

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Public Relations in a “Jolted” Political Environment: An Exploratory Study of Boundary-Spanning Government Relations Professionals in Maryland

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This qualitative study examined government relations, an academically underexplored specialized form of public relations. It explored the individual lived experiences of boundary-spanning government relations professionals (GRPs), those organizational members who manage organizational interdependence with political stakeholders, in organizations enduring a major “jolt” (A.D. Meyer, 1982) in the political environment. The jolt in question is the election of Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., in November 2002, as Maryland’s first Republican governor in nearly four decades. The study then explained the implications of this jolt for GRPs, their work, and their organizations. Further, the study considered those experiences and implications in light of whether the jolt was perceived as a boon or a bane to an informant’s organization.

From the conceptual framework built from public relations and organizational theories, the study specifically looked at GRPs’ perceptions of the jolt and the political environment, organizational worldviews, communication practices, their work activities and responsibilities, and organizational political legitimacy. Active interviews were

conducted with forty “informants” who functioned as either in-house or for-contract GRPs for IRS-designated 501c nonprofit organizations in Maryland.

Among other findings, the analysis demonstrated the ways in which partisan conflict among political stakeholders, a polarized political environment, and changes in organizations’ political legitimacy affected in the work-lives of informants. Of greatest concern to them were the jolt’s effects on their networks of social and professional contacts — their social circles (Kadushin, 1968). Social circles were found to be the ultimate linchpins to GRPs’ effectiveness and success. The analysis also revealed that dialogue, used in the course of jointly implementing the personal influence and cultural interpreter models of public relations, best described both the positive and normative practices of government relations.

This study made significant contributions to the body of knowledge on public relations and government relations. It advanced a positive-normative theory of government relations, resolved speculation about why government relations is an anomaly to the Excellence theory of public relations (J.E. Grunig, 1992), filled gaps in the scholarly literature, and suggested organizational justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975) as a conceptual framework for understanding symmetry and dialogic processes in government relations.

Public Relations in a “Jolted” Political Environment:
An Exploratory Study of Boundary-Spanning Government Relations
Professionals in Maryland

By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my dear friend, Julia Melantha Yurwitz. Julia's enthusiastic pursuit of knowledge inspired me to pursue my own intellectual passions. Julia passed away unexpectedly in 1998, never having the opportunity to see where her pursuit would have led. I take comfort in thinking that she would be extremely proud to see where my pursuit has led. Unfortunately this is, of course, cold comfort. Julia, your friendship will always be missed; this dissertation honors you.

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Is it possible to *truly* thank the people who've given you life, help you make it in life, and make life so worth living? Probably not, but I'll give it a shot.

My mom and dad have supported me in so many ways since the day I announced I was quitting gainful employment to head to graduate school. They have always encouraged me, even when I was *so* ready to give up. I hope that I have made them proud by having finally checked "Earn a Ph.D." off of my life "to-do" list. Now I can move on to other slightly less crazy items on that list, like sky-diving, although I don't think they'll be as encouraging about that. Thank you, Mom and Dad. I could not have asked for better parents!

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I cannot forget my dissertation support group, comprised of Drs. Lisa Burns, Leslie Dinauer, and Laura Janusik, and Amy Heyse. We first began getting together while we were all still located in College Park. Now none of us are there and the group has evolved into a virtual entity. But their friendship and support remain as meaningful to me now as back when we'd get together to dish over lunch in downtown College Park. Thanks guys!

I consider myself infinitely fortunate to have someone as esteemed as Dr. Lauri Grunig serve as my dissertation advisor. Her grace and patience toward me have been unwavering. So many doctoral students have nightmarish advisor stories but not me. I have had nothing but a "dream" relationship with Lauri throughout this process. She always pushed me to do better because she knew I could. I am a better researcher, writer, thinker, and future professor because of her. Thank you, Lauri. I hope I do you and the University of Maryland public relations program proud with this work and my future career.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	1
Significance of the Study	3
Applied Significance	3
Theoretical Significance	6
Inclusions and Delimitations	12
Inclusions	12
Delimitations	13
Procedures	14
Maryland, My Maryland	14
What is a “Jolt”?	14
The “Jolted” Political Environment in Maryland	17
CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION	23
Public Relations	24
Defining “Public Relations”	24
Justifying “Stakeholders”	26
Systems Theory	29
Organizations as Open Systems	30
Organizational-Environmental Rapport	31
Critiques of Systems Theory	33
Nonprofit Organizations With Political Interests	38
IRS-Designated 501c Organizations	39
501c(3) Organizations	39
501c(4) Organizations	40
501c(6) Organizations	40
Government Relations in 501c Organizations	43
Organizational Environments	45
Dimensions of the Environment	47
The Construct of Uncertainty	49
Organizational Learning	51
Subjectivity, Perceptions, and Implicit Associations	51
Environments as Interorganizational Networks	57
Interdependency	59
Goal Re-Evaluation	60
Foundational and Middle-Range Public Relations Theories	61
Worldviews in Public Relations	63
Cultural Topoi	64
Organizational Ideology	65
Requisite Variety	65
Manifestations of Worldviews	66
Models of Public Relations Practice	68
Asymmetry and Symmetry	69

Two Other Models of Public Relations Practice.....	73
Boundary Spanning.....	77
The Two Modes of Boundary Spanning.....	80
The Process of Boundary Spanning.....	89
Boundary Spanners as Technicians or Managers?.....	92
Boundary Spanners as Entrepreneurs.....	96
Boundary Spanners as Buffers.....	99
Organizational Legitimacy in Public Relations.....	102
Theory Questions.....	106
CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	109
The Qualitative Genre and Rationale.....	109
A New and Improved Research Design.....	111
Everyone I turned down will be sent a copy of the executive summary of my study's ..	118
The Research Strategy: Qualitative Interviews.....	120
The Interview Protocol.....	122
Pretesting.....	125
Interviewing by Telephone.....	128
Ethical Considerations.....	130
Promises.....	130
Risks and Confidentiality Considerations.....	131
Informed Consent.....	133
Veracity.....	133
Reflexivity.....	133
Coder Reliability.....	135
Population Sample.....	137
Data Collection and Management.....	142
Audiotaping.....	142
Preparing the Raw Data.....	144
Coding, Reducing, and Organizing the Data.....	145
Transformation.....	149
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	153
Theory Question 1: Perceptions of the Jolt and How It Affected Annapolis.....	155
Dimensions of the Environment.....	156
Increased Dynamism and Complexity.....	156
“The Ground Itself Is in Motion”.....	159
Interorganizational Networks.....	165
Uncertainty.....	169
Uncertainty, Dysfunctional Communication, and Social Circles.....	170
Uncertainty and Partisanship.....	177
Uncertainty and Organizational Learning.....	177
Uncertainty and Subjectivity, Perceptions, and Implicit Associations.....	182
Goal Re-Evaluation.....	191
Theory Question 5: Perceptions of Organizations’ Political Legitimacy.....	196
Theory Question 5a.....	196
Legitimacy as Political Status.....	198
Clues From Stakeholders About Organizations’ Political Status.....	199

Informants' Perceptions of Their Organizations' Political Status	203
Where Does Political Legitimacy Come From?	205
Boundary-Spanning GRPs' Personal Legitimacy.....	212
Theory Question 5b.....	216
Political Stakeholders' Values and Priorities.....	217
The Impact of Turbulence on Legitimacy	218
Theory Question 2: Worldviews.....	220
Theory Question 2a.....	222
who controlled the Office of the Governor) held asymmetrically presupposed ..	223
Willingness to Cede Control.....	223
"Breadth of Perspective" in Organizational Decision-Making.....	244
Evidence of a "Dexterous" Mind	252
Theory Question 2b.....	261
Examples of Organizations Whose Worldviews Changed	262
Effect of the Jolt on Informants' Doctrinaire Thinking	265
Theory Question 3: Models of Public Relations Practice	266
Theory Question 3a.....	267
Grassroots Outreach as One-Way Communication	268
Grasstops Activities as Two-Way Communication	271
The Importance of Dialogue	271
Gamesmanship in Government Relations.....	279
Hope for Symmetry Yet.....	280
The Two Other Models of Public Relations Practice	282
Personal Influence Model	283
Cultural Interpreter Model	286
Gravitation Toward Politics and Government Relations	289
Theory Question 3b.....	293
The "Exceptional" Informant.....	294
Bane Informants' Organizations	296
Boon Informants' Organizations.....	297
Organizations' Tweaking of Communication Practices	298
The Influence of the Personal Influence Model.....	299
Theory Question 4: Boundary Spanning.....	301
Theory Question 4a.....	301
External-Representation Mode	302
Information-Processing Mode	302
Environmental Scanning.....	303
Boundary Spanners as Technicians or Managers?.....	307
Boundary Spanners as Buffers.....	315
Theory Question 4b.....	320
Oak-Reed Hybrids	321
The "Oak" Exception	322
Boundary Spanners as Entrepreneurs	323
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	329
Review of Results	329
Major Results for Central Research Questions 2 and 3	333

Central Research Question 2.....	336
Initial Perceptions of the Jolt’s Implications	336
The Role of Social Circles in Political Legitimacy	340
Persona Non Grata	342
Partisanship as Spoiler or Savior	342
The Game of Politics	345
Stakeholders’ Conference of Political Legitimacy	350
The Implications of Worldview Presuppositions.....	350
The Mixed-Motive Worldviews of Political Stakeholders	352
A Reverse Mixed-Motive Worldview?.....	353
Mixed-Motive Worldviews of Informants’ Organizations	355
An Auspicious Communication Strategy.....	355
Implications of Social Circles.....	359
A New Framework for Understanding Government Relations?.....	364
Making the Case for Justice as a Framework for Public Relations	365
What Is Justice?	369
Central Research Question 3.....	378
Significance of the Study	378
Implications of the Academic Underexploration of Government Relations	380
Implications of the Academic Exploration of Government Relations.....	385
Normative Insights.....	387
The Learning Curve of a Two-Party Political Environment.....	391
Implications of Conducting Qualitative Research on Boundary Spanning	395
Limitations and Strengths	397
Directions for Future Research	399
APPENDIX A	406
APPENDIX B	408
APPENDIX C	410
APPENDIX D	412
APPENDIX E	413
APPENDIX F.....	415
APPENDIX G.....	419
BIBLIOGRAPHY	422

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and consider.

—*Sir Francis Bacon (1597), English philosopher*

The seeds of this study began to take root in the fall of 1998 when I wrote my first graduate school research paper (Simone [a.k.a. Tuite], 1999), which explored government relations, a specialized form of public relations. Nurtured by my perspective as a doctoral student in public relations, my experiences working for Washington, DC-based nonprofit advocacy groups during the congressional Republican “revolution” in the mid 1990s, and my deep personal interest in politics, those seeds eventually blossomed into the dissertation contained in these pages.

Purpose of the Study

This study’s working premise is that, to remain a relevant actor in its environment, an organization must negotiate some degrees of compatibility and civility with its environment. As J.E. Grunig (1997b) put it, organizations and publics (e.g., stakeholders in the environment) “may not always agree or have a friendly relationship, but they do *understand* one another — and *understanding* is a major objective of public relations” (p. 242). This understanding, which I will refer to as organizational-environmental rapport (“rapport”), is achieved through the efforts of boundary-spanning personnel. Readers of this dissertation should understand that the purpose of this dissertation is to explore the experiences of boundary spanners, those organizational members who manage organizational-environmental interdependence with rapport as the goal, in organizations that are contending with a major “jolt” (A.D. Meyer, 1982) in the

political sector of their environment. Boundary-spanning government relations professionals (GRPs) and their individual lived experiences are this study's units of analysis. More specifically, this dissertation hopes to understand their experiences throughout the jolt and the implications of that "sudden and unprecedented event" (p. 515) on the work they do. Further, I will consider those experiences and implications in light of an organization's affect toward the jolt, that is whether the organization perceived the jolt as a boon or as a bane.

Readers of this study should also understand that this study aspires to do more than describe, or collect facts about (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994), boundary spanners' experiences. Description is, of course, a necessary building block of explanation and can make for insightful, rigorous studies (e.g., O'Leary, 1994). However, unless a descriptive study includes enough significant descriptive inference to qualify as an explanatory study, it will lack the theoretical insight required of a doctoral dissertation. Marra (1992), who developed a theoretical model of crisis public relations, carefully distinguished his explanatory dissertation from purely descriptive research:

Although it is extremely important for public relations professionals to know *what* to do in a crisis, it is equally important to understand *why* to do it. Explanations of why something occurs provide more valuable information than do simple description. (p. 5)

Learning *what* boundary spanners' experiences are lacks theoretical value, but learning *why* boundary spanners experience environmental jolts and the development and maintenance of rapport as they do does have theoretical value. This is explanation, not description.

Significance of the Study

My dissertation is, at its heart, a public relations study. Public relations is a discipline simultaneously applied and theoretical. I contend that this study potentially has great applied and theoretical significance and, as such, it should appeal to people having those respective interests.

From an applied standpoint, boundary spanners and other organizational members should gain insight into what they could expect to happen when their organizations must contend with an environmental jolt. From a theoretical standpoint, scholars in public relations and organizational theory would benefit from the study's deepened understanding of boundary spanners and boundary spanning during times of major political change.

Applied Significance

The potential for change is looming, expected, and omnipresent in politics. As U.S. President Ronald Reagan once observed, "I think the presidency is an institution over which you have temporary custody" (as quoted in Sidey, 1986, para. 4). In today's fickle political environment, the faces of those who hold elected office, contrary to what some proponents of term limits may claim, frequently change from election to election. State legislatures have come to expect turnover within their leaderships and general memberships (Gurwitt, 2003).

What is also changing is that increasingly, more of these new faces are Republicans. Republicans occupy more state-level offices now than in the past 50 years. Republicans control four more state legislatures than they did before the 2002 elections,

whereas Democrats have lost control of two state legislatures in that same time. The two parties split control of 12 states' bicameral legislatures (Gurwitt, 2003).

If one visualizes the political "mood" of the United States as a pendulum, the pendulum appears to have swung to the right over the past decade or so, when maverick Republican Newt Gingrich and others orchestrated the Republican "takeover" of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate in 1994. However, the political mood of America eventually and inevitably will swing back to the left. When it does, the faces of politicians will change yet again, as will the letter in the parentheses after their names.

Although individuals may only have temporary custody over an elected office, political parties may have near-permanent custody. Such was the case for Democrats and the U.S. Congress until 1994, just as it was for Democrats and the Office of the Governor of Maryland until November 5, 2002. When a political party that has so dominated the political environment of a state for so long, like the Democrats in Maryland, falls out of power, people toss around phrases like "sea change" and "political earthquake" like confetti on election night. Those phrases are not hyperbolic.

A politician's or political party's hold on an elected position may be impermanent, but some entities in the political environment remain constant: nonprofit organizations like charitable organizations, issue advocacy groups, and trade associations. These organizations' existences transcend election nights and they must be prepared to handle the long-term aftershocks, whether positive or negative, of election night. Their success or failure, indeed their survival, depends on it.

Organizations themselves do not negotiate their political environments. This responsibility falls to boundary spanners, people who act as liaisons between

organizations and elements in their environment. Boundary spanners may be public relations professionals, lobbyists, spokespeople, executive directors, and even CEOs. They function literally on the brink of the organization's environment, as detectors, interpreters, and relaters of environmental changes and other goings-on. They do so, so the organization appropriately can contend with those continual environmental changes and goings-on. This is all done in the name of organizational effectiveness:

Professionals of diagnosis can make a major contribution to organizational effectiveness by helping decision-makers identify the external conditions that affect their organization, assess current tactics for managing environmental relations, and find ways to take advantage of external changes and improve their organization's competitive position. (M.I. Harrison, 1994, p. 104)

With government as ubiquitous and powerful as it is, and with the shifting political mood in the United States, boundary spanners and those "constant" organizations must learn how to contend or otherwise deal with this swing toward the conservative end of the political spectrum and that inevitable future swing back. Beyond that, the Republican and Democrat parties are undergoing a redefinition of what it means to be a "Republican" or a "Democrat." As an erstwhile Democrat candidate for president in 2004 repeatedly declared in his stump speeches: "I'm Howard Dean, and I'm here to represent the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party" (as quoted in Schieffer, 2003, para. 4). With the line between the two parties often blurred, an elected official's political label can be less important than his or her ideology. These constant organizations, their boundary spanners, and other decision-makers could look to this study to inform their attempts to negotiate rapport with their environment and maintain organizational effectiveness. At a minimum, they could look to this study to gain insight into what to expect.

Theoretical Significance

There are several theoretically significant aspects of this study. First, my study seeks to make the existing research on boundary spanning more “complete” and holistic. Although much has been written about the myriad impacts that the organizational environment may have on boundary spanners’ roles, influence, communication, behaviors, perception by others, and so forth, nearly all of this research has been conducted quantitatively (viz., Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992; Springston & Leichty, 1994). Finet (1993), whose study incorporated interview and survey data, remains an exception. Qualitative research, which listens to and values boundary spanners’ experiences, will contextualize and triangulate the established quantitatively developed body of knowledge on boundary spanning.

My decision to explore boundary spanning using qualitative methods is not meant to imply that the extant quantitative research on boundary spanning is of questionable validity or otherwise suspect. Quantitative and qualitative research methods are often used in combination. For instance, a researcher could conduct interviews or focus groups to help develop a survey instrument. A survey instrument could contain open-ended items to elicit qualitative responses (e.g., McComas & Tuite, 2004). Interviews could be used to help fill in the gaps or explore interesting data from surveys.

For example, the Excellence study employed a two-phase research design. The Excellence team administered surveys in Phase 1 and completed 25 organizational case studies for Phase 2 (L.A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). This design yielded a much more complete and well-rounded understanding of excellence in public relations than if only one method had been used. This comprehensive understanding of a

phenomenon, excellence in public relations in the case of the Excellence study, is probably the greatest advantage of employing both approaches.

Quantitative research looks at structure and the existence of relationships between variables and seeks answers to questions such as “What? How much? How many?” Qualitative focuses on understanding the behaviors and processes occurring in a phenomenon, seeking answers to “How?” and “Why?” questions. Quantitative’s breadth and qualitative’s depth of knowledge helps to create, again, a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon. This should hold true even if the methods are used asynchronously, such as with my qualitative exploration of boundary spanning after and apart from the extant quantitative research. In explaining the methods “merger” from our 2004 study, McComas and I noted, “The quantitative data informs the qualitative data and vice versa, which arguably causes the spiral of science to move forward at a faster rate” (p. 14) than if only one approach is used.

Second, this study is significant because it will also cast a scholarly light on government relations, an academically underexplored specialized public relations program. This is surprising given the importance, if not near omnipotence (Mintzberg, 1983), of governments in organizational life. Toth (1986) advocated for additional qualitative research in public affairs, which for all purposes is another way of saying “government relations.” (Public relations efforts of government agencies are often called “public affairs” [J.E. Grunig, 1997b], mainly because federal law prohibits the government from engaging in public relations efforts. Essentially the practical differences between the terms “public relations” and “public affairs” are semantic; but in

practice outside of government agencies, “public affairs” is usually synonymous with “government relations.”)

