this study tested. It is my hope that eventually a tool could emerge to assist organizations to optimize spending and maximize the results from marketing projects.

Concluding Remarks

I have enjoyed working on this research study. It was taken me to a new place in my research and analysis skills; it was my first foray into interpretive research. Learning and executing grounded research was overwhelming at times, but I have no regrets and have only grown from the experience as both an academic and a business professional. The opportunity to listen to others' insights and stories was an invaluable learning experience.

My previous research projects have been positivistic, and as I have a strong business orientation, I have usually evaluated operations based on quantitative measurements. But I can see that approach is but one side of the coin. The value of relationships may be harder to judge – and certainly they are difficult to quantify – but by adding qualitative insights, the information becomes much richer, more satisfying and valuable.

This study has given me new insights into organizational culture and its deep impacts on lives. I am grateful to all who participated and shared their experiences, insights, and opinions. I encourage other researchers, scholars, and practitioners to continue to work on the partnerships between OD and functional areas. There is much that can be accomplished.

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Appendix A – Agency Recruitment Letter, Theoretical Sampling

Dear _____:

I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation at the University of St. Thomas and would like your help. I am researching the impact of organizational culture on marketing projects. In broad terms, I would like to know what are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs. What should marketing agencies know about these elements in order to develop more successful marketing programs and relationships? I hope you think this is as interesting as I do. It's been an interest of mine for many years and now I have the chance to explore it fully.

I would like to interview you about your experiences on the agency side and what you encounter when working with client organizations. Before I go any further though, let me assure you that all interviews and data are completely confidential. I have received approval for this research from the Institutional Review Board at St. Thomas and have met all the criteria to guarantee your confidentiality and safety. There will not be any way to identify you, your company, or your clients in my final report. I fully respect your privacy and realize that it is critical that you maintain client confidentiality.

I would like to schedule an interview at your convenience. The interview can be in person or on the phone – whatever best meets your needs – and will take approximately 45 minutes. I will record the interview and you will have the opportunity to review your remarks; it's important that I am accurate in reflecting your experiences and viewpoints.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate. Your experiences and insights will contribute greatly to this research. I appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Harrower
Doctoral Candidate
University of St. Thomas
651-271-1853
nlharrower@stthomas.edu

Appendix B – Client Recruitment Letter, Theoretical Sampling

Dear _____:

I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation at the University of St. Thomas and would like your help. I am researching the impact of organizational culture on marketing projects. In broad terms, I would like to know what are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs. What should marketing agencies know about these elements in order to develop more successful marketing programs and relationships? I hope you think this is as interesting as I do. It's been an interest of mine for many years and I now have the chance to explore it fully.

I would like to interview you about your experiences on the client side and what you encounter when working with marketing agencies. Before I go any further though, let me assure you that all interviews and data are completely confidential. I have received approval for this research from the Institutional Review Board at St. Thomas and have met all the criteria to guarantee your confidentiality and safety. There will not be any way to identify you or your company in my final report. I fully respect your privacy and realize that it is critical that your information remain confidential.

I would like to schedule an interview at your convenience. The interview can be in person or on the phone – whatever best meets your needs – and will take approximately 30 – 40 minutes. I will record the interview and you will have the opportunity to review your remarks; it's important that I am accurate in reflecting your experiences and viewpoints.

Please let me know if you are willing to participate. Your experiences and insights will contribute greatly to this research. I appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Harrower
Doctoral Candidate
University of St. Thomas
651-271-1853
nlharrower@stthomas.edu

Appendix C – Recruitment Letter, Snowball Sampling

Dear _____:

I am conducting research for my doctoral dissertation at the University of St. Thomas and would like your help. I am researching the topic of organizational culture and how it may impact marketing projects. I am researching the impact of organizational culture on marketing projects. In broad terms, I would like to know what are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs. What should marketing agencies know about these elements in order to develop more successful marketing programs and relationships? I hope you think this is as interesting as I do. It's been an interest of mine for many years and now I have the chance to explore it fully.

I am seeking people from both the client and marketing agency side who have, or have had, responsibility for hiring marketing agencies or developing marketing projects. Can you recommend someone for me to contact for an interview? I would like to interview this person about their different experiences when working with clients.

Before I go any further, let me assure you that all interviews and data are completely confidential. I have been approved for this research by the Institutional Review Board at St. Thomas and have met all the criteria to guarantee confidentiality and safety. There will not be any way to identify the person, company, or clients in my final report. I fully respect their privacy and realize that it is critical that they maintain client confidentiality.

Please let me know if you can refer me to someone who meets the research criteria. I appreciate your support.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Harrower
Doctoral Candidate
University of St. Thomas
651-271-1853
nlharrower@stthomas.edu

Appendix D – Interview Consent Form

Organizational Culture and Marketing Programs
IRB# B10-215-02

I am conducting a study about the impact of organizational culture on marketing projects. In broad terms, I would like to know what are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because of your expertise in this area. I believe that you can help to inform my understanding of this problem. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Nancy L. Harrower, doctoral candidate in Organization Development, University of St. Thomas.

Background Information
Corporate marketing programs are visible activities that communicate an organization's value both to the marketplace and the public at large. These marketing programs reflect a company's culture, regardless of whether the marketing program is long-term and strategic (i.e., marketing strategy, competitor and environmental analysis) or short-term and tactical (i.e., advertising, promotion and publicity).

Because of the large amount of money spent globally on advertising and marketing – more than $117.9 billion! – the need for marketing agencies to understand their clients' organizational cultures is critical to a successful marketing program implementation. Spending on all types of marketing programs represent a significant investment by a corporation to build an image in the marketplace and sell its goods and services. Corporations need to achieve a maximum return on their marketing investments; marketing agencies must be able to effectively help corporations achieve their business goals.

The success or failure of marketing programs may be determined by many factors, including the impact of organizational culture. While internal marketing departments reflect the organizational culture without having to consciously think about it, it is just as critical that external marketing agencies have the same understanding. It is the relationship between an organization's culture and the marketing agency that this project will address.

The Research Question
What are the elements of organizational culture that impact the implementation and success of marketing programs? What should marketing agencies know about these elements in order to develop successful marketing programs and relationships?

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to consent to an interview of 45 – 60 minutes. The interview will be audio taped so that I can make sure to accurately capture your comments and insights.

Confidentiality
The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way.

Maintaining confidentiality is critical in research. All tape recordings and transcriptions will be kept secure in my home office in a locked storage cabinet. All transcriptions and documents will be secured in a password protected file on my home computer. No mentions of participants or companies will be made in such a way so as any reader could identify them. Research findings, memos, diagrams and the like will not disclose participant names or organizations. If quotes are used in the report, then pseudonyms will be used in place of names and the central list of respondents and companies will also be kept in a secure, password protected file on my home computer. I understand that you have placed your trust in me.

Data and records will be kept for five years following completion of the dissertation study. The anticipated completion date of the study is May, 2011. All files will be electronically erased and paper notes will be shredded.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you, I will respect your decision and delete any records of your participation or responses. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions
My name is Nancy Harrower. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-2710-1853 or email at nlharrower@stthomas.edu. My dissertation research advisor may also be contacted: Dr. Alla Heorhiadi, heorhiadi@stthomas.edu. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Appendix E – Interview Guide

1. Tell me about some of the recent projects you have worked on. What types of projects were they? How did you determine whether the results were successful or not?

2. Can you tell me about a project where the relationship between the agency and client was good? What happened?

3. Can you tell me about a project where the relationship between the agency and client was poor? What happened?