Such research into public affairs/government relations, Toth (1986) said, would be particularly beneficial to the understanding of “concepts of public relations” (p. 33) like boundary spanning. She cited one study (viz., Ferguson, Weigold, & Gibbs, 1984) that, serendipitously, investigated boundary spanning within the context of government. After reviewing the public relations literature, I believe her call has not been satisfactorily heeded, with these notable exceptions: Johnson’s (1992) thesis on the connection between lobbying and public relations in Washington, DC; a study of lobbying in Norway (Haug & Koppang, 1997); and the Excellence study, which explored specialized public relations programs including government relations (Dozier, L.A. Grunig, & J.E. Grunig, 1995; J.E. Grunig, 1992; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002).

Third, this study represents an attempt to understand, from an individual-level perspective, the work lives of boundary-spanning GRPs as they and their organizations contend with a jolted political environment. Granted, as a qualitative study, the results would not be generalizable to a population of boundary-spanning GRPs; but the results nonetheless may provide theoretical and practical insights into their work during times of an environmental jolt and attendant efforts to negotiate rapport between the organization and the jolted environment. The study aspires to contribute to the development of a positive theory of boundary spanning in organizations contending with major political change. A positive theory describes and explains actualities and “what people do” (Lave & March, 1993, p. 108). A positive theory may facilitate the understanding of problems

(J.E. Grunig & L.A. Grunig, 1992), “coping with reality” (Toth, 1986, p. 30), prediction (Lave & March, 1993; Marra, 1992; Toth, 1986), and even control (Marra, 1992).

Contingent on the data collected and comparisons across organizations’ affects toward the jolt, a normative theory may emerge. Normative theories “give advice” (Lave & March, 1993, p. 108); they offer idealized representations of how something *should* be done or how someone *should* behave. As will be explained in a subsequent section, incompatibility between organizations and their sociopolitical environments happens frequently and with great effect; disagreements and misunderstanding occur. In spite of the ungeneralizable nature of this qualitative study, boundary spanners could look to the positive, and perhaps normative, theory that emerges from the study for guidance when facing that nearly inevitable misalignment. Because problems are unique, so too are their solutions — a source of frustration for public relations professionals seeking solutions to problems. Theories provide the insight and direction to help solve problems and alleviate professionals’ frustration (J.E. Grunig, 1978).

It is important to me that what emerges from this study is something that professionals realistically could and would understand and learn from. To me, this is imperative given, as I have pointed out, that public relations is a discipline both academic and practical. I would be disappointed in the outcome of this academic endeavor if professionals were to find it user unfriendly or “rather abstract and conceptual,” as Cornelissen (2000, p. 316) lamented about how professionals generally view academic research. I confronted this first hand several times during my research: Several informants gently teased and questioned me about the term “boundary spanner.” Once I would explain the term to them, the inevitable follow-up was “Why not just use

“communicator?” One person told me that he had joked with his colleagues about adding “boundary spanner” to his resume. Unfortunately, one person called to berate me about the “ridiculous” title of my dissertation (which I have since changed) and demanded I explain each term in the title in detail. After explaining to him the terms and the purpose of my study (which was very clear from the letter he received and on details provided on my Web site), he said, “Well, why didn’t you just put it that way in your title?” Moreover, this person by profession was a medical doctor, someone who I would have thought would be sympathetic to the need to use professional jargon in research. He declined to participate. Although I was taken aback at his unnecessarily rude inquisition, I concluded that he did have a point: A disconnect exists between public relations academics and public relations professionals. This is a consistent refrain I have heard voiced at forums such as the annual International Public Relations Research Conference sponsored by the Institute for Public Relations.

Finally, I identified four voids in the existing literature that my dissertation will attempt to begin filling. One, Springston and Leichty (1994), in their article on boundary spanning, called for a “fuller understanding of how public relations practitioners interact with publics, and collect and use information about publics” (p. 687), as well as for a better understanding of routine boundary-spanning activities. Two, Jemison’s (1984) contention, although dated, that research was needed on factors that affect boundary spanners’ influence remains viable. Three, Werder (2002) said that public relations would benefit from additional positive theories.

Baum and Rowley (2002) identified the interactions between organizations and their sociopolitical environment as “an important conceptual question” (p. 9). This, the

fourth void, requires explanation. Governments are powerful and ubiquitous, as Mintzberg (1983) noted: The government “represent[s] the ultimate legislative authority of the society. . . [and] establish[es] the rules—the laws and regulations—within which every organization must function” (p. 44). Within the context of international public relations, M. Taylor and Kent (1999) observed the government was some organizations’ most important public even in situations not involving direct communication with the government. Citizens elect lawmakers, who in turn appoint officials. Lawmakers and appointed officials hire staff personnel. These three groups and the legal and regulatory frameworks in which they operate and which they also create, implement, and enforce — the government — constitute the political environment for the organizations in my study. The government is the political environment and the political environment is the government. To recast the observations of M. Taylor and Kent and of Mintzberg, for some organizations (such as those in my study) the government is the more than just the most important public. Rather, the government is the most important “environment”; the government *is* the environment.

This “environment” is the political environment. Only recently has research on organizations and environments diverted its attention from organizations’ economic and technological environments to their sociopolitical, or non-commercial, environments (Finet, 1993). According to Finet, “the sociopolitical world within which organizations must operate is changing in some fundamental way, and researchers need to formulate new questions to correspond with the reality of a far more complex and turbulent sociopolitical environment” (p. 58). Although her comments are more than a decade old, I believe they are still an accurate assessment of current politics. I believe that my study

will help illuminate this fourth void identified in the literature by exploring boundary spanners help organizations engage with stakeholders in dynamic, complex political environments. Any filling of this or the other three voids will contribute to the study's theoretical significance.

Inclusions and Delimitations

The dissertation process requires strategic decision-making about what to include and consider and what not to. Choices must be made and limits must be set about which literatures to draw on and which questions or hypotheses a study will tackle. The temptation to do too much could cause a dissertation to degenerate into the equivalent of the Winchester House of San Jose, CA, whose construction continued, without rhyme or reason, for nearly forty years.

Inclusions

As I was cognizant of this temptation, I constructed the study's theoretical framework using only the literature and theories that in my view best address the study's purposes and aspirations. I included both germinal and contemporary research. I sought information that would inform and explain the problems, opportunities, work activities and responsibilities, influence dynamics, organizational processes, and other issues and situations potentially experienced by boundary-spanning government relations personnel working for nonprofit organizations contending with a jolted political environment.

The first major section of the conceptualization chapter explores topics that provide context for the rest of the chapter. These topics include definitional issues in public relations (e.g., see J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000; Hazleton & Long, 1988; Heath, 1997; Long & Hazleton, 1987; and Toth, 1986),

stakeholders (e.g., see Coombs, 2001; J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992), and systems theory (e.g., see Aldrich & Herker, 1979; Cutlip et al., 2000; Hatch, 1997; Jemison, 1984; Terreberry, 1968). I relied on scholars such as Douglas (1987); Hall (1987); L.K. Lewis, Hamel, and Richardson (2001); and Salamon (1995) for the section on nonprofit organizations with political interests. Scholars such as Aldrich and Pfeffer (1976); Emery and Trist (1965); Lauzen and Dozier (1992); Robbins (1990); Sutcliffe (2001); Terreberry (1968); and Weick (1969, 1979, 1983) helped to frame the section on organizational environments. The final section, on foundational and middle-range public relations theories, draws on the work of Aldrich (1979); Baum and Rowley (2002); Boyd (2000); Finet (1993); J.E. Grunig (1984, 1992, 2001), J.E. and L.A. Grunig (1989); Lauzen (1995a, 1995b); Leichty and Warner (2001); Springston and Leichty (1994); and others.

Delimitations

Equally as important as declaring the scope of a dissertation is declaring its delimitations. These are the questions and areas of inquiry that could be studied but are deemed “beyond the scope” of the study. This study has two major delimitations: One, I will consider only organizations having IRS Section 501c nonprofit status that operate in Maryland. I excluded for-profit organizations, such as corporations, as well as all organizations operating outside Maryland. Two, I will consider only the government and subordinate media relations efforts of these Maryland nonprofit 501c organizations. I will not consider other public relations programs (such as donor, member, employee, or board-member relations) found in these organizations.

Procedures

The research design of a study is a plan of operationalization. I describe how I sought the empirical answers to the theory-born questions below.

Hon (1997, 1998) studied effectiveness in public relations by interviewing more than three-dozen public relations professionals. The richness of her data and the learning that richness engendered inspired my choice of qualitative method. I conducted my research through telephone interviews with people who function as boundary-spanning GRPs whose salaries are paid by Maryland charitable [501c(3)], issue advocacy [501c(4)], and business league [501c(6)] organizations.

I identified potential participants by analyzing media sources, organizational Web sites, and lists obtained from the Maryland Government Relations Association and the Maryland State Ethics Commission. Through an initial three-wave mailing and an expanded one-wave mailing to solicit participation, I eventually completed telephone interviews with 44 participants, 40 of which were analyzed. This number of interviews achieved the “informational sufficiency” (Snow, 1980, p. 103), or requisite levels of depth and breadth of information, needed to meet the study’s goals. I have provided a lengthier discussion of the research design in the methods chapter.

Maryland, My Maryland

In this section, I explain the concept of an environmental “jolt” and my decision to use Maryland as a quasi-laboratory.

What is a “Jolt”?

Two reasons drove my decision to situate this study in, and effectively delimit it to, Maryland. Although I will not have resided there for most of the dissertation process,

Maryland was my adopted home state from 1989 to 2003. During this time I became well versed and fascinated, perhaps morbidly so, with its brand of state-level one-party politics. I learned more about the political process in my four-month stint as an intern to the Maryland House of Delegates' Environmental Matters Committee in 1992 than I did in myriad government and politics courses I took as an undergraduate student. After the 2002 gubernatorial election, Maryland suddenly —and somewhat surprisingly — had a brand-new brand of state-level partisan politics. The state's political environment had been “jolted” and as such became a laboratory rich with learning opportunities for scholars in the communication and political science disciplines.

I have adopted the term “jolt” to describe what happened to Maryland's political environment upon Republican Robert L. Ehrlich's win over Democrat Kathleen Kennedy Townsend in the 2002 race for governor. I provide a discussion of the jolt in the following section.

First, however, this term requires explication. A.D. Meyer (1982) examined the responses of a group of hospitals to a workers' strike, an external event that he called an “environmental jolt.” At the outset of this article, he characterized environmental jolts as “transient perturbations whose occurrences are difficult to foresee and whose impacts on organizations are disruptive and potentially inimical. . . [They] trigger responses that reveal how organizations adapt to their environments” (p. 515); but he went no further. He did not provide, for example, a definition of “crisis” for comparison, nor did he compare examples of jolts and crises. Some definitions of crisis, such as “an event that is an unpredictable, major threat that can have a negative effect on the organization, industry, or stakeholders if handled improperly” (Coombs, 1999, p. 2), sound like a jolt's

near doppelganger. Other definitions for crisis are less so but still jolt-esque, such as “a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly” (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 60).

A.D. Meyer clarified himself by refining the concept of an environmental jolt in a later work (A.D. Meyer, Brooks, & Goes, 1990). Jolts, readers discovered, are a mild form of discontinuous change. A discontinuous change event is abrupt and, despite its limited duration, “transforms fundamental properties or states of the system” (p. 94). True discontinuous change could be characterized as a “cataclysmic upheaval” (p. 93), such as the fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s. A more recent example would be the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The election of a Republican governor in Maryland in 2002 falls short of being a *true* discontinuous change event; any cataclysm it caused certainly is not on par with the fall of the Iron Curtain or 9/11. However, I aver that it did cause enough upheaval to qualify as a *mild* discontinuous change event: a jolt.

A.D. Meyer provided further insight in the waning lines of his 1982 article. He emphasized that jolts are only *potentially* jeopardizing to organizations. Jolts may be advantageous to and positively perceived by organizations, as the election of a Republican governor likely would be to some nonprofit organizations in Maryland included in this study. For this reason, and because the 2002 gubernatorial election is a mild discontinuous change event, “jolt” is a wholly appropriate designation for this study.

The “Jolted” Political Environment in Maryland

Maryland, a “microcosm” of politics at the national level (Montgomery, 2002a), presented an ideal opportunity for exploring boundary spanning, a quintessential public relations concept, within organizations trying to contend with a “jolted” political environment. The jolt that provides the backdrop for this study is the outcome of the 2002 gubernatorial election.

Only 66,170 votes, or barely four percent of the 1.7 million votes tallied in the 2002 Maryland governor’s race, broke down the “Democratic wall of invincibility” (Stuckey, 2002, para. 2) that had blocked Republicans from the Free State’s governorship for 36 years. An upstart Republican candidate, Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., had not just broken down the wall; he tore it down by beating the once-presumptive winner, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, a scion of the Kennedy political empire. Not since Spiro Agnew, who resigned the governorship in 1969 to become President Richard M. Nixon’s vice president, had a Republican governor lived in the Governor’s Mansion in Annapolis.

Ehrlich, a four-term Republican congressional representative and a former two-term member of the Maryland House of Delegates from the suburbs of Baltimore, had won in what many long had considered a one-party — specifically, Democrat — state (“Two-party State,” 2002). Giddy excitement over his win emanated from Republican political circles: “[Ehrlich’s win in Maryland] is where we’re looking for lessons for 2004,” exclaimed the Republican Governors Association finance committee chairman (as quoted in Montgomery, 2002c, para. 6). Ehrlich’s Republican congressional colleagues greeted him with hearty backslaps, handshakes, and even a standing ovation (Montgomery, 2002b).

During his election-night acceptance speech, Ehrlich intoned: “Welcome to history! To Republicans: Our time in the desert is over” (as quoted in Stuckey, 2002, para. 8). To some, a gleeful declaration; to others, ominous. Although many policy issues, such as the legalization of slots, the construction of an Intercounty Connector roadway, and tort reform, could be used to illustrate the policy and ideological differences between Glendening and Ehrlich, the governors’ differing perspectives on land-use management issues is the most illustrative. As such, it is the one I expound upon here.

Land-use management issues typically pit environmental interests against business interests in a classic, and nearly intractable, debate over nature versus progress. From 1994 through 2002, environmental interests in Maryland had a governor who was squarely in their corner. Under the leadership of then-Governor Parris N. Glendening, in 1997 Maryland became one of about a dozen states to codify comprehensive growth management legislation (Brown, 2001; D.R. Porter, 1997). Maryland’s Smart Growth initiatives, dedicated to stopping poorly planned or unplanned development — sprawl — have three goals: (1) to support and enhance existing communities, (2) to preserve natural resources and agricultural areas, and (3) to save on the costs of new infrastructure (Maryland Department of Planning, n.d.).

Then in 2002, Republican Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. won the gubernatorial contest. Suddenly, business interests had a governor who was firmly in their corner. Maryland’s nationally vaunted Smart Growth policies had lost their greatest champion, leading many to wonder what would become of Smart Growth under this new, more business-friendly administration. Ehrlich has since put his own imprimatur on his predecessor’s Smart

Growth program by renaming it “Priority Places.” His office also introduced legislation in 2004 to dismantle the state Office of Smart Growth. The state Department of Planning would assume its responsibilities (Nitkin, 2004).

The governor who had championed “nature” in the nature versus progress debate was gone. Maryland now has a governor who champions progress. For organizations embroiled in this debate, the political environment of the state has changed dramatically. Beyond that, this change was not just from one politician to another but from one political party (Democrat) to another (Republican) that had not held the governorship since the 1960s.

Thus, for organizations with business and agricultural interests, Ehrlich’s biblical reference appropriately captured the magnitude of his win. For two terms, Ehrlich’s predecessor, Glendening, used his office as a bully pulpit to promote environmental policies, particularly his anti-sprawl land-use management program, Smart Growth. Glendening left office widely considered a national leader on Smart Growth and was once even called an “apostle” of Smart Growth (Lambrecht & Martin, 1997). Environmental groups worked closely with Glendening throughout his administration, as he championed environmental protection and development restriction policies (Biemer, 2002a).

Business organizations did not enjoy similarly friendly relationships with the Glendening administration. A partner in one of Annapolis’s top lobbying firms with many development and real estate clients noted: “Glendening was pro-environment. . .it’s hard to be pro-business as well. So any business has to be feeling pretty positive about Ehrlich’s election. They’re looking forward to a friendlier environment, an easing of

regulations” (as quoted in Becker, 2002, p. B1). The partner offered this anecdote: His firm holds an annual breakfast mixer attended by the firm’s clients and state legislators. Glendening never attended this event; Ehrlich, at the time of the article’s writing still the governor-elect, had already agreed to be the breakfast’s next guest of honor. Another telling anecdote involves a comment overheard at the Maryland Chamber of Commerce soon after Ehrlich’s win: “Do you realize what’s happening? We are preparing to talk to the governor about our needs because he wants to hear from us! That’s a new phenomenon” (as quoted in Becker, 2002, p. B1).

Immediately after their win, Ehrlich and his lieutenant governor, Michael Steele, indicated that their administration would be much more business friendly, or at least more sympathetic to business interests. Steele said: “Now we will always be mindful of protecting public safety and the environment. But we also recognize that the business community is the economic engine of this state” (as quoted in Becker, 2002, p. B1). Pro-business interests also welcomed Steele’s comments that this administration would be reviewing the “state’s overregulated business environment” (Becker, 2002, p. B1), specifically Glendening’s anti-sprawl policies and environmental regulations. As one business lobbyist noted: “Wherever there’s change, there’s opportunity. This is the opportune time where we can really mold things” (as quoted in Becker, 2002, p. B1). The message from Ehrlich’s camp was clear: Pro-business interests, your time in the desert is over.

Agricultural interests, particularly farmers, also were relieved to have a Republican in the governor’s office. The Glendening administration had enacted a strict nutrient-management program to decrease the fertilizer-polluted run-off that was

damaging the health of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Many farmers found this program to be unnecessarily burdensome. The director of government relations for the Maryland Farm Bureau commented: “The farm community is just relieved to have an opportunity to participate in the discussions in Annapolis over the next four years. They felt shut out for the past eight years” (as quoted in Biemer, 2002b, para. 3). Farmers did not have to wait very long before Ehrlich’s team welcomed them in from the desert: Reconfiguring this nutrient run-off program to ease its burden on farmers, while maintaining as many of its environmental gains as possible, was one of Ehrlich’s initial priorities (Biemer, 2002b).

Also at the top of Ehrlich’s priority list was a proposed merger of the Maryland departments of natural resources and the environment. Such a merger was popular among pro-business interests, which were hoping for a less restrictive regulatory environment. Not surprisingly, environmental organizations were less enthusiastic about this proposal (Montgomery, 2002a).

Some environmental groups, like the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, remained politically neutral during the governor’s race; others, like the Sierra Club, endorsed Ehrlich’s opponent, Townsend. Wariness would aptly describe the overall feeling of environmental groups about the Republican becoming governor (Biemer, 2002a). The executive director of 1000 Friends of Maryland, which enjoyed a close relationship with the Glendening administration on Smart Growth, expressed trepidation: “There’s a whole lot of waiting and seeing right now” (as quoted in Biemer, 2002a, para. 3). The Maryland director of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation was optimistic:

Once he's [Ehrlich] in office, and sees the magnitude of the issues and the important economic benefits of the bay, I hope he'll really come forward and step up and be a governor that we can look to later and say, "He was a strong environmental governor." (as quoted in Biemer, 2002a, para. 11)

Although Ehrlich was not sending the message, "To environmental groups: Your time in the desert has just begun," his administration's pro-business and pro-agriculture priorities likely have given environmental groups pause. Their successes will be defined differently in this Republican administration than in the preceding Democrat administrations, much as Boris and Krehely (2002) implied: "[Environmental organizations'] short-term successes are likely to vary with the political party in power" (p. 319). They also suggested that an organization's success may be more about maintaining environmental strides made in previous years and less about making new strides: "A new political administration initially perceived as being more willing to favor economic development over environmental preservation may put environmental organizations on the defensive to preserve existing gains" (p. 320).

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION

All things must change to something new, to something strange.

—*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1878), American poet*

This study explores the lived experiences of boundary-spanning government relations professionals (GRPs) in organizations enduring a major “jolt” (A.D. Meyer, 1982) in their political environment. What were their experiences before and after the environmental jolt? Why did they experience the jolt as they did? What were the implications of the jolt for them and the work they do and why? What can be learned that will inform both theory and practice?

This section builds a theoretical framework for understanding and contextualizing these lived experiences, as informants in addressing the above purposes will impart them to me. My use of the word “informants” is deliberate: These people specifically were selected for participation in this study so they could relate their first-hand experiences, as boundary-spanning GRPs, to me. This, according to Lindlof (1995), distinguishes them from merely being “respondents.”

I have built the conceptual framework for this study out of the scholarly literature on nonprofit organizations with political interests, organizational environments, and foundational and middle-range theories in public relations. Interspersed throughout the framework are theory questions, or as they are more commonly known, research questions. I developed these based on the discussions immediately preceding their appearances. Theory questions serve to “generate a research protocol and produce a framework for patterns in the analysis of the results of the study” (Plowman, 1996). I have developed the theory questions so I can learn about the individualized, nuanced

experiences that my boundary-spanning informants have of what the extant (mostly quantitative) research says they should experience. I present the theory questions again en masse at the end of the chapter.

Although I have incorporated some literature and concepts outside the traditional domain of public relations in the conceptual framework, public relations is the ultimate context for this study. Readers should consider everything in the framework within the context of public relations; as such it requires explication.

Public Relations

In this section, I establish a definition of “public relations” as well as identify its functional role in organizations (for the purposes of this study). I also discuss the concept of stakeholders and systems theory.

Defining “Public Relations”

In claiming that public relations suffers, in both academia and practice, from the “being all things to all people” syndrome, I find myself in good company: The venerable Edward Bernays made a similar diagnosis in a 1992 address to public relations scholars (Gonders, 2004). Public relations academicians have yet to elect a universal, holistic definition of “public relations” (Cropp & Pincus, 2001; Hutton 1999, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000b; Stacks, 2002), in spite of the many electable candidates, including:

- “the management of communication between an organization and its publics (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 6),
- “the building of relationships and the management of communication between organizations and individuals” (Thomsen, 1997, p. 12),
- “the management of credibility” (Stacks, 2002, p. 17),

- “the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends (Cutlip et al., 2000, p. 6), and
- “the distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.” (Harlow, 1976, p. 36)

Many of these candidates qua definitions acknowledge that public relations should be an organizational management function. They diverge, however, on what purpose public relations should serve to the organization. These purposes include reputation management (Hutton, Goodman, J.B. Alexander, & Genest, 2001), relationship management (Heath, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000a), message management (IPRA, 1982), conflict resolution (Plowman, Briggs, & Huang, 2001), and even marketing communication (Duncan & Caywood, 1996; Hutton, 1996).

This definitional pluralism provides a public relations researcher the latitude to choose the definition that best fits the purpose and framework of a given study. Definitions incorporating the concept of organization-environment interdependency most befit my dissertation, as this chapter will bear out. Crable and Vibbert (1986) described public relations as an “art of adjusting organizations to environments and environments to organizations” (p. 413). Although vague, their description harkens back to Cutlip and Center’s (1952) idea that public relations mediates the interdependencies between organizations and stakeholders in the environment.

For my dissertation, I will use the definition of public relations put forth by Hazleton and Long (1988) and Long and Hazleton (1987), a definition endorsed by

Wilcox, Cameron, Ault, and Agee (2005). Readers should understand that I am defining public relations as “a communication function of management through which organizations adapt, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals” (Long & Hazleton, 1987, p. 6). I chose this definition above others because it is grounded in the language of organizational-environmental interdependence. Beyond that, this academic definition similarly captures the idea of adaptation that the Public Relations Society of America’s official definition does: “Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other” (Public Relations Society of America, n.d).

Although I have found Long and Hazleton’s (1987) definition useful for anchoring my study, some public relations scholars take issue with it (J.E. Grunig, personal communication, November 17, 2004). Their criticisms of this definition likely are due to its strong systems theory approach to organizational-environmental interdependence (Werder, personal communication, June 10, 2005). Systems theory, as I will discuss in the following section, is frequently criticized for its overly modernist, objectivist perspective.

Justifying “Stakeholders”

Exactly with whom or what in the environment are organizations interdependent? Exactly with whom or what in the environment should an organization’s public relations professionals engage? The answer to each of these questions is “stakeholders.” Because many public relations scholars would answer these questions using the term “publics” rather than “stakeholders,” I will explain my choice. I believe governments are better understood as stakeholders, for this study’s purposes, than as organizational publics. Any

individual or entity that has a stake in an organization is considered a stakeholder. A stake is an interest, right, claim, or ownership (Clarkson, 1995); it is “anything — tangible or intangible, material or immaterial — that one person or group has that is of value to another person or group” (Heath, 1997, p. 28). Stakeholders and organizations are interdependent because they are of mutual consequence (J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992) and interdependence necessitates interaction. Being of mutual consequence does not necessarily mean the two parties are of equivalent consequence, however. For instance, even though organizations can influence public policy, governments retain greater and ultimate authority in the public policy process (Cralle & Vibbert, 1985). Emshoff and Freeman (1979) also made this point, saying stakeholders are, “group[s] whose collective behavior can directly affect the organization’s future, but which [are] not under the organization’s control” (as cited in J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 297).

When a stakeholder perceives a consequence as a problem, it evolves into a public (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992). Publics coalesce in response to perceived problems and organize to confront them. The term “public” thus does not accurately describe the government’s position relative to organizations (for this study’s purposes) whereas “stakeholder” does.

Interdependence with stakeholders must be managed by an organization (Coombs, 2001) specifically through certain of its members, namely public relations professionals and members of the organization’s dominant coalition. Many researchers prescribe engaging in activities that sound much like public relations. Strategic stakeholders should be selected and relationships with them should be nurtured (Metcalf, 1981); stakeholders should be communicated with (Hazleton & Long, 1988; Heath, 1994; L.K.

Lewis et al., 2001; Thompson, 1967); research must be conducted to anticipate environmental fluctuations (Thompson, 1967); and organizations must be open-minded and flexible enough to modify their actions in relation to their stakeholders, which populate the environment (Thompson, 1967; Weick, 1977). White and Dozier (1992), in arguing their case that public relations is a strategic management function, said “strategic management includes managing exchanges across the organizational boundary to ensure that the organization responds to environmental demands and opportunities” (p. 101). J.E. Grunig (1991) was more direct: “Public relations helps organizations *manage their interdependence* with publics that interact with the organization as it pursues its goals” (p. 264). J.E. Grunig cited the even-more-direct Gollner (1983, 1984), who defined public relations as the management of interdependence (p. 260).

Specialized professionals in government relations, for example, would manage interdependence with specific stakeholders, such as the government. Hatch (1997) noted that lobbyists and government relations programs are frequently used by organizations that are attempting to manage their “regulatory dependencies” (p. 80), meaning their dependencies on legislative and administrative bodies and regulatory agencies.

The management of interdependence with organizational stakeholders is an integral component of the Excellence theory, which itself explains the excellent management of organizational-environmental interdependence. Before delving into a discussion of this dominant metatheory of public relations, I must present a detailed overview of systems theory and its relationship to public relations.

Systems Theory

Organizations can be studied and understood through many metaphorical models (Morgan, 1997; Spicer, 1997). As many other public relations researchers have done, I have decided to follow the advice of W.G. Scott (1961): “The only meaningful way to study an organization. . .is as a system” (p. 15). Further, systems theory is often used to frame research on issues management, a subfunction within public relations (Bowen, 2000; J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992). However, as M. Taylor et al.’s (2003) article established, much of this research is published in scholarly journals outside the boundaries of the traditional public relations literature (viz., *Journal of Public Relations Research* and *Public Relations Review*), such as *Business Quarterly*, *California Management Review*, *Canadian Business Review*, and *Long Range Planning*.

A biologist pioneered systems theory and as such it has a biological grounding. Ludwig von Bertalanffy was also one of the first researchers to realize the theory’s theoretical potential in areas such as psychology and the social sciences (ISSS, n.d.). Organizations are frequently conceptualized and studied as if they were living organisms by using systems theory (e.g., Bivins, 1992; Bowen, 2000; Crable & Vibbert, 1985; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000; J.E. Grunig, 1992; J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Long & Hazleton, 1987; M. Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003). Systems theory considers “organizations as systems of internal relationships and as inhabitants of a larger environment in which they operate and on which it depends for resources” (Baum & Rowley, 2002, p. 6).

Likening an organization to an organism is useful for understanding how organizations work and achieve goals (Spicer, 1997). Each organizational subsystem

performs a function, defined as “the normal and specific contribution of any bodily part of the economy of a living organism” (Gove, 2000). This biological definition is reminiscent of J.E. Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) broad conceptualization of a function as a subsystem within a larger system. These organizational functions — specifically the adaptive, production, support-disposal, maintenance, and managerial subsystems — must work together for the organization’s survival, much like a living organism needs its digestive, respiratory, and circulatory systems (among others) to work together if it is to survive.

Organizations as Open Systems

Organizational boundaries are a key, although unmentioned, part of Baum and Rowley’s (2002) definition. Boundaries are both sentinels and gatekeepers (Jemison, 1984). Boundaries demarcate between whom and what are included in the organization and whom and what are excluded from the organization (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). The “excluded” comprises the “environment, which is outside the system boundary” (Terreberry, 1968, p. 606).

Not surprisingly, Bertalanffy, in 1956, was the first person to acknowledge just how integral the permeability of an organization’s boundary is to its survival (Terreberry, 1968). Neither an organism nor an organization will be long for life if it has a closed boundary, for having a closed boundary inhibits interaction (in all forms) with the larger environment that the organization inhabits. Having a permeable yet maintained boundary, or an “open system,” is advantageous because it allows the organization to communicate with its environment, to address external (environmental) factors. This aids in the achievement of organization goals (Spicer, 1997). Finally, an open systems

perspective facilitates answers to Thompson's (1967) fundamental question:

“Organizations act, but what determines how and when they will act?” (p. 10).

This open systems perspective also acknowledges that a symbiosis exists between organizations and environments. Inputs (like resources) come from that environment. That same environment consumes the organization's outputs, which are of course made using the environment's inputs (Bivins, 1992; Emery & Trist, 1965; M.I. Harrison, 1994; Terreberry, 1968). Inputs are transformed into outputs via throughput processes. An organization also requires feedback from its environment so that equilibrium between the two is maintained. This involves communication between the organization and its environment (Spicer, 1997), which in turn facilitates the organization's ability to contend and develop or maintain rapport with its environment. This is a transformational process (Bivins, 1992).

Organizational-Environmental Rapport

Organizations try to reconcile themselves with their environment because they aspire toward “homeostasis, or self-stabilization, which spontaneously, or naturally, governs the necessary relationships among parts and activities and thereby keeps the system viable in the face of disturbances stemming from the environment” (Thompson, 1967, p. 7). However, as M.I. Harrison (1994) pointed out, not all organizational theorists would agree with Thompson's contention that organizations seek balance or equilibrium. Yet many theorists, such as Weick (1979), cautioned that an organization's existence depends on the achievement and maintenance of some sort of balance between the organization and its environment.

Rather than thinking of organizational-environmental interdependence in terms of balance, I have opted to conceptualize this general idea as an understanding, which connotes the ideas of co-existence, simpatico, and “getting along.” I call this understanding “organizational-environmental rapport.” For organizations that necessarily do not “get along” with stakeholders in their environment, rapport could still be developed and maintained even if it only rose to the level of the parties being cordial or civil to each other, an achieving of *détente*. The existence of rapport between two parties, such as an organization and a stakeholder or, as Spradley (1979) advocated, an interviewer and interviewee, creates a situation in which conversations occur. Spradley (1979) dealt with the concept of rapport in his suggestions for conducting ethnographic interviews. He described rapport as:

a harmonious relationship between ethnographer and informant. . . .that allows for the free flow of information. . . .[but] does not necessarily mean deep friendship or profound intimacy between two people. . . .Rapport can exist in the absence of fondness and affection. (p. 78)

Public relations is the organizational function that helps to manage organizational-environmental interdependence with the goal of rapport: “Effective public relations helps organizations adjust to expectations from the organizational environment (internal and external)” (Hon, 1997, p. 5). It exists on the organization-environment boundary as a boundary-spanning function and thus Cutlip et al.’s (2000) placement of it within an organization’s adaptive subsystem is logical. Public relations professionals, as boundary spanners, identify relevancies in the organization’s environment and bring information about the relevancies — inputs —back into the organization. They analyze this information and explain it to other organizational members so it will be incorporated into organizational decision-making; this represents the throughput process. The organization

then acts toward the environment and the relevancies; this represents outputs. Then public relations detects responses — receives feedback — from the environmental relevancies to the organizational outputs, and so the management of interdependence continues.

Fittingly, much theoretical discussion of public relations is predicated on its being a boundary-spanning function in an open-systems organization (e.g., Cutlip et al., 2000; Dozier et al., 1995; J.E. Grunig, 1992; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002; Hazleton & Long, 1988; Pavlik, 1987; Spicer, 1997). Indeed, Long and Hazleton (1987) advocated systems theory as “the way to go” (p. 5) for theorizing in public relations. Consequently, it is difficult to divorce public relations theories, which I will present in the upcoming section “Foundational and Middle-Range Public Relations Theories,” from systems theory. Before jumping into discussions of two of systems theory’s main elements (viz., organizations and environments), I would be remiss if I did not present some criticisms of systems theory and other theories that have been floated as alternatives to it.

Critiques of Systems Theory

Although it remains an important and viable perspective for understanding organizations and environments (Sutcliffe, 2001), critics have asserted that its objectivist, modernist epistemology handicaps systems theory (Hatch, 1997; Sutcliffe, 2001). Modernism assumes that the world exists independently of humans’ ability to know it; the world exists as it is. “Truth” and “Reality” can be known. With apologies to Freudian psychology, it is a “sometimes a cigar is just a cigar” way of knowing and understanding the world. Modernism also presupposes that human beings, and structured aggregations of them or “coalitions of individuals” (Cyert & March, 1963, p. 27) such as

organizations, think and behave rationally. As anyone who knows a human being could say, “rationality” is not always the correct adjective for describing human (or organizational) behavior, thus exposing another flaw in modernist systems theory. It even has been contended that the behavior exhibited by such large corporations as Wal-Mart and Enron is pathological, even psychopathic, diagnoses normally reserved for human behavior (Achbar, Abbott, & Simpson, 2004; Bakan, 2004).

Many critiques of systems theory involve questions of modernism versus postmodernism and objectivism versus subjectivism. In modernist systems theory, an organization’s environment can be known objectively. That is, all organizational members can know it as the same and a well-defined boundary exists between the organization and its environment (Sutcliffe, 2001). The theory offers a relatively simple (simplistic?), objective perspective of a “concrete world” (p. 201) that can be universally understood (Hatch, 1997). A variation on this perspective is that things, like environments, can be perceived and that perceptions may differ. But once an environment is perceived as it is, it becomes reified and made real, as if it were the “objective” environment (Hatch, 1997). Perceived (i.e., reified) and objective environments differ depending on the accuracy of the perceivers (Sutcliffe, 2001).

Postmodernism disavows the notion that such things as a “concrete” world; universal understandings; and permanent, definitive boundaries exist. This subjectivist philosophy counters that knowledge is fragmented, complex, and conflicting because every individual interprets and “knows” things and phenomena through his or her filtering schemes. Boundaries are blurred. All perspectives are considered and appreciated. Weick’s (1979, 1983) enactment theory exemplifies this epistemology.

Enacted environments are constructed by organizations (through organizational members) through the processes of selective attention and meaning making. The environment is not something external to the organization that is “Real”; the environment is created by the organization and thus effectively is part of the organization and vice versa. As with perceived environments, created environments, once reified, effectively become objective: “When we enact something, there is little difference between the creation and reality” (Hatch, 1997, p. 41). Hatch clarified her point, noting that the reified environment is more likely “objectified” than objective: “It is socially constructed in a way that makes it *seem* objective” (p. 42).

J.E. Grunig (1997b) is the most prominent public relations scholar to critique systems theory, although an open-systems organizational perspective (viz., J.E. Grunig, 1992; J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) framed much of his research on public relations and its relationship to organizational effectiveness. In this book chapter (i.e., J.E. Grunig, 1997b), he zeroed in on the environment in his criticism of systems theory. Systems theory, he argued, fails to operationalize definitively the concept of “environment” and further fails to provide insight into how organizations determine which environmental elements are strategically important and which of those should be given top priority (p. 257). Rather than just criticize, J.E. Grunig offered two alternatives: his own situational theory of publics (for a detailed discussion of this important public relations segmentation theory, see J.E. Grunig, 1997a) and the strategic constituencies perspective.

This perspective helps organizations to cull through all of the elements in the environment, to determine which ones are the critical for the organization to engage and interact with, and to develop and maintain rapport. These are the strategic constituencies

— stakeholders — that represent the greatest opportunities or threats to the organization. Figuring out whom or what in the political environment is important, assigning priority to them, and interacting with them is well within the purview of organizational boundary spanners like GRPs. Their initial task is to learn of the elements (such as other organizations) that constitute the political environment.

This is a modernist endeavor because these elements exist; they are tangible: An executive administration exists, a legislative body exists, a regulatory agency exists, and an activist group exists. The boundary spanners' subsequent task, which is at least equally important, is to make judgments about which elements are important, which ones present opportunities or threats, and to what degrees. This is a subjective endeavor because it involves human beings' perceptions.

Despite its flaws, systems theory has demonstrated staying power and no alternative theory has emerged to warrant dethroning it as the dominant model for organizational theory (Sutcliffe, 2001). As “extreme” as systems theory considers the environment (“totally objective”), the way the major alternative at the other end, Weick's (1983) enactment theory, considers the environment (“totally constructed”) is just as extreme (Sutcliffe, 2001, p. 203). Perhaps the staying power of systems theory is attributable to the difficulty of understanding concepts in organizational theory such as the environment, strategies, and goals without being modernist (Hatch, 1997). As a result, these concepts really cannot be discussed apart from the modernist systems perspective.

In this study, I take a contingency theory approach to the above debate: No one epistemological perspective is universally optimal; sometimes the best way of doing or

understanding something is situational: It depends. I believe that the optimal way for understanding organizations and environments is to temper modernist systems theory with a dose of the postmodernist enactment perspective, a blended approach that even Weick (1969, 1979, 2003) likely would agree with (Sutcliffe, 2001).

Throughout this chapter, readers will see that I have taken such a blended approach to my study's conceptual framework. For example, based on my reading of Sutcliffe (2001, p. 202), I believe that organizations and stakeholders in their political environment have distinctly delineated boundaries, boundaries that are reinforced by laws related to campaign fundraising and donations, lobbying disclosure regulations, ethics rules, and conflict of interest regulations. This is an objectivist/modernist perspective. I am aware that it could be argued that the boundaries between organizations and the government are blurred thanks to, for example, the influence of money in politics and cronyism. Yet, from a purely legal standpoint, organizations and governments remain distinct entities. They can be "known" in a tangible sense. However, what an organization "thinks" about the stakeholders its political environment (e.g., are they friendly or unfriendly to the organization's goals?) is an assessment arising from the perceptions and interpretations of organizational perceivers such as boundary-spanning GRPs. This injects an element of Weickian variety subjectivism/postmodernism into my conceptual framework.

I will now discuss two of the three main elements of systems theory, organizations and environments. I will discuss the third element, boundary spanning, as part of the upcoming section on "Foundational and Middle-Range Theories in Public

Relations.” Because my study is delimited to nonprofit organizations with political interests, so too is the following discussion of organizations.

Nonprofit Organizations With Political Interests

Some organizations devote themselves to economic production, such as business firms; or the creation and distribution of political power, such as government entities; or the propagation of culture and education, such as churches (Tompkins, 1982). A fourth type of organizations, integration organizations, exists as well. These organizations, of which interest groups are an example, seek to influence and “adjust conflicts that could paralyze society” (p. 165).

The latter two organizational types (i.e., cultural and educational organizations and integration organizations) could qualify as nonprofit organizations (NPOs). Eadie (1997) estimated the existence of 1.5 million NPOs at all levels of U.S. society. NPOs, eponymously, are organizations whose existences are not driven by profit. No profits earned by an NPO can be distributed to private shareholders or individuals (Salamon, 2002). In spite of not being driven by profit, the economic importance of NPOs should not be underestimated: The nonprofit charitable organizations in southern California alone are a \$34 billion industry (Manzo & Costello, 2005).

Researchers have found varying classes of NPOs. Hall (1987) categorized NPOs as those that “perform public tasks delegates to them by the state; provide services for which there is a demand that state and for-profit organizations will not fulfill; or influence policy in the state, the for-profit sectors, or other nonprofit organizations” (p. 3). Salamon (1995) classified four types of NPOS: fundraising intermediary agencies, member-serving organizations, public benefit organizations, and religious-purposed

organizations. Douglas (1987) classified three types: those that provide a public benefit from private funds, mutual benefit organizations, and political pressure groups. L.K. Lewis et al. (2001) identified three types of NPOs: philanthropic, advocacy, and mutual benefit organizations.

IRS-Designated 501c Organizations

The federal government, in the form of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), also categorizes NPOs in Section 501c of the Internal Revenue Code. I am particularly interested in three IRS-designated categories of organizations: charitable organizations, social welfare organizations, and business leagues. These categories correspond with L.K. Lewis et al.'s (2001) typology.

501c(3) Organizations

Charitable organizations, or 501c(3) organizations, are public charities. They “operate exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, or educational purposes” (Salamon, 2002, p. 7). These primarily philanthropic NPOs may also engage in minimal levels of political- or legislative-related advocacy, but they risk their tax-exempt status if they engage in too much advocacy (IRS, 2004). There does not appear to be hard or official metrics about how much is too much advocacy although the IRS has recently stepped up its investigations of the advocacy and political activities of 501c(3) organizations (Dalrymple, 2006). For example, the Petfinder.com Foundation is a 501c(3) charitable organization. People can deduct donations to this group from their federal taxes.

501c(4) Organizations

Advocacy NPOs, or 501c(4) social welfare organizations, seek to “promote social, economic, and/or political causes” (L.K. Lewis et al., 2001, p. 8). According to the Web site of the IRS, a 501c(4) organization “must operate primarily to further the common good and general welfare of the people of the community (such as by bringing about the civic betterment and social improvements” and may primarily do so “by seeking legislation germane to the organization’s purposes” (IRS, n.d.b.). The Humane Society of the United States is an example of a 501c(4) organization because it lobbies for animal rights and welfare legislation at the federal, state, and local levels. Donations to the Humane Society are not tax-deductible.

501c(6) Organizations

Professional and trade associations are 501c(6) business league organizations. The IRS defined a business league as “an association of persons having some common business interest, the purpose of which is to promote such common interest and not to engage in a regular business of a kind ordinarily carried on for profit,” and may do so by lobbying for “legislation germane to the common business interest” (IRS, n.d.a.). A business league organization “provides benefits more or less exclusively for its members” (Douglas, 1987, p. 51), who usually share similar professional or livelihood interests. It thus qualifies as a member-serving or mutual benefit organization (L.K. Lewis et al., 2001). For example, the American Boarding Kennel Association is the 501c(6) organization that represents pet-care service businesses.

Jenkins (1987) offered yet another typology, one that is rooted in the commerciality of an NPO’s interests and to whom benefits will accrue. An organization

with non-commercial, non-economic interests benefiting the collective good is a nonprofit organization. 501c(3) and 501c(4) organizations fit this classification. Business league organizations (501c[6] organizations), which others have classified as NPOs, would not be considered so in Jenkins' typology. Benefits from trade associations accrue to their members; typically, 501c(6) organizations advocate the overarching economic interests of their members, some of whom may be competitors (in the case of trade associations [Hatch, 1997]). However, the policies that trade associations advocate may accrue benefits to those outside their memberships — an example of the “free rider” situation (Olson, 1965). The policies that may bring economic improvement for these NPOs' members may positively affect the public good. For these reasons, Jenkins' typology, although worthy of discussion here, will not be used to frame the study. The overlapping NPO typologies of Hall (1987), L.K. Lewis et al. (2001), and the IRS are most worthwhile given my purposes.

As is often the case when moving from the normative to the positive, NPOs do not always neatly fit into one category (Douglas, 1987): “Actual organizations often straddle the classes to a greater or lesser extent” (p. 51). The roles that NPOs potentially play might better capture the nature of any one NPO. An NPO could be a service provider; an advocate; a community builder; a value guardian; or a patron of interests artistic, cultural, and the like (Salamon, 2002).

The NPO-as-advocate “giv[es] voice to a wide assortment of social, political, environmental, ethnic, and community interests and concerns” (Salamon, 2002, p. 10). Further: “[A]dvocacy is a vital traditional role of nonprofit organizations. Throughout U.S. history, individuals have voiced their concerns and worked together in nonprofit

associations to shape and reshape the country's political, economic, and cultural landscape" (Boris & Krehely, 2002, p. 299).

Of particular interest to my study are certain 501c(3) charitable NPOs, 501c(4) advocacy NPOs, and 501c(6) membership-serving NPOs. I will broadly refer to them as 501c organizations from this point forward. They all enact the role of advocate, to varying degrees, on public policy issues, on behalf of the collective public good or their memberships. U.S. democracy welcomes diverse opinions in the marketplace of ideas, and so advocator 501c organizations are integral to the health of that democracy (Douglas, 1987). Jenkins (1987) would classify these as "politically recognized advocacy organizations" (p. 298) because they operate within the margins of an established political system. By contrast, "social movement organizations" operate outside those margins and thus are much further removed from the political decision-making structure.

Tesh (1984) might have considered charitable and advocacy nonprofit organizations to be "issue groups" and member-serving organizations to be "interest groups." To her, issue groups have "open or nonexclusive membership[s] and base their appeals for support in terms of 'moral convictions about the rightness of policies,'" whereas interest groups have "narrow economic interests" (as cited in Jenkins, 1987, p. 296). Walker (1983) also contrasted nonprofit issue and interest groups. He found that issue advocacy nonprofit organizations (i.e., 501c[3] and [4] organizations) frequently support public-policy objectives that would result in government expansion. 501c(6) member-serving interest groups frequently embrace "more privatistic positions,"

opposing such government-expanding policy objectives (as cited in Jenkins, 1987, p. 298).

Government Relations in 501c Organizations

Regardless of the classification scheme, public relations is a central — if not *the* central — function of 501c organizations (Mayhew, 1997). These organizations engage in many specialized public relations programs such as government relations, media relations, community relations, employee relations, and board member relations. Essentially, a specific public relations program exists for every stakeholder or sector of the environment.

Some stakeholders, such as employees or board members, can be internal. This study's focus is on an external stakeholder, namely the government. The government is a critical stakeholder of the 501c organizations included in this study. By virtue of its ability to hold sway over these organizations, the government qualifies as a strategic constituency of these organizations (L.A. Grunig et al., 1992). Public relations efforts toward the political and legal dimensions of an organization's environment are commonly referred to as government relations, public affairs, or legislative affairs programs. "Government relations" is the term I will use throughout this study.

Government relations occurs within a public relations context but is limited to an organization's political, social, and public policy interests (Cutlip et al., 2000; Toth, 1986). Thus, extrapolating from Long and Hazelton's (1987) definition of public relations, government relations could be defined as "a communication function of management through which organizations adapt, alter, or maintain their *political* environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals." This is a much more

managerial-minded definition for government relations than that of, for example, top public relations firm Burson-Marsteller: Government relations is “a strategic function that uses creatively executed tactics to help the company achieve business goals” (as quoted in Mack, 1997, p. 123).

In addition to 501c(3), 501c(4), and 501c(6) organizations, many other organizations engage in government relations efforts, including corporations, activist groups, and unions (Cutlip et al., 2000; J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This is not surprising, given that the ubiquity of government and public policies practically mandates that organizations of all varieties engage with stakeholders in their political environments.

Fundraising, donor relations, and member relations are of paramount importance to 501c organizations. These organizations depend on the generosity of individuals and institutions to fund their existences and abilities to engage in other types of specialized public relations programs. In spite of their importance to 501c organizations, these specialized public relations programs lay beyond the parameters of this study. This study’s interests are delimited to the government relations efforts (and related media relations efforts) of 501c organizations. These are the programmatic efforts of GRPs that either directly or indirectly target those stakeholders that comprise a 501c organization’s political environment.

The existence of a 501c organization depends as much on political capital as it does on financial capital. Boris and Krehely (2002) lent further insight into this delimitation: “The role of money has grown increasingly important in American politics. Yet research has shown that nonprofit public interest organizations have gained more

influence in recent years and exert considerable sway in the policy process. How can this be?” (p. 300).

The answer may lie in a 501c organization’s non-financial activities. Although many 501c organizations may not have the financial weight to throw around in the political process, they have gained weight through clever, elaborate, and professional government and media relations efforts. These organizations routinely conduct formalized research and analysis, litigate, lobby, mobilize the “grassroots” and “grasstops,” work in coalitions, use technology, and distribute campaign donations through political action committees (PACs) — all in addition to the traditional conduits for information dissemination and education (Boris & Krehely, 2002; Jenkins, 1987) as part of their government relations efforts. These efforts enable them to register more strongly on the public and political agendas to influence public-policy decisions — the ultimate mission of these organizations. Thus, fundraising, donor relations, and member relations’ efforts ultimately support a 501c organization’s comprehensive government relations efforts directed at stakeholders in the political environment.

Organizational Environments

But what is an “environment”? In this section, I aim to answer this question by reviewing both classic and contemporary literature on this element of systems theory. Terreberry’s (1968) definition of the “environment, which is outside the system boundary” (p. 606), is deceptively simple (and modernist) and echoes others’ (i.e., Duncan, 1972; Robbins, 1990) definitions. As J.E. Grunig (1997b) intimated, vague definitions like Terreberry’s are less than satisfying. Environments have multiple facets, some real, some created; they have dimension, characteristics, layers, and even texture

(Emery & Trist, 1965). They are complex and affect all aspects of organizational life (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976).

This critical concept merits explanation beyond its physical location. In fact, some (viz., Duncan, 1972) reminded readers that an internal environment exists within organizations too. Middleton (1987) offered this more appropriate definition: “Environment means all external elements that are salient to the organization as a whole, its subunits, or its members in their performance of activities that are organization-related but fall outside its authority” (p. 141).

Robbins (1983), a renowned organizational theorist, offered a similar definition: “Those institutions or forces that affect the performance of the organization, but over which the organization has little or no direct control” (pp. 142-143). His definition lacked Middleton’s (1987) idea of salience, or prominence and relevance, of certain elements. Robbins (1983, 1990) addressed salience by distinguishing between an organization’s general environment, which includes everything outside the organization but whose impact or relevance or both is questionable, and its specific environment. The latter, reflective of Middleton’s thinking, is limited to external relevancies that can immediately and significantly affect organizational life: “At any given moment, it is the part of the environment with which management will be concerned because it is made up of those critical constituencies that can positively or negatively influence the organization’s effectiveness” (Robbins, 1990, p. 206). Other researchers (Pearce & Robinson, 1982; Thompson, 1967) similarly distinguished between an organization’s remote (or general) environment and its task (or specific) environment.

Readers of this study should understand “environment” to be the organization’s specific, or task, environment. Namely, the specific environment of the 501c organizations included in this study is their political environment. It is comprised of these critical, strategic constituencies — stakeholders, which is my term of choice — and relevancies: elected and appointed government officials, their staffs, and the legal and regulatory frameworks in which they operate and which they also create, implement, and enforce. I include media as an organizational stakeholder in the political environment as well. The media arguably may influence citizens’ perceptions of political officials and policy issues (Entman, 1993; McCombs & Bell, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Dimensions of the Environment

The notion that environments have different dimensions appears to have originated in Emery and Trist’s (1965) pioneering article. There must be “something more” to organizational-environmental interaction than the process itself, they said. That “something more” is the “causal texture” of the environment: “processes in the environment itself which are among the determining conditions for exchanges” (p. 22).

Emery and Trist (1965) identified four “ideal” types of causally textured environments. The simplest is the placid-randomized environment, in which “goals and noxians (‘goods’ and ‘bads’) are relatively unchanging themselves and randomly distributed” (p. 24). Schutzenberger (1954) recommended that organizations in this environment simply address “goods” and “bads” as they arise (as cited in Emery & Trist, 1965). Goals and noxians are also present in the placid-clustered environment. Knowledge about the environment and strategy become critical components of organizational engagement with this environment.

Even more complex is the disturbed-reactive environment, which is a placid-clustered environment that includes other, similar organizations. An organization's strategic actions must reflect that goal attainment is now competitive and that "what it knows can also be known by the others" (p. 25). Interorganizational interaction makes this environment dynamic.

The most complex environment is the turbulent field. This environmental type is dynamic not only from the interorganizational interaction taking place "but also from the field itself. The 'ground' is in motion" (Emery & Trist, 1965, p. 26). The increasingly competitive demands of the disturbed-reactive environment and the "deepening interdependence between the economic and the other facets of the society" (p. 26) move the ground, so to speak. Every organizational action requires extra consideration and analysis: Is this the right action today, even if it will not be tomorrow? What reaction will the action elicit? Would today's reactions be any different from tomorrow's?

Other researchers (Duncan, 1972; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Terreberry, 1968; Thompson, 1967) simplified Emery and Trist's (1965) typology while retaining the spirit of causal texture. Environments, these researchers agreed, vary along two dimensions. The simple-complex dimension represents the "number and variety of environmental factors that organizations must consider in decision-making" (Rose, 1985, p. 323). The static-dynamic dimension is "the degree to which factors of the decision unit's internal and external environments remains basically the same over time or are in a continual process of change" (Duncan, 1972, p. 316). Crossing these dimensions results in four types of environments: static-simple, dynamic-simple, static-complex, and dynamic-complex.

Lauzen and Dozier (1992) translated Duncan's (1972) two dimensions into the language of public relations. In this language, the simple-complex dimension becomes the "range of publics that are of interest or concern to the organization" (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992, p. 211). The static-dynamic dimension becomes "the degree to which attitudes, behaviors, and membership of key publics change over a specified period of time" (p. 211).

The Construct of Uncertainty

Duncan (1972) argued that the static-dynamic dimension, the more important of the two dimensions, has two subdimensions. The subdimension of stability-instability is the environment's sameness or changeability, as apparent in his definition of the static-dynamic dimension. The other subdimension, frequency- infrequency, is less apparent. It is "the frequency with which decision unit members take into consideration new and different internal and/or external factors in the decision-making process" (pp. 316-317). The levels of stability and frequency determine the actual level of uncertainty in the dynamic-complex environment, which already has the most uncertainty of the four configurations. Organizations in environments that are turbulent — meaning agitated and tumultuous — must continually contend with uncertainty.

The construct of uncertainty is an important one because it is central to understanding organizational decision-making and organizational survival. Uncertainty is a function of the stability, complexity, homogeneity, dispersion, consensus, and turbulence in the environment (Aldrich, 1979; Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Duncan, 1972; J.E. Grunig, 1984). Rose (1985) called it a "form of tension on the organization-environment linkage" (p. 324). Uncertainty, in the form of political and social tension, is

always a factor between NPOs and governments (DeHoog & Racanska, 2003), an observation particularly applicable to this study.

Other researchers have added their own ideas to the construct of uncertainty. For Duncan (1972), the lack of critical information about a specific situation; the inability to gauge the stakes, or risks, to an organization facing that situation; and the inability to judge the odds of the success or failure of decision options are important components of uncertainty. Higher uncertainty seems to correlate with less predictability. Uncertainty, Thompson (1967) said, arises from three sources: “the lack of cause/effect understanding in the culture at large,” that “outcomes of organizational action are in part determined by the actions of elements of the environment,” and organizational-environmental interdependency (p. 159).

Uncertainty compels an organization to learn about and interact with its environment, in a bid to reduce that uncertainty. This is the strategic reduction of uncertainty approach (M. Taylor, Vasquez, & Doorley, 2003). Since the 1970s, research on organizational-environmental interaction has “become fashionable” (Weick, 1977, p. 267), as evidenced by the numerous researchers on the subject (e.g., see Finet, 1993, for a list that includes Aldrich, 1979; Emery & Trist, 1965; Hannan & Freeman, 1978; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; and Thompson, 1967). This may be partially attributable to the blurring of where an organization ends and the environment begins in the open-systems (think “permeable boundary”) perspective (Baum & Rowley, 2002). In fact, some scholars conceptualized the boundary between an organization and its environment as a zone or region rather than as a line (Harris, 1997; Leifer & Delbecq, 1978).

Organizational Learning

Environmental jolts, which cause or compound uncertainty, are also Petri dishes for organizational learning (A.D. Meyer, 1982). As Louisa May Alcott, the famed 19th century American writer, once said, “I’m not afraid of storms, for I’m learning to sail my ship” (as quoted in J.J. Lewis, 2004). Her point as applied to this discussion: Through environmental turbulence and uncertainty come organizational learning.

Assuming that knowledge becomes ingrained in the organization’s “brain,” the organization will apply that knowledge to change positively the outcome of subsequent attempts. Other organizations may also learn from this organization’s experience, because learning springs from both direct and indirect experiences. Neuroscientists recently found that the human brain reacts in the same way whether a person makes a mistake him- or herself or watches another person make a mistake (“Study: Brain Sees Others’ Mistakes as Own,” 2004), arguably lending scientific support to the truism that people can learn from others’ mistakes. It flows logically that organizations could learn perhaps as much from their experiences as from other organizations’ experiences. Curiously, however, organizational learning research tends to explore organizations’ direct experiences (Baum & Rowley, 2002).

Subjectivity, Perceptions, and Implicit Associations

Sutcliffe (2001) envisioned environmental uncertainty as a function of the quality and quantity of information available about the environment. This point dovetails nicely with Hatch’s (1997) reminder about the role of people in environmental uncertainty: “Environments do not feel uncertain, people do” (p. 89). Organizational boundary spanners — people — perceive uncertainty when, for example, the quantity or quality of

information about the environment is lacking, thus making it difficult for predictions and decisions to be made about goings-on in the environment. People are uncertain about the environment rather than the environment itself being inherently uncertain. Boundary spanners' perceptions of uncertainty in the environment affect the decisions made by organizational decision-makers about the actions appropriate for engaging with this environment (Sutcliffe, 2001). Harris (1997) also studied uncertainty and the influence boundary spanners wield. Boundary spanners' abilities to effectively manage uncertain situations make them influential within the organization, not the sheer existence (or perception) of uncertain situations.

Dimensions determine the level of environmental uncertainty, so dimensions and uncertainty would also be defined through the eyes of organizational personnel (Duncan, 1972). Rose (1985) said environmental textures, or dimensions, "exist for organizations only as perceived" (p. 323). Perception is individually subjective because it "is a process in which the perceiver constructs reality by performing cognitive operations on cues derived from the environment" (Kiesler & Sproull, 1982, p. 552). Theoretically, the number of environments perceived could equal the number of organizational personnel who perceive. It is also possible that not one of these perceptions accurately represents the actual, or objective, environment, if such an environment even exists.

Weick (1969, 1979, 1983) believed that environments are "enacted," or identified and brought to life, by boundary spanners as they purposively select and subjectively synthesize information about the environment. Boundary spanners construct and make meaning of environments (Baum & Rowley, 2002), thus making environments "real," through the process of reification. Organizational members rely on these enactments to

make decisions about how to engage with the environment (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; White & Dozier, 1992).

Here is a scenario of how boundary spanners may do this and the implications for the organization: An environmental 501c organization assumes it may achieve great success in influencing public policy under a Democrat administration. Thus, it might set relatively lofty legislative goals for itself. However, under a Republican administration, it may downgrade the loftiness of its goals because it would assume that whatever constitutes “success” would need to be downgraded. If readers of this dissertation are familiar with Gladwell’s (2005) *Blink*, implicit association tests, or Harvard University’s Project Implicit, the assumption I have used above (that a Democrat administration would be friendlier with environmental interests and a Republican administration with business interests), probably seems “right.”

Implicit associations are the connections people quickly and unconsciously make “between pairs of ideas that are already related in our minds than we do between pairs of idea that are unfamiliar to us” (Gladwell, 2005, p. 77). In one of the simplest examples in his book, Gladwell challenged readers to categorize a list of first names as either male or female. This is easily done with names like John, Bob, Amy, and Holly (he used these names and others). He then proceeded with not-as-simple examples that demonstrated that people much more readily associate the “female” with domestic and family concerns and the “male” with professional and monetary concerns.

I was unable to find an implicit association test on the Project Implicit Web site (<http://implicit.harvard.edu>) that specifically dealt with political issues and political parties. I have taken the liberty of creating my own simple implicit association test to

show how people, like the readers of this dissertation, quickly and unconsciously make assumptions about and positive associations between political issues or interest groups and political parties. Please sort as quickly as possible —without thinking— each of the issues listed in the middle into either the column labeled “Democrat” or the column labeled “Republican.”

Democrat

Republican

Women
 Small business owners
 Oil and gas industry
 Racio-ethnic minorities
 Corporations
 Christian religious groups
 Anti-smoking groups
 Men
 Jewish religious groups
 Small business owners
 Trial lawyers
 Children
 Right to privacy
 Gays and lesbians
 Building and construction companies
 Environmentalists
 Tax reform
 “Small” government
 Tort reform
 Immigration reform
 “Big” government
 Culture of life
 Hollywood

I suspect that readers were quickly able to sort the items listed in the middle into either of the two columns and did so without too much difficulty. As Gladwell’s (2005) subtitle says, people make these categorizations “without thinking.” These unconscious associations — or assumptions — function as heuristic devices, thus sparing humans from having to think actively about every last little thing. For example, I bet that readers

likely associated labor unions, Jewish religious groups, and Hollywood with Democrats, and the oil and gas industry, tort reform, and the culture of life with Republicans. My point is that the people responsible for trying to make sense of their organizations' political environments also deal with implicit associations and that they likely will make associations similar to readers' associations.

Thus, it is easy to understand how labor union lobbyists in Maryland would likewise associate their union's interests with "friendly" Democrats. They would instinctively feel trepidation about the union's chances of enacting collective bargaining legislation with a Republican, and presumably unfriendly, governor in office. Conversely, lobbyists for a trade association for the oil and gas industry, who associates their organization's interests as more aligned with Republicans than Democrats, might have the gut feeling that the organization will be more successful in pushing its political agenda with a Republican governor in office than with a Democrat. These feelings, these perceptions, would likely affect the goals set by the organization for the coming legislative session and the strategies and actions by which those goals are pursued.

Sometimes, implicit associations are accurate: In a recent *Washington Post* article about the proliferation of corporate lobbyists in Washington, DC, the director of government affairs for a major corporation boasted: "We're trying to take advantage of the fact that Republicans control the House, the Senate, and the White House. There is an opportunity here for business community to make its case and be successful" (as quoted in Birnbaum, 2005, p. A1). Birnbaum also observed that in this Republican-dominated federal political environment, "all-Republican lobbying firms have boosted their rates the most" (p. A1). Thus, the implicit association that Republicans are more

business-friendly than Democrats is at least substantiated by these and other anecdotes sprinkled throughout Birnbaum's article. I provided several Maryland-specific anecdotes that speak to this in the "Maryland, My Maryland" section of Chapter 1.

However, implicit associations, although useful and sometimes correct, are fallible and sometimes unreliable because they are based on generalizations (perhaps grossly so). They are not unlike stereotypes, which are notoriously and frequently incongruent with how things or individual people are. Remember my example that Democrats are associated as being more aligned with environmental issues? To demonstrate just how fallible implicit associations can be, take a guess — wild or educated — about which of these U.S. presidents is considered to be the "greenest" (Sussman & Daynes, 2004): Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, or G.W. Bush? The answer is not found among the four Democrat presidents (Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, and Clinton). The correct answer, almost counterintuitively, is Richard M. Nixon, a Republican. During his administration, he endorsed the first Earth Day; established the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Citizens' Advisory Committee on the Environment, the Environmental Quality Control Council, and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration; expanded the National Park System; signed amendments to the Clean Air Act and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act; and enacted the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the Coastal Zone Management Act (Sussman & Daynes, 2004). All of this "green" happened through the signature of President Nixon, whom I daresay the majority of Americans would associate with many things, none of which have anything to do with the environment. I end this

diversion by cautioning readers about relying on implicit associations as gospel: To assume is to make an a** out of you and me.

As the last few paragraphs have illustrated, perceived environments may be largely inaccurate representations of the actual environment. But organizations that perceive inaccurately are in good company because no one organization has a monopoly on environmental misperception (Starbuck, Greve, & Hedberg, 1978). Yet Aldrich and Pfeffer (1976) advised that environmental misperceptions matter only if the perceptual gap is significantly jeopardizing. When the misperceived differences are critical, organizations may say or do the wrong thing, which may have serious implications for the organization: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas, 1949, p. 301). Nonetheless, Robbins (1990) concluded, “it is the perceived environment that counts” (p. 208).

Aldrich (1979) identified a curious gap in the literature: What causes accurate perceptions of the environment and what are the results of such accurate perceptions? The literature said that inaccurate perceptions are often attributed to humans’ inherent subjectivity (e.g., implicit associations [Gladwell, 2005]) and constraints of the organizational system (Aldrich, 1979; Rose, 1985). My assumption is that accurate perceptions may be a function of the quality of the members of one’s social circle and the quality of the information that members share and exchange. I discuss social circles in this next section.

Environments as Interorganizational Networks

Another popular modernist approach to understanding organizational environments is as an interorganizational network (Hatch, 1997). An organization’s

environment is comprised of elements, whether conceptualized as and termed organizations, strategic constituencies, publics, or stakeholders. I prefer and continue to use the term “stakeholders.” These stakeholders, which are affected by an organization and which also affect the levels of effectiveness and success achieved by that organization, form that organization’s environment. Because of these mutual consequences, the organization and its stakeholders are linked to each other and thus must interact with each other. Extrapolating from that, those organizational stakeholders would then be linked to and interact with each other (Springston, Keyton, Leichty, & Metzger, 1992). Together, the organization (an element in the environment as well) and all of these linked interacting stakeholders form an interorganizational network. This is a useful approach for understanding the communication and actions that occur between, and the “reciprocal influence” of, organizations and environments (Sutcliffe, 2001, p. 221).

DeHoog and Racanska (2003) examined the interactions and relationships between NPOs in Slovakia and the critical stakeholder in their task environment, the Slovakian government. They were interested in how the political and social tensions inherent in NPO-government relationships were manifested in this democratizing former Eastern-bloc nation. They found that Slovakian NPOs mitigated this tension by enacting Salamon’s (1995) three roles of NPOs. As opponents, NPOs offered alternative opinions and policies. As agents of the state, NPOs provided services and programs on behalf of the government. As partners, NPOs and the government cooperated on services, programs, and public policy issues. DeHoog and Racanska cited communication, particularly dialogue, as a critical factor in the partner role.

Interdependency

Organizational-environmental interaction exists because of dependence, as postulated by Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) resource dependency theory. An organization's dependence on the environment is a function of both an environmental stakeholder's ability to provide something — an input like information — that the organization needs, as well as the organization's ability to procure that information from elsewhere (Thompson, 1967). Dependence constrains organization's autonomy and increases its vulnerability (Robbins, 1990). Dependence may also threaten the organization's abilities to survive and succeed (Thompson, 1967). This theory posits that an organization should behave so it becomes less dependent. Such behaviors may result in decreased constraints on its autonomy, decreased vulnerability, and increased abilities to survive and succeed. This “information-flow approach” to resource dependency theory illustrates, in a modernist way, how organizations monitor and interpret their dynamic-complex environments and then make strategic, fitting decisions (Aldrich, 1979; Terreberry, 1968). Aldrich (1979) also noted organizations put a premium on efforts to procure informational inputs given increased environmental dynamism and complexity.

Organizations thus must mitigate dependency, which is actually interdependency. An environmental stakeholder on which an organization depends likely could be another organization, one that is reciprocally dependent. As Tompkins (1982) reminded, “The most important part of an organization's environment is other organizations” (p. 172). This point is particularly relevant given this study's focus on the interdependency between Maryland 501c organizations with political interests and stakeholder organizations that comprise its political environment, specifically the Office of the

Governor of Maryland and the executive-branch agencies and departments under its control, and the Maryland General Assembly (i.e., the House of Delegates and Senate).

Goal Re-Evaluation

Understanding organizational-environmental interdependence is similar to understanding interorganizational relationships. Terreberry (1965) identified four approaches for analyzing interorganizational relationships. Three of these are most appropriate for nonturbulent or tranquil environmental conditions, in which interdependence and attendant concerns about organizational survival are minimal. The fourth approach, as suggested by Thompson and McEwen (1958), situates interorganizational relationships in a context of high organizational-environmental interdependence. This approach “emphasize[s] the interdependence of organizations with the larger society and discuss[es] the consequences that this has for goal setting” (Terreberry, 1965, p. 605).

Interdependence may require the organization occasionally to re-evaluate its goals, especially given a dynamic environment. As I have noted, implicit associations about stakeholders that constrain or buffet organizational goals may also prompt goal re-evaluation. Thompson and McEwen (1958) argued that goal reassessment is “more difficult as the ‘product’ of the enterprise becomes less tangible” (p. 24). This observation is particularly relevant given that the “products” of organizations considered in this study are changes in public policy. Public-policy changes exist in the abstract; they are intangible, rather than tangible. Rethinking a goal related to the enactment of an environmental law, for example, is arguably more abstruse and challenging than rethinking a goal related to the production of widgets.

At the end of Chapter 1, I explained the jolt to Maryland's political environment (i.e., the 2002 election of the Republican Ehrlich as the state's governor). With that serving as the background context, combined with the conceptual framework I have thus far constructed in Chapter 2, I present the first set of theory questions:

TQ1a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their organizations' perceptions of the jolt?

TQ1b: How did the jolt affect organizations' perceptions of their political environment?

Foundational and Middle-Range Public Relations Theories

The Excellence theory of public relations, a dominant metatheory of the discipline, explains the fundamental characteristics of an excellent — “managerial, strategic, symmetrical, diverse, and ethical” — public relations function and its contributions to organization effectiveness (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 306; see also Dozier et al., 1995; J.E. Grunig, 1992). It is both a normative and a positive theory because it predicts, describes, and explains public relations practice. The Excellence theory was born of a two-decade long research project sponsored by the International Association of Business Communicators' Research Foundation. This project entailed compiling an extensive literature review (viz., J.E. Grunig, 1992) and conducting quantitative and qualitative research with public relations professionals and top-level executives in organizations located in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (viz., Dozier et al., 1995; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). The research and scholarly output of the Excellence team have spawned innumerable research studies and scholarly commentary about the Excellence theory (J.E. Grunig, 2001; Sallot, Lyon, Acosta-

Alzuru, & K.O. Jones, 2003). It is as if an entire industry based on the Excellence theory exists.

The Excellence study isolated characteristics of public relations programs, public relations departments, organizations, and organizational environments that foster the excellence of organizations' public relations endeavors. Having excellent public relations is important, financially and otherwise, because it contributes to organizational effectiveness by negotiating rapport between the organization and its internal and external stakeholders (L.A. Grunig, J.E. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992). The full complement of Excellence characteristics can be placed into four categories: empowerment of the public relations function; communicator roles; models of public relations; and organization of the communication function, relationship to other functions, and use of consulting firms (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). Some of the characteristics found in the former three categories (specifically those involving worldviews, symmetry, roles, and models) inform this study. The activities and efforts of government relations programs and professionals should not be substantively different from those of public relations programs and professionals except in that these activities and efforts would be focused on an organization's stakeholders in the political environment.

However, I must note that government relations has been found to be a unique form of public relations. It tends not to correlate with some theoretical indicators of excellent public relations as other specialized forms of public relations — such as media, employee, or member relations — do (Dozier, et al., 1995; L.A. Grunig, et al., 2002). Researchers on the Excellence project speculated that these weaker correlations may occur because the people who head government relations programs often do not have

professional backgrounds in public relations and that these programs may operate independently from an organization's comprehensive communication or public relations function. Researchers speculated about another reason for the anomaly of government relations, a point that I will revisit later in the paper: the dependence of GRPs on their network of contacts in the political environment (Dozier et al., 1995).

Worldviews in Public Relations

J.E. Grunig and White (1992) offered an entire chapter on worldviews, specifically what they are and their implications for public relations thinking and practice. Worldviews are variously described as mindsets, paradigms, perceptual screens, epistemological assumptions and beliefs (Magee, 2004), conceptual frameworks, and schema that people — or organizations — use to organize and make sense of their reality (J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). Worldviews can also be described as ideologies, “relatively coherent sets of beliefs that bind people together and explain their world in terms of cause and effect relations” (Beyer, 1981, p. 166).

The concept of worldviews is the agar of the Excellence theory; the caveat is that organizations that embrace symmetrically presupposed worldviews nurture public relations excellence. The possession of a symmetrically presupposed worldview implies that that organization is open minded toward and respectful of “others.” Organizations with symmetrically presupposed worldviews appreciate that they have consequences on others and vice versa. The appreciation of such interdependence obliges them to seek balance among all parties' interests, which can be attempted, if not achieved, through dialogue and “collaborative advocacy” (Spicer, 1997).

A symmetrically presupposed worldview embraces the organization's existence as an open system and understands that rapport between an organization and its environment (or rather, stakeholders that comprise its environment) constantly needs to be negotiated. Symmetrically presupposed organizations also value innovation, equity, autonomy, decentralized management, responsibility to others, conflict resolution, and interest-group liberalism (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). To contrast, an internal orientation, a closed system, efficiency, elitism, conservatism, tradition, and centralized authority (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992) mark organizations with asymmetrically presupposed worldviews.

Cultural Topoi

Leichty and Warner (2001) offered the cultural-topoi perspective as a means of organizational openness to worldviews different from the organization's own. They defined a cultural topos as "a systematic line of assumptions and arguments that reinforces a preferred pattern of social relationships. [It] emerges out of a core rhetorical vision of the way in which the universe is" (p. 62). In other words, cultural topoi are worldviews. Public relations professionals should "detach" themselves from their cultural topoi and those of their organization to optimally mediate organizational-environmental interdependence. The concern for detached professionals is that their "mixed motives" may cause other organizational members to question the professionals' loyalty (J.E. Grunig & White, 1992).

An organization possessing a symmetrically presupposed worldview would be more amenable to having detached, or "divorced," public relations professionals than would an asymmetrically presupposed organization. The organization realizes that such a

divorce will facilitate the flow of information across the organizational boundary, which is ultimately advantageous to the organization (Sriramesh & White, 1992). A professional who is wedded voluntarily or forcibly to organizational topoi, as could be expected in organizations with asymmetrically presupposed worldviews, will suffer from tunnel vision, an inability to “see” the existence or merits of other extra-organizational cultural topoi. Call it blindness or elitism, in this scenario (or worldview) the organization loses valuable inputs from the environment. It suffers as a result.

Organizational Ideology

Beyer (1981) argued that organizational ideology influences how an organization engages with its environment. Likewise, A.D. Meyer (1982) suggested that organizational ideology is a significant factor in organizations’ amenability to engage. He defined organizational ideology as “constellations of shared beliefs that bind values to actions” (p. 522). He found that a hospital workers’ strike less adversely affected hospitals with positive organizational ideologies, as seen in the openness of their dealings with their environments and members, than hospitals with negative ideologies. Further, these “positive” hospitals demonstrated greater resiliency, or ability to bounce back after the strike, than did “negative” hospitals. His description of a positive organizational ideology corresponds to the concept of a symmetrically presupposed organizational worldview, whereas a negative ideology corresponds to an asymmetrically presupposed organizational worldview.

Requisite Variety

Weick’s (1979) concept of requisite variety reasoned that if an organization’s internal environment reflects the diversity, or variety, of its external environment, it then

can engage more effectively with its environment than if the internal environment does not reflect external diversity. Simply put, the organization's inside should reflect its outside, like a microcosm. In the Excellence theory, the principle of requisite variety is usually presented in terms of the gender and racio-ethnicities of an organization's public relations professionals (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). The principle of requisite variety could be expanded to include cultural topoi. Organizations would not necessarily need to match internally the external variety of worldviews, but they should be respectful of and receptive to these different worldviews. J.E. Grunig (2001) alluded to this when he argued for the ethicality of communicating with "morally repugnant" groups (p. 15). Successful public relations professionals acknowledge and learn from perspectives and topoi that they themselves do not embrace (Springston, Keyton, Leichty, & Metzger, 1992). Culbertson (1989) called this "breadth of perspective" (p. 3).

Manifestations of Worldviews

Worldviews are manifested in several ways throughout organizations, including how they communicate with and behave toward those with whom they are interdependent. Here is how the symmetrically presupposed worldview is manifested in organizations with excellent public relations. First, the organizational decision-makers, or dominant coalition, will highly value the public relations function as a mechanism for managing interdependence (and thus, government relations programs for managing the organization's interdependence with stakeholders in its political environment). This then empowers the function, and its professionals, to be managerial rather than technical. A technical public relations function performs the craft and tactical activities of public relations: informal research, writing, editing, special-event planning, and the like.

Technicians do the work necessary to implement the communication-related organizational decisions and plans made by others. Decisions they make are of the procedural variety at the program or campaign level (Lauzen, 1994). Nevertheless, the value of technicians' work should not be underestimated because their expertise is essential, more so given the presence of managerial expertise, to organizations with excellent public relations (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002).

Managers contemplate, strategize, and participate in these decisions and plans that steer the organization. Organizations with excellent public relations value public relations professionals who strategically manage public relations programs, engage in formal research and strategic planning, and are either directly or indirectly involved in the organization's decision-making processes (J.E. Grunig, 1992). They are involved in policy decisions at the organizational level and thus have the potential to wield more influence within the organization than would their technician counterparts (Lauzen, 1994). According to the Excellence theory, these managers may directly report to senior management or may participate directly or indirectly in the dominant coalition. This reflects an internal orientation. They understand the concept of symmetry and its application to public relations, which reflects an external orientation. Having both of these orientations results in a public relations professional, nay, manager who is a boundary spanner — someone who can mediate between those orientations.

A worldview is a multifaceted concept. I try to delimit my use of the term to one facet: the symmetry or asymmetry of the thinking, communication, and behavior of informants and their organizations. I rely on the term "cultural topoi" to refer to the other

facets of worldviews such as political perspectives, perceptual screens, and ideologies of informants (the other facets of worldviews) and organizations.

An organization's worldview pervades all aspects of its operations, steeping organizational members like boundary spanners in it. As such, the second set of theory questions is about worldviews:

TQ2a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe the worldviews of their organizations?

TQ2b: How did the jolt affect the worldviews of their organizations?

Models of Public Relations Practice

Near-encyclopedic amounts of original research, contemplations, and critiques have been written about the four original models of public relations practice: press agency/ publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical (J.E. Grunig, 2001). These four models, which are “simplified representations of the world” (Lave & March, 1993, p. 19), form a useful schema for describing and explaining the positive and normative practices of public relations (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Originally, two variables combined to form the models: the directionality of the communication (one-way, flowing outward from the organization to its stakeholders; or two-way, flowing between them) and the degree of symmetry (“the degree to which collaboration and advocacy described public relations strategy or behavior” [J.E. Grunig, 2001, p. 29]) or asymmetry (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). J.E. Grunig (2001) evolved the models to reflect their four “underlying variables” (p. 29). The original two variables, directionality and symmetry, remain. The new variables represent the use of mediated and interpersonal communication and the ethicality of the public relations practice.

Asymmetry and Symmetry

The variable of interest here is the asymmetry or symmetry of an organization's communication. Asymmetrically presupposed communication attempts to achieve an outcome that is desired by and favorable to the organization. An imbalance that favors the organization is the goal. In this approach, stakeholders are "used" to advance the goals of the organization; their input may be solicited but is unlikely to be incorporated into the organization's decision-making process. Unfortunately, in reality, organizations may tend to rely more on asymmetrically presupposed strategies (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) when communicating with their stakeholders.

Symmetrically presupposed communication entails the mutual, balanced exchange of information and influence between an organization and its stakeholders. From such meaningful and substantive dialogue, the theory postulates that an understanding between the parties will emerge. Out of this understanding, organization-environmental engagement can be managed. This falls under the purview of organizational public relations professionals, in their managerial-level boundary-spanning capacities, and of the dominant coalition, to which the professionals either belong or have access. An example of symmetrically presupposed communication, or dialogue as J.E. Grunig (2001) clarified it, would be routinely held meetings between activist groups and corporations during which the groups are consulted for their input on issues of mutual concern.

J.E. Grunig (2001) and L.A. Grunig et al. (2002) have put to rest confusion about the two-way symmetrical model. As others have, Murphy (1991) equated this model with games of pure cooperation or accommodation; the organization sacrifices its own

interests for the sake of stakeholders' interests. She posited a mixed-motive model that balanced symmetry and asymmetry to reconcile the tension between the interests of an organization and those of its stakeholders. J.E. Grunig asserted that this is in fact how he conceptualized the two-way symmetrical model all along, as a blending of asymmetrical and symmetrical motivations. The two-way symmetrical model is a mixed-motive model.

The two-way symmetrical model does involve accommodation to a degree, but in the sense that organizations and stakeholders must be willing to entertain and perhaps give some ground to other interests beside their own. The model involves advocacy and collaboration, just as Spicer's (1997) mixed-motive model that he called "collaborative advocacy" does. I will refer to the "two-way symmetrical model" as the "two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model" from this point forward in this dissertation. I do so to reinforce understanding of that this model is indeed a model of mixed-motives, not pure accommodation.

But more than anything, the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model is about the process (Spicer, 1997), not the outcome, of dialogue (J.E. Grunig, 2001) and collaboration (J.E. Grunig & L.A. Grunig, 1992). In the two-way asymmetrical model, organizations influence, even manipulate, stakeholders. The two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model offers an opportunity for organizations and stakeholders to influence each other (in addition to learning about each other and exchanging information). Through boundary spanners, organizations and stakeholders can exchange influence, which is "the ability to affect the outcome of decisions" (Jemison, 1984, p. 133). This model gives stakeholders "true" voice; the two-way

asymmetrical model gives stakeholders “false” voice; the two one-way models render them mute. It is the *process* of the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model that makes it inherently ethical, not that the model leads to ethical outcomes (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002).

The degrees of dynamism and complexity in the political environment determine the constraints and uncertainty with which an organization must contend. In terms of the public relations models, constraints affect symmetry whereas uncertainty affects directionality (J.E. Grunig, 1984; L.A. Grunig, 1992).

The constraint-symmetry relationship is curvilinear (J.E. Grunig, 1984). Constraints limit the self-determination, or autonomy, of organizations. In a moderately constraining political environment, organizations should be motivated to be more symmetrical, to collaborate and engage in dialogue with legislators and other elected officials, for example, to show that the organization is or can be “good.” When facing no or few constraints, organizations may rely on asymmetry simply because they can. They can dominate their environment, through asymmetry, because the environment is unable to constrain the organizations. In a highly constraining environment, organizations will likewise employ asymmetrically presupposed communication because, since it is already so constrained, it neither has anything to lose by doing so, nor anything to gain with symmetrically presupposed communication.

If a goal of a 501c organization is to influence governmental officials to support its stances on policy issues, then in a sense these officials constrain the organization’s ability to accomplish that goal. In an environment where the officials favorably consider the group, the officials should be receptive to the group’s efforts to effect policy.

Moderate constraints exist. Nevertheless, the organization, employing appropriate, symmetrically presupposed advocacy efforts, enjoys a positive relationship with the constrainers. But what if the reception or relationship is less than warm? What if the environment is highly constraining? Jenkins (1987) implied that organizations would resort to asymmetry:

If, however, [the 501c organization] advocates interests that are routinely ignored or, worse still, deliberately excluded in centers of political decision-making, then the reception will be problematic and the organization may find it necessary to use more unconventional tactics. (p. 298)

Highly constrained organizations may feel backed into a corner; asymmetrically presupposed communication strategies are their way of acting out.

Uncertainty and directionality enjoy a direct relationship. As uncertainty increases, organizations should increasingly rely on the two two-way models. As uncertainty decreases, the two one-way models would be sufficient (J.E. Grunig, 1984; L.A. Grunig, 1992). This, however, is a particularly myopic strategy for organizations in dynamic-complex environments, which are characterized by fluctuating levels of uncertainty. Relying on the two two-way models would serve any organization well, regardless of the level of uncertainty in its environment.

As I have said, because organizational-environmental interdependence exists, an organization must address changes in its environment. This may entail the organization itself changing, or adapting; the organization attempting to change, or alter, the environment; or attempts to maintain the interdependence as is. When an organization is adapting to its environment, it theoretically will rely on the public information and two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive models. These models embrace a symmetrically presupposed worldview, as does the notion of adaptation to an extent. Alteration is an

attempt to control or manipulate the environment to change to befit the organization, clearly reflective of an asymmetrically presupposed worldview. Fittingly, alteration endeavors likely will employ the press agency and two-way asymmetrical models (J.E. Grunig, 1984; L.A. Grunig, 1992). Regardless of the type of organizational change, Lauzen and Dozier (1992) added that dynamic, complex environments require the two two-way models of public relations.

Unfortunately, it is not so simple as matching models to environments. J.E. Grunig and L.A. Grunig (1989) contended that organizations might employ individualistic public relations strategies, rather than a one-model-fits-all public relations strategy. Different stakeholders (i.e., legislators, journalists, or activist groups) or different programs (i.e., government relations, media relations, or community relations) may require different models of public relations (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). The Grunigs' research explained Lauzen and Dozier's (1992) finding of the "consistent but weak" (p. 211) relationship between the organization's environment and the model of public relations it practiced. Organizations were likely practicing more than one model of public relations because of their numerous and differentiated stakeholders.

Two Other Models of Public Relations Practice

Two variations of the original four models were initially found overseas (J.E. Grunig, L.A. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995) and then in the United States (J.E. Grunig, 2001; Johnson, 1992; Simone [a.k.a Tuite], 1999). J.E. Grunig's (2001) re-envisioning of the original models should not affect the legitimacy of these variations.

The cultural interpreter model describes how some organizations hire public relations professionals who are part of or otherwise familiar with a nation or a culture

(and its language, customs, mores, and the like) as organizational “ambassadors.” The cultural interpreter model embodies Weick’s (1979) concept of requisite variety.

Simone (a.k.a. Tuite, 1999) agreed with others (e.g., Mack, 1997; Wexler, 1989) who found Washington, DC, to be a unique microculture. It is a political village, located “inside the Beltway,” whose citizens have their own language and rules about gossip and are somewhat xenophobic about those from “outside the Beltway.” That government relations programs often are exceptions to the “rule” of the Excellence theory has been attributed to GRPs’ reliance on their network of contacts. The personal influence model describes how a professional’s personal and professional network of contacts — his or her social circle (Kadushin, 1968) — is integral to an organization’s public relations efforts.

Simone (a.k.a. Tuite, 1999) found anecdotally that these two models, as practiced in politics and government relations in Washington, DC, are used in tandem. The previous jobs of that study’s participants acculturated them to the culture of the village that is Washington, DC, and facilitated their relationships with its citizens. These participants in fact were fully assimilated citizens.

The personal influence model relates back to the earlier discussion of organizational dependency. Organizational interdependency is managed not by organizations but by people. Hatch (1997) suggested using interpersonal relationships between members of an organization and members of stakeholder organizations as one method for managing interdependency.

The links between these interacting stakeholders “represent channels through which resources, information, opportunities, and influence flow” (Hatch, 1997, p. 65).

Hatch used the term “channels” in its literal sense. But channels in the figurative sense are the people, namely boundary spanners, who function as the intermediaries of resources, information, opportunities, and influence among the stakeholders in an interorganizational network. These people communicate. How these people from different organizations in the network communicate with each other affects the linkages among their organizations (Manev & Stevenson, 2001). Of course, this communication in the “interindividual” network occurs within the context of their organizations’ relationship as well (Manev & Stevenson, 2001).

Once again, it is important to not become ensnared in the anthropomorphization trap: Organizations do not perceive, communicate, make decisions, or act. Organizations are comprised of people — boundary spanners — who do. Likewise, the environment is comprised of other organizations, which of course are themselves comprised of people. So ultimately, when scholars and I write of organizations and environments, we are writing about people.

With the foundation of an interorganizational network built on the information flow and communication between boundary-spanning individuals at different organizations, that interindividual network could be understood as a social circle. Weedman (1992) used the concept of social circles to study the communication channels between boundary spanners. Her definition of a social circle, “a set of individuals connected to one another by some form of social choice” (p. 258), drew from the work of social network theorist Charles Kadushin. According to Kadushin (1968), in a social circle:

- The interaction and connections between individuals in the circle can be direct or indirect (i.e., through a third party or mutual friend), and

- Circle members have something in common, such as a political interest.

Kadushin (1968) emphasized the informal nature of the social circle. Social circles do not have “clear leaders. . .clearly defined goals. . .definite rules for interaction. . .[or] distinct criteria for membership” (p. 692). Presumably members of work-related social circles discuss their jobs and thus share and exchange knowledge and insights. Once information is introduced into the network, it may be communicated grapevine-style around the network: Person A shares a tidbit with Person B, who passes that information on to persons C and D, and so on throughout the network. Weedman (1992) said the significance of social circles lies in this assumption, that one member’s information and intelligence can be communicated and transferred throughout the network. This assumption also underlies the importance and power of communicating through informal channels — people from different organizations who are linked through a social circle. Manev and Stevenson (2001) concurred: “Some of the external work ties through which business communication flows can be quite stable and lasting, and they are often critical for the organization, such as relationships with. . .a government agency” (p. 187).

It may seem simpler to examine interorganizational networks as refracted through an interindividual level, social-circle perspective than as refracted through an organizational-level perspective. But simpler it may not be; relationships among human beings represent “the highest level of systems complexity” (Bivins, 1992, p. 366; Borden, 1985, as cited in Bivins, 1992).

Based on the preceding discussion of the models of public relations practice, I offer this set of theory questions:

TQ3a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their communication practices with their organizations' political stakeholders?

TQ3b: How did the jolt affect their communication practices with their organizations' political stakeholders?

Boundary Spanning

Public affairs, which I have established as a synonym for government relations (a specialized form of public relations), is a boundary-spanning function (Toth, 1986) between the organization and its political environment and stakeholders. Springston and Leichty (1994) noted that “those who work with publics” (p. 697) are boundary spanners. Nevertheless, transitive arguments do not need to be employed to assert confidently that public relations is a boundary-spanning function. Many theorists and researchers conclude as much (Everett, 1993; J.E. Grunig, 1991; J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; L.A. Grunig, 1987; Mayhew, 1997; Newsom, A. Scott, & Turk, 1989).

This study maintains that public relations is the function through which an organization engages with strategic stakeholders in its environment, to achieve some degree of rapport between the organization and those stakeholders. Gollner (1983, 1984, as cited in J.E. Grunig, 1991) averred that public relations is the management of interdependence. If both of these assertions are sound, which I believe they are, then clearly boundary spanners and boundary spanning must have the utmost centrality for organizations. Researchers have agreed, as these quotes demonstrate:

- Boundary spanning is the key “set of activities involved with organization-environment interaction” (Jemison, 1984, p. 133).
- Boundary spanning “helps the organization to manage its relationship with groups in the environment (J.E. Grunig, 1991, p. 259).

- Boundary spanners “operate at the periphery or boundary of the organization, performing organizational-relevant tasks and relating the organization to elements outside it” (Leifer & Delbecq, 1978, pp. 40-41).
- Boundary spanners act as liaisons between and link organizations and environments (Aiken & Hage, 1972, as cited in Jemison, 1984).
- Boundary spanners are the organization’s “points of contact with the environment” (Aldrich, 1979, p. 251).

By some of these definitions, organizational members such as sales representatives, human resources professionals, customer service representatives, members of the board of directors (Russ, Galang, & Ferris, 1998), and receptionists fulfill the boundary-spanning function. Even my husband, an officer who is the U.S. Navy’s liaison to a defense contractor for shipbuilding projects and who by trade and education is an engineer, is a boundary spanner. For my purposes, boundary spanners are GRPs who “frequently interact with the organization’s [political] environment and who gather, select, and relay information to the organization’s decision-makers” (White & Dozier, 1992, p. 93). Practically speaking, this includes in-house GRPs, those organizational members with government relations-specific boundary-spanning responsibilities, and for-contract GRPs who engage in government relations activities on an organizational client’s behalf.

Simply put, boundary spanning facilitates organizational engagement for the purposes of rapport with stakeholders. It involves monitoring the environment for changes, problems, and opportunities; managing information flow between the organization and the environment; and counseling the organization about how best to negotiate and achieve goals in that environment (Cyert & March, 1963; Hannan & Freeman, 1978; March & Simon, 1958; Thompson, 1967). More poetically, boundary

spanning is “a window out of the corporation through which management can monitor external change, and simultaneously a window in which society can affect corporate policy” (Post, 1980, p. 23, as quoted in Toth, 1986, p. 29).

Post’s (1980) description implies a balanced dialogue exists between the organization and its environment. Tompkins (1982) embraced a more monologic perspective on boundary spanning, focusing on its role in message production and dissemination for an organization’s external communication efforts.

I had expected to find, given its centrality to public relations, much more research on boundary spanning in the public relations literature than I did. One reason for this may be that so many researchers (e.g., Huang, 2004; Lauzen, 1994; Lauzen & Dozier, 1994; Philbin, 2005; Wyatt, S.S. Smith, & Andsager, 1996) treat boundary spanning in public relations as a foregone conclusion. Perhaps public relations scholars believe the discipline can safely move beyond studying boundary spanning, especially when there are so many other important topics that demand scholars’ attention (e.g., a general theory of public relations, a global theory of public relations, ethical issues in public relations, and the measurement of public relations outcomes and effectiveness). Or it may be a question of what else could public relations researchers realistically add to the concept.

However, I was heartened to discover that boundary spanning has been heavily researched in other disciplines. I found several more-or-less-recent articles in peer-reviewed journals outside of the “traditional” public relations journals that delved into this concept (e.g., Liesbeskind, Oliver, Zucker, & Brewer, 1996 [in *Organization Science*]; Lysonski & Woodside, 1989 [in *Journal of Product Management Innovation*]; Manev & Stevenson, 2001 [in *Journal of Business Communication*]; Rao & Sivakumar,

1999 [in *Organization Science*]; and Weedman, 1992 [in *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*]).

Hazleton and Long (1988) noted that the “effective public relations practitioner specializes in interpreting the environment and its various publics for the employer or client” (p. 79). Professionals then “work with management to develop strategic plans of organizational change and responsiveness” (Cutlip et al., 2000, p. 220). Both of these quotes describe a great deal of what boundary spanning entails. Katz and Kahn (1966), by contrast, argued that public relations was inadequate for engaging in boundary-spanning activities. Their reasoning, however, is flawed: They equated public relations with institutional advertising, which I have established public relations is not. Despite Katz and Kahn’s objections, for my purposes, the public relations function is the ideal and logical “home” for the boundary-spanning activities of an organization, as I have herein presented them.

The Two Modes of Boundary Spanning

Public relations personnel have multifaceted job descriptions, but boundary spanning may be the single-most important facet in terms of organizational survival and success. This is because boundary spanners’ main two modes are to represent the organization to the external environment and to gather and process information from the external environment (Aldrich, 1979; Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Jemison, 1984; Springston & Leichty, 1994). More specifically, Adams (1980) elaborated on the activities boundary spanners may engage in: to transact and filter inputs and outputs, to search for and collect information, to represent the organization to external audiences, and to obtain

information to help buffer the organization from external threats (as quoted in Finet, 1993, p. 42).

The two modes, as well as Adams' (1980) list of activities, suggest an imbalance: that boundary-spanning activities are conducted for the organization's benefit. This is not the case; because in the course of external representation and information processing, boundary spanning can also benefit an organization's stakeholders as it "conveys information and influence between the constituent group and outside groups and vice versa" (Springston & Leichty, 1994, p. 697).

When in the external-representation mode, boundary spanners engage in organizational engagement activities. These activities arise out of the organization's decision-making process, which is informed by the boundary spanners' information processing. Rose (1985) made two observations about boundary spanning in this mode: Its purpose is "to effect strategies and compromises that maintain the autonomy of the organization with respect to the environment" (p. 323) and it involves interaction (e.g., manipulation and collaboration) with environmental elements.

Responsibilities of boundary spanners, in the external-representation mode, include maintaining the organization's image and political legitimacy (Aldrich, 1979). Katz and Kahn (1966) also suggested that supportive functions on an organization's boundary should cultivate external support and legitimacy for the organization. Image maintenance relies on influence and persuasion to increase the organization's visibility and enhance its reputation. Boundary spanners "try to make an organization visible by influencing the behavior of groups in ways that benefit the organization, without bargaining or negotiating with the target" (p. 254).

Maintaining political legitimacy requires that boundary spanners mediate the power dynamics and influence between the organization and stakeholders, as well as broker information (Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Aldrich and Herker presented organizational image as the representation of the organization that organizational members transmit into the environment.¹ The goal of such transmissions is to enhance the organization's visibility in the environment, presumably in a positive light, in turn enhancing the organization's "social legitimacy" (p. 221).

When in the second mode of information processing, boundary spanners first face outward to the environment. They monitor the environment by selecting and collecting relevant information and other knowledge subsidies. They "flow" information into the organization. Organizations cannot possibly make sense of all the information in their environments. Boundary spanners defend against information overload by focusing on what is relevant; in doing so, they decrease, or "absorb" uncertainty (Aldrich, 1979, p. 251). Boundary spanners decide what is relevant based on myriad factors. Such factors may include their a priori theories and beliefs (Starbuck, 1976); cultural topoi; professional experience and instinct; recognition of the degree of the threat to the organization (Leichty & Warner, 2001) and, conversely, the degree of the opportunity for the organization; one's cognitive-processing abilities (Rose, 1985); and implicit associations (Gladwell, 2005). Starbuck (1976) also credited the role of cognitive

¹ J.E. Grunig and White (1992) suggested that public relations scholars should avoid using the term "image," because its overly broad application by professionals has rendered the concept confusing and ultimately meaningless. Scholars instead should use a more precise term, such as "reputation" or "impression." Indeed, many do (viz., Benoit, 1995; Coombs, 2001; Ihlen, 2002). Heath (1997) used the terms "image" and "reputation" interchangeably throughout his book to mean "the attitude key publics hold regarding the company or other organization" (p. 197). The concept of "reputation" thus appears to be a suitable substitute for what Aldrich and Herker (1977) conceptualized as "organizational image."

dissonance theory in boundary spanners' efforts to combat information overload, noting that a boundary spanner "tends to learn what he already believed" (p. 1080).

Boundary spanners then face inward to the organization, evaluating, interpreting, translating, and summarizing this information so it will be useful and usable to the organization (Aldrich, 1979; Aldrich & Herker, 1977). This continual process assures the flow of fresh information about the environment and stakeholders into the organization's decision-making process. This is important because

It is through the reports of boundary agents that other organizational members acquire their knowledge, perceptions, and evaluations of organizational environments. It is through the vigilance of boundary agents that the organization is able to monitor and screen important happenings in the environment. (Organ, 1971, p. 74)

This is a variation on the information-flow approach to understanding organizational environments, as I discussed in the earlier section titled "Organizational Environments."

This overview of the activities that boundary spanners engage in has not yet done justice to the information-processing mode. In this mode their potential to influence becomes clear (Aldrich, 1979). Influence is "the ability to affect the outcome of decisions" (Jemison, 1984, p. 133). I believe that such influence is a function of perception and subjectivity and of activities related to environmental scanning. As such, I explore these subjects in detail as follows.

Boundary spanners are in a unique, and perhaps enviable, position in that they are information brokers. Information itself has power and it makes those who have information powerful. In environments rife with uncertainty, boundary spanners absorb uncertainty (Aldrich, 1979; Aldrich & Herker, 1977). Their collecting and interpreting of information serves to make uncertain situations less so. As I wrote earlier, boundary

spanners derive influence from their ability to effectively manage uncertainty, not from the existence or perception of uncertainty (Harris, 1997).

As information brokers, boundary spanners carefully attend to the environment for information that is relevant to the organization. Although sometimes they may need to sleuth around for information, boundary spanners are exposed to large amounts of information “by virtue of their strategic position” (Aldrich, 1979, p. 249) and also from their membership in social circles. Here is where boundary spanners can first exercise influence: by selectively attending to or ignoring certain information. From a practical standpoint, such screening helps combat information overload.

Boundary spanners simultaneously imbue this screened information with meaning. They must make inferences about what this raw information, not always neatly packaged as quantifiable facts, means. They must contextualize this information in terms of the organization’s goals, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Starbuck, Greve, & Hedberg, 1978). Here is where boundary spanners can also exercise influence: This contextualization process subjectifies, or biases, the information. This information then must be condensed, translated, and constituted so that other organizational members can understand and use it.

Agenda setting and framing, two complementary, classic concepts from the media-effects literature, which lend insight into the “power” of the media, parallel the above two points. In the same way that the media agenda-set and frame issues for the public’s consumption, boundary spanners agenda-set and frame information about the environment and stakeholders for the consumption of other organizational members. I

have provided an overview of agenda setting and framing to inform the on-going discussion about boundary spanning.

The media establish the public's agenda when they select or privilege certain stories (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). These are the issues, by virtue of the media's sanctioning, to which the public then pays attention. The media increase the public's awareness of issues and events. Agenda setting is the "transmission of object salience" (McCombs & Estrada, 1997, p. 240). Relatedly, framing is the "transmission of attribute salience" (p. 240); it is the selection, neglect, emphasis, or de-emphasis of certain attributes of an issue. Framing may represent innocent attempts to increase audience appeal (e.g., focusing on conflict or controversy) or to distill complex issues for a lay audience. Facts may be omitted, contextual material may be sacrificed, and oversimplification and inaccuracies may occur because of framing (Gunter, Kinderlerer, & Beyleveld, 1999; Richards & King, 2000). Alternatively, framing less innocently may be a function of a journalist's ideological leanings (Graber, 1989).

Most allegations of media bias can be traced to how the media framed news stories and issues (Tuggle, 1998; Willis, 1991). M. Harrison (1985) in fact argued that the news is inherently biased: The media cannot present every fact or piece of information about an issue (i.e., framing) or present all possible issues (i.e., agenda setting). Is media bias an unpleasant fact that the public should just accept? Indeed, journalists have acknowledged that, despite journalistic ideals and commitments to objectivity, objectivity or unbiased reporting may be humanly unattainable (Durham, 1998; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1972).

What the boundary spanner has sensed, selected, interpreted, and “packaged” as important — organizational intelligence — will likewise be considered important by other organizational members (Aldrich, 1979; Weick, 1983). This is what agenda setting and framing theories, as applied to boundary spanning, would postulate. As Aldrich and Herker (1977) observed about organizational intelligence, “Once created, intelligence tends to be accepted” (p. 227), especially as, for various reasons, it is not always feasible for other organizational members to verify or triangulate information (Aldrich, 1979; Pearce & Robinson, 1982). This is the responsibility of boundary spanners and other organizational members expect them to meet their responsibilities. When trying to gain an understanding of the political environment, which would result from organizational intelligence, “it is many times the case that subjective or judgmental approaches may be the only practical methods” for doing so (Pearce & Robinson, 1982, p. 147). This amounts to a resignation-tinged acknowledgement that bias in boundary spanning is an unpleasant fact, a case of satisficing.

Alternatively, such acceptance may suggest that trust exists between boundary spanners and organizational members, but even that may not necessarily be the case. The Excellence theory of public relations postulated that a diverse public relations staff contributes to an organization’s excellent public relations (J.E. Grunig, 1992). According to Weick’s (1979) principle of requisite variety, the diversity of an organization’s stakeholders (located in the environment) should be “matched” in the public relations department (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). An organizational public relations professional who is also a “member” of one of the organization’s stakeholder groups ostensibly will be a better boundary spanner between the organization and that stakeholder group than a

“non-member” of that group (Dozier et al., 1995). As discussed in the “Worldviews” subsection of this chapter, diversity is typically thought of in terms of the gender or race-ethnicity of the public relations professional. I have offered the possibility that, as applied to public relations, requisite variety could be expanded to include cultural topoi: Receptivity to and respect for, if not a “matching” of, the diversity of extra-organizational worldviews should emanate from the organization via its public relations professionals. A public relations professional who is receptive and respectful of or matches a stakeholder’s cultural topoi will better understand its concerns and communicate those concerns back inside the organization than a professional who is not. However, this *simpatico* or intimacy may cast doubt on that professional’s loyalty to the organization (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; White & Dozier, 1992), thus casting doubt on the veracity of the organizational intelligence.

Having boundary spanners who “get” and enjoy rapport with their organizations’ stakeholders is important enough that organizations should overcome their tendencies to hire familiar or safely reliable management personnel (Aldrich, 1979). For instance, given Maryland’s suddenly Republican executive branch, a Democrat-leaning 501c organization should think twice before hiring GRPs with Democrat résumés. A wiser, although perhaps uncomfortable, choice may be to hire Republican GRPs to act as liaisons with that Republican stakeholder. To wit, a *Washington Post* article about top-level executive turnover at national interest groups observed:

Even without being coerced, many groups have lately chosen Republicans as their new chieftains. They reason that it only makes sense to hire a high-level Republican to communicate with decision-makers when both the Congress and the executive branch are controlled by that party. But given what could be a hair-breadth-close election this year, a big question remains: Will

lobbying groups continue the pattern of hiring Republicans or will they hedge their bets by turning to Democrats? (Birnbaum & Edsall, 2004, p. A1)

Discussions of requisite variety and organizational loyalty aside, an organization relies on boundary spanners' intelligence about stakeholders and the environment to make decisions, develop strategies, and take action. Boundary spanners might seem relatively innocuous when in fact they, through their informational inputs, potentially wield a great amount of organizational influence. The organization uses their inputs to make decisions about how to engage with stakeholders in a turbulent environment and to develop or maintain organizational-environmental rapport. The organization's decision-makers depend on boundary spanners and their inputs. Dependence begets influence. Greater environmental dynamism and complexity also increase this dependency on, and thus the influence of, boundary spanners in an organization's strategic decision-making processes (Hambrick, 1981a; Jemison, 1984). These are the processes in which organizational members deliberate and make decisions about the issues most critically relevant to the organization (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Theoret, 1976). The increased visibility boundary spanners enjoy in organizations with dynamic environments (Aldrich, 1979; Thompson, 1967) could increase their influence.

Boundary spanning is an important function in organizational decision-making (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Finet, 1993; Jemison, 1984; Leifer & Delbecq, 1978; Thompson, 1967). Jemison (1984) investigated the influence of boundary spanners in strategic decision-making at 15 organizations from three industries. He found that boundary spanning explained 60% of the variance in influence in these organizations' strategic decisions.

The Process of Boundary Spanning

That boundary spanners possess any influence is because of the informational inputs, or organizational intelligence, that they contribute to the organization.

Organizational intelligence is much more than just raw data; it is created. The process by which organizational intelligence is created — gathered, interpreted, and made meaningful to other organizational members — represents most of what boundary spanners do in their primary mode of information processing. The process requires explication.

Boundary spanners, in their “unique perch at the boundaries of their organization” (Lauzen, 1995b, p. 188), must first gather information from the environment. I disagree with Krippendorff and Eleey’s (1986) observation about how boundary spanners go about this: “Any organization can do no better than the feedback it receives from its environment” (p. 14). In fact, organizations *can* do better. Receiving feedback is passive and reactive (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). To optimize their unique perch, boundary spanners must engage in much more active and proactive research activities: They must engage in environmental scanning.

Environmental scanning entails seeking information about groups and other organizations, trends, events, ways of thinking, and the like that would be relevant and useful for the organization to know (Lauzen, 1995b). Boundary spanners would seek information on political players, those “persons who create law or ordinance that prescribes which actions are rewardable or punishable” (Heath, 1997, p. 28). Boundary spanners could also use both informal research methods, such as routinely conversing with members of one’s social circles, and formal research methods, such as public

opinion polling. Pearce and Robinson (1982) recommended gathering both quantitative and qualitative data to balance and strengthen the eventual analysis of the data.

Information about stakeholders and the environment is collected in two main ways. Boundary spanners gather much information about the environment via automatic scanning, “a direct perceptual process of which people are not aware” (Kielser & Sproull, 1982, p. 555). This is the on-going, un- or semi-conscious processing of information in which all humans engage. People encode and decode, selectively attend and listen, and make inferences and associations (even implicit ones) among people, traits, timing, events, and the like. This is unintentional learning.

Boundary spanners also engage in directed searches. These are research endeavors that are intentional and of which the boundary spanner is aware. They are conscious learning efforts to address specific purposes and goals.

Environmental scanning is a continuous process. The demand for environmental scanning and uncertainty enjoy a circular relationship. An organization in an environment fraught with uncertainty needs much information about the dynamism and complexity that bred the uncertainty (Emery & Trist, 1965; Hazleton & Long, 1988; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). Researchers (e.g., Stoffels, 1994; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992) have argued that this would decrease uncertainty, which is “the lack of information about future events so that alternatives and their outcomes are unpredictable” (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971, p. 219). Environmental scanning may decrease uncertainty about one environmental problem. But in the course of doing so, a boundary spanner may stumble upon information about another potential problem of which the organization had theretofore been unaware. In learning how to resolve one

problem, the spanner may discover a new problem. Discovery requires more research (Hazleton & Long, 1988) to generate more information about that problem, and so on. Hence, environmental scanning is self-perpetuating.

Environmental scanning is part of a “cognitive process” (Dutton, 1993, p. 339) whose objectives are to understand and make sense of the organization’s environment. These objectives expedite the organization’s goal of optimizing and maximizing strategic engagement with its environment. The information gleaned from environmental scanning awakens boundary spanners to emerging and on-going relevancies in the organization’s environment. Relevancies either may positively or negatively affect the organization.

Environments abound with opportunities for organizations, yet boundary spanners tend to focus on problems in their organizations’ environments (Jackson & Dutton, 1988). Boundary spanners should pay attention to cooperative, positive opportunities and relationships much as they pay attention to sources of conflict (Aldrich, 1979). Boundary spanners should analyze and incorporate all relevancies into the organization’s strategic decision-making process so that the organization can address those relevancies. Pearce and Robinson (1982) suggested that organizations should attend to these specific possible relevancies when their political environments undergo change: any policy changes and implications thereof for the organization; potential for goal achievement (or failure) of the new administration and implications thereof for the organization; “friendliness” of the administration to the organization; and the existence of political risks, constraints, and support for the organization. Information about any of these relevancies will reduce uncertainty.

Lauzen (1995a) also examined the idea of cultural blindspots in this cognitive process. Cultural blindspots emerge when organizations are oblivious (intentionally or not) to new relevancies, are unwilling to create new categories for new relevancies, or are too accustomed to doing things their way or the “old” way. The environment progresses but the organization does not, unable to “see” because it is trapped in an asymmetrically presupposed worldview.

Boundary spanners also examine the past to inform and guide the organization’s future (Lauzen, 1995a), reflecting a symmetrically presupposed worldview. Relatedly, Zabriskie and Huellmantel (1991) said that a boundary spanner’s ability to think strategically (as opposed to routinely) comes from knowing how to analyze information learned through his or her relationships with external environmental actors (i.e., other members of his or her social circle network); deducing threats and opportunities; being prepared to contend with them; developing plans that address them; and having a forward-looking orientation. Further discussion of boundary spanners and environmental scanning will be illuminated by a discussion of professional roles in public relations.

Boundary Spanners as Technicians or Managers?

Copious amounts of research have affirmed a two-role typology of the work activities and responsibilities of public relations professionals (Dozier & Broom, 1995). Communication technicians perform the craft and tactical activities of public relations: informal research, writing, editing, special-event planning, and the like. Communication managers engage in formal research and strategic planning and are either directly or indirectly involved in the organization’s decision-making process.

The research stream on this theory has strongly flowed for a quarter century (Pasadeos, Renfro, & Hanily, 1999; Sallot et al., 2003), thus pre- and post-dating the inception of the Excellence theory. Roles theory is an important middle-range theory that has been incorporated into the Excellence theory. The stream started with Broom and G.D. Smith (1979), who explored the workplace activities and responsibilities of public relations professionals. An initial four-role typology of their activities emerged: Public relations professionals may take on the role of the communication technician, the expert prescriber, the problem-solving process facilitator (PSPF), or the communication facilitator. This typology was eventually collapsed into the two-role typology of the communication technician and communication manager (Dozier & Broom, 1995) because the latter three original roles all involved managerial activities and were highly intercorrelated (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1983).

Studies of role enactment have suggested that professionals often may enact the manager and technician roles concurrently (e.g., Broom & Dozier, 1986). Although professionals may progress from being technicians to managers, they necessarily may not cease engaging in technician activities.

Broom and G.D. Smith's (1979) three original managerial roles are interesting facets of what is now the catch-all role of manager. As such, I overview them here. The expert prescriber is the person upon whom an organization depends for advice and leadership on government relations matters (for example). The organization looks so intently at the expert prescriber on government relations matters that it may cede decision-making responsibility for those matters to him or her, thus diminishing the organization's active involvement in them (Dozier, 1992). As Dozier explained, "The

expert prescribes and management obeys” (p. 329). This subrole is associated with asymmetrically presupposed communication practices (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and thus in turn an asymmetrically presupposed worldview.

That a practitioner is regarded as knowledgeable and experienced is also implicit in the other two managerial roles, the PSPF and communication facilitator. The PSPF engages in many of the same activities that an expert prescriber does. However, the PSPF counsels organizational decision-makers in ways so they engage in addressing government relations matters. Like the names of the other two manager roles, the name of third role, “communication facilitator,” doubles as its definition. The communication facilitator facilitates communication between an organization and its stakeholders. Ergo, the communication facilitator is a boundary spanner. But so are expert prescribers and PSPFs. They are all boundary spanners, individuals whose lived work experiences are this study’s unit of analysis. Boundary spanning thus is obviously an important part of the work activities and responsibilities of a managerial-level public relations professional or GRP.

Lauzen (1995b) implied that environmental scanning was in the technician’s purview, noting, “Environmental scanning is an information gathering process and is not in and of itself strategic” (p. 190). Information gathered in this process is “raw” and needs “processing” before it could be used for strategic organizational purposes. White and Dozier (1992) agreed that the environmental-scanning process is a technician-level activity. Stoffels (1994) disagreed, as did Hambrick (1981b), who characterized environmental scanning as a managerial activity. I consider the environmental-scanning process, in terms of collecting information, to be a technician-level activity. But that

does not mean boundary spanners are technicians. They are responsible for the creation and packaging of organizational intelligence. They are responsible for its incorporation into decisions so the organizations decides smartly about how to engage and have rapport with stakeholders. These are managerial-level activities. After all, it is “managers [who] align organizational and environmental forces to a desired state of congruence” (Smircich, 1983, p. 227). I prefer to think of this desired state as less about congruence and more about rapport.

Several studies have found that boundary spanners do meaningfully participate in an organization’s strategic decision-making (Jemison, 1984), and thus “information about relations with priority publics gets factored into organizational decisions, policies, and actions” (Broom & Dozier, 1986, p. 42). A.D. Meyer (1982) found that hospitals that more closely and broadly monitored their environments anticipated a potential environmental jolt (in his study’s case, a hospital workers’ strike) earlier than hospitals that did not. Additionally, these hospitals were better prepared for the jolt because, thanks to their boundary-spanning personnel, they anticipated the occurrence of the jolt.

Boundary spanners are both environmental scanners (technicians) and sense-makers (managers). As sense-makers, they construct meaning by interpreting relevancies and their implications for the organization (Dunford & D. Jones, 2000). Once again, perception acts as a “spoiler” of reality. Does meaning arise from the relevancies themselves, or do the boundary spanners give them meaning (perhaps a more appropriate label for boundary spanners would be *sense-givers*)? The degree to which a relevancy is perceived as positive or negative may depend more on the “state” of the perceiver than on the reality of the relevancy (Kiesler & Sproull, 1982). The state of the perceiver is a

function of cultural topoi, life experiences, work experiences, gut instincts, cultural biases (Leichty & Warner, 2001), cognitive-processing abilities (Rose, 1985), and demographic and psychographic profiles, among other factors.

Boundary spanners' opportunities to participate and their influence in decision-making increase given turbulent environments (Emery & Trist, 1965; Kiesler & Sproull, 1982; Leblebici & Salancik, 1981; White & Dozier, 1992). Environmental uncertainty and the ability to address it appropriately (through the possession and leverage of organizational intelligence) ultimately determine the influence boundary spanners wield in an organization (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Crozier, 1964; Hickson et al., 1971; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). Public relations researchers (Dozier, 1992; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992) have similarly found that high levels of environmental uncertainty drive the organization's need for the enactment of the public relations manager role.

Boundary Spanners as Entrepreneurs

Dynamism and complexity also spur organizations and their boundary spanners toward entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurism's traditional business roots are reflected in this definition: "the organizing and catalytic effort responsible for bringing about new economic activity (new goods and services) or the provisions of these products in some innovative way" (Young, 1987, p. 168).

Organizational engagement with a placid, simple environment, or an environment with patterned fluctuations, may be historical and rote and reflect a long-term perspective (Thompson, 1967). Dynamic, complex environments do not allow organizations and boundary spanners such luxury; there is no such thing as "business as usual." Long-

range planning may not be possible in a constantly changing environment filled with new and unique environmental contingencies: “So long as the environment of the firm is unstable — and predictably unstable — the heart of the theory [of the firm] must be the process of short-run adaptive reactions” (Cyert & March, 1963, p. 100). Is it possible for organizations to “forecast. . .the future by extrapolation of a noncomparable past?” (Terreberry, 1968, p. 595).

Do noncomparable events call for noncomparable measures? The literature on entrepreneurship answers in the affirmative. These new measures are born of organizational entrepreneurship, which itself is often born of a “serious — often environmentally related — organizational problem” (Young, 1987, p. 168). Young argued that entrepreneurship is imperative if organizations are to engage successfully with their dynamic-complex environments. Entrepreneurism helps organizations to step out of their comfort zones to engage effectively with environments where, again, there may be no such thing as business as usual. Entrepreneurism breeds innovative “products or practices that are new to the organization adopting them” (Aldrich, 1979, p. 98). A symmetrically presupposed worldview embraces innovation (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). Thus the existence of entrepreneurship in organizational thought and action likely reflects a symmetrically presupposed organizational worldview.

Making the spirit of entrepreneurship tangible is a responsibility well within the purview of managerial-level boundary spanners. They introduce diverse informational inputs from the environment into the organization, fueling creative and innovative thought and action (Aldrich, 1979; Terreberry, 1968; Weedman, 1992). Schwartzberg (1983), in an atheoretical article, suggested that creativity is a common personality trait

of public relations professionals. Boundary spanners aid organizations in “the construction of new meanings about the organization in relation to its environment” (White & Dozier, 1992, p. 99), that is, new worldviews and cultural topoi.

Entrepreneurism also makes an organization flexible (Weick, 1979). Upon realizing that the old rules no longer can or should apply in a dynamic-complex environment, an organization “must retain a sufficient pool of novel actions” (p. 215) in its engagement toolbox. An organization that would disavow flexibility to the point of being rigid — stubbornly embracing conservatism — in its dealings with such an environment is a foolish organization, as this fable from Aesop gently moralizes:

An oak that grew on the bank of a river was uprooted by a severe gale of wind, and thrown across the stream. It fell among some reeds growing by the water, and said to them, “How is it that you, who are so frail and slender, have managed to weather the storm, whereas I, with all my strength, have been torn up by the roots and hurled into the river?” “You were stubborn,” came the reply, “and fought against the storm, which proved stronger than you: but we bow and yield to every breeze, and thus the gale passed harmlessly over our heads.” (V.S.V. Jones, n.d., p. 36)

However, Weick (1979) cautioned that overly flexible organizations — reeds — risk eroding their identities. If an organization is constantly bending to its environment, for what is it willing to stand firm? What does that organization stand for? Organizations must be flexible (Pearce & Robinson, 1982), but they also must maintain a modicum of resoluteness (Weick, 1979). Thus, organizations must temper flexibility with a dose of resoluteness — difficult to accomplish, but necessary for survival. An organization should also be able to contend rapidly with environmental fluctuations (Aldrich, 1979). The moral: An organization must be an oak-reed hybrid to survive and thrive in its environment.

Boundary Spanners as Buffers

Thompson (1967) offered yet another way of thinking about how organizations engage with their environments through boundary spanners. Organizational-environmental interdependency entails the organization ceding some control to its environment. Thompson argued that organizations would try to regain some of that control through the “maneuvering device” of buffering (p. 20).

Buffering cushions an organization from environmental fluctuations by, among other ways, stockpiling raw materials or conducting preventative maintenance (Thompson, 1967). In another context, having two months’ worth of rent saved provides a buffer for an individual who has become unemployed. Buffering provides a safety net for an organization (or an individual) should its environment drastically or unexpectedly change — become jolted.

Buffering as a protective cushion for the organization is similar to Cyert and March’s (1963) concept of organizational slack. Slack functions as a cushion for absorbing environmental fluctuations (Bourgeois, 1981; Cyert & March, 1963; A.D. Meyer, 1982). It enhances the organization’s stability and survivability: “By providing a pool of emergency resources, it permits aspirations to be maintained and achieved during relatively bad times” (Cyert & March, 1963, p. 38). Cyert and March argued that slack just “happens”; it is not the result of purposeful, deliberate efforts. Thompson (1967) explained buffering as a purposeful, deliberate conscious effort to absorb environmental fluctuations. Regardless of their geneses, slack and buffering are mechanisms for organizations to steel themselves against punches from the environment (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976).

Hatch's (1997) more recent take on buffering nearly equates it with boundary spanning. The difference is that buffering involves raw materials and resources whereas boundary spanning involves information. Boundary spanners, through stockpiling information and intelligence and absorbing and reducing environmental uncertainty, serve as organizational buffers to the environment. They "run interference" with the environment for other organizational members and functions. Their buffering efforts allow the organization to operate with less worry about environmental conditions.

Refining Cyert and March's (1963) treatment of slack, Bourgeois (1981) offered a much more expansive perspective of the concept. Slack strengthens an organization's ability to contend with environmental jolts and contributes to organizational effectiveness. It acts as not only a buffer in the sense presented by Cyert and March and Thompson (1967). Slack may help reconcile organizational-environmental conflict. Slack, as the extra resources beyond what the organization minimally or routinely requires, encourages innovative thinking and entrepreneurship (Bourgeois, 1981). Further, slack acts like a "shot of courage": It encourages organizations to pursue opportunities present in the environment. Bourgeois concluded that slack's "presence allows an organization to interact or compete in its environment more boldly" (p. 35).

Simply put, slack provides organizations with the room to fail. They can take chances on experimenting with new ideas or products because if the experiment fails, the organization has only spent slack, or extra, resources — not its necessary lifeblood resources. In toto, slack affects how organizations engage with their environments (Bourgeois, 1981; A.D. Meyer, 1982).

Bourgeois (1981) believed that successful organizations amass slack. Slack is a happy byproduct of success. Although the success may have been “planned,” the slack was not; it “happened.” Acknowledging the “slack-is-unplanned” perspective, Bourgeois speculated that slack should be planned. He found evidence, albeit anecdotal, of planned slack.

A.D. Meyer (1982) viewed slack as a mechanism for absorbing shock, facilitating adaptation, and “foster[ing] organizational learning” (p. 522). Slack provides the room for an organization to attempt new strategies or products. Success or failure logically flows from this; the organization will gain knowledge, or learn, from this experience.

Slack, however, is not always a boon for organizations. With too much slack, Bourgeois (1981) cautioned, organizations become lazy. They may experience a false sense of security toward environmental fluctuations or have a “rest on our laurels” attitude if they have copious amounts of insulation or room to fail. Instead of optimizing, these organizations will merely satisfice.

Although so far I have considered slack and buffers to be equivalent concepts, Sharfman, Wolf, Chase, and Tansik (1988) thought otherwise. Particularly relevant for this study is this distinction: “Slack resources are physical entities such as cash, people, nonobsolete inventory, machine capacity, and so forth. Other buffers, such as preventive maintenance, future contracts, sales smoothing, and so forth, are more intangible systems and procedures” (p. 603). I will now use their semantic choice of “buffer” because it represents intangibilities while still capturing the essence of the concept of organizational “insulation.”

For organizations like 501c organizations that deal with intangibles (e.g. changes in public policy and public opinion), what forms would organizational buffers take? Buffers in such organizations might be incarnated as positive relationships with their publics (Bruning, 2002; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Coombs, 2001; Ledingham, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998), positive organizational reputation (Heath, 1997), and stores of political capital (Lopez, 2002). All of these could be accrued deliberately or through happenstance, nurtured and grown. Given an environmental jolt, an organization could expend or even exhaust all of these during engagement efforts, as this observation about former U.S. President Bill Clinton illustrates: “Whatever demons caused him to dally with [Monica] Lewinsky, the results were clear. Bill Clinton’s second term was spent on minor domestic policy initiatives, *as he had to spend all of his political capital just to stay in office* [emphasis added]” (Kamarck, 2004, para. 7).

Based on the preceding discussion the work activities and responsibilities, and the corresponding professional roles in public relations, of boundary spanners, I offer the following set of theory questions:

TQ4a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their work activities and responsibilities?

TQ4b: How did the jolt affect their work activities and responsibilities?

Organizational Legitimacy in Public Relations

The concept of legitimacy, an implicit part of the Excellence theory, is directly related to the concept of stakeholders. Legitimacy enjoys a rich tradition in public relations research, particularly in crisis communication and reputation studies (Boyd, 2000). A legitimate organization is one that critical stakeholders perceive as responsible

and needed and that has engendered their “good will and approval” (Boyd, 2000, p. 344). It is one that conforms to society’s generally accepted normative “rules,” expectations, and values (Baum & Rowley, 2002; J.W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; W.R. Scott, 1987). Finet (1993) said that legitimacy “involves the perceptions of important societal interests that organizational practices are socially and politically appropriate” (p. 37). Harris (1997) even observed, “Legitimacy cannot be defined independently of values” (p. 313).

External stakeholders confer legitimacy on an organization (Finet, 1993; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). When the rules, norms, and expectations of an organization’s “society” — its environment — change, so too must the organization if it is to retain its legitimacy. An organization risks its legitimacy if an external stakeholder views the organization as inappropriate or out of step given the conditions of the environment. Krippendorf and Eleey (1986) noted that 501c organizations “received public support for their work only to the extent that citizens believe their supportive participation is worthwhile” (p. 14). Legitimacy is, in a sense, an operating license the public gives to an organization, renewable based on continued stakeholder sanction and “good” organizational behavior. Political legitimacy is the operating license from political stakeholders.

In the vernacular of public relations theory, political status may be understood as the degree of legitimacy conferred upon the 501c organization by critical stakeholders, namely political ones. Political status is also understood as the “distance” between a 501c organization and the political decision-making structure (Roy, 1981). The more proximal a 501c organization is to the corridors of political power — located well within the margins of a political system — the more political clout it presumably has. With

more clout, the more effective that 501c organization presumably will be in “the act of pleading for or against a cause, as well as supporting or recommending a position . . . [the] active espousal of a position, a point of view, or a course of action” (Boris & Krehely, 2002, p. 301) to an “institutional elite” (Jenkins, 1987, p. 297) — a stakeholder. Jenkins cautioned that advocating a specific legislative action is conceptually different from securing enactment of that bill and overseeing its implementation once it becomes law.

An organization’s legitimacy is more at risk in a turbulent organizational environment than a calm one (Finet, 1993). However, that legitimacy can help calm that turbulent environment:

Relatively unquestioning legitimacy is the functional equivalent of the minimally turbulent environment. The stability that results from these non-turbulent sociopolitical environmental conditions is reflected in specific organizational benefits such as a diminished need to defend the organization from potentially costly social and political challenges. (p. 40)

Delegitimacy has the opposite effect; environmental turbulence increases when stakeholders negatively perceive the organization (Finet, 1993).

Logically then, an organization perceived as legitimate likely also has a positive reputation and vice versa (Boyd, 2000). An organization’s reputation is in part an outgrowth of the quality of the relationships it has with its stakeholder and non-stakeholder groups (J.E. Grunig & Hung, 2002; Hutton et al., 2001) and the external representation efforts of organizational boundary spanners.

Although boundary spanners seem to be influential vis-à-vis organizational legitimacy, Finet (1993) believed her study was the first to examine the effects of boundary spanning on legitimacy. That many organizations’ environments are

increasingly dynamic and complex may have profound implications for both organizational legitimacy and boundary spanning. Finet specifically investigated whether the external perceptions of organizational boundary spanners' messages and behaviors (both direct and indirect) were related to external perceptions of organizational legitimacy. She found that they are related to each other:

Boundary spanning might actually count among the most important variables that potentially influence organizational legitimacy. Put another way, these results imply that boundary spanning is too important a communication activity, in terms of its consequences for organizational legitimacy, to fail to perform well. (p. 59)

Based on this discussion of organizational legitimacy within the context of public relations, I offer this final set of theory questions:

TQ5a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their political stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of their organizations?

TQ5b: How did the jolt affect the political stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of the boundary-spanning GRPs' organizations?

Thus concludes my presentation of the conceptual framework for this study, which I have attempted to relate to the particulars of the study: boundary-spanning GRPs working on behalf of 501c organizations operating in Maryland's "jolted" political environment. I began with the ultimate context for the study, public relations. Within the conceptual framework built from literature on 501c organizations, environments, and foundational and middle-range theories of public relations, I delved into topics such government relations, open systems theory, dimensions of organizational environments, worldviews, boundary spanning, and other theories and concepts integral to this study. In this next section, I review the study's sets of theory questions.

Theory Questions

Research questions (or as I refer to them, “theory questions,” a choice I explain shortly) emerge from a study’s conceptualization. The difference between a study that is excellent and one that is subpar lies in part in the quality of its theory questions. If a researcher does not ask appropriate research questions, even a study with a well-developed and articulate conceptualization will stumble. In theory, research questions should provide a cohesive route for “moving” a study from its overall purpose to the gathering of data. In reality, this has led to confusion about the nature of research questions versus interview questions (Wengraf, 2001).

Wengraf (2001) developed a four-level tree diagram to alleviate the confusion. At the top of the tree diagram is the study’s overall research purpose. The study’s central research questions, which guide the study, grow out of the overall research purpose. These research questions act as fertile ground for theory questions. Interview questions sprout from each theory question. Interview questions are posed to the study’s participants to elicit data that address the theory questions; they operationalize the theory questions. The interview question should reflect “the language of the interviewee” (p. 62). Conversely, research and theory questions, which “govern” the development of the interview questions, should reflect the “theory language of the research community” (p. 62).

Other qualitative research experts (e.g., Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) equated “research questions” with Wengraf’s (2001) “theory questions.” Wengraf, however, would have equated their research questions with his central research questions. Yet he and Marshall and Rossman agreed on this point: The

research purpose and (central) research questions drive the formulation of the study's conceptualization. Wengraf developed this idea, implying that the conceptualization then drives theory questions, which in turn drive interview questions. This study's textual version of Wengraf's (2001) tree diagram is presented below:

My overall research purpose is to learn of the experiences of boundary spanners, those organizational members who manage organizational-environmental interdependence with the goal of developing and maintaining rapport, in organizations enduring a major "jolt" (A.D. Meyer, 1982) in their political environment. To reiterate, the organizations under consideration are 501c organizations operating in Maryland. The environment is the political environment of the organizations. The jolt is the election of Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., in November 2002, as Maryland's first Republican governor in nearly four decades. The study is predicated on the working assumption that boundary spanners were of crucial significance to organizations throughout and after the jolt, regardless of whether their organizations welcomed the jolt or not.

The central research questions that guide this study are:

- In what ways have the jolt and subsequent changes in the political environment in Maryland affected boundary-spanning GRPs and the work they do?
- Why did the jolt affect them as it did?
- What can be learned from their experiences that informs the theory and practice of the specialized form of public relations, government relations?

Based on the conceptualization, which is driven by the study's purpose and central research questions, I will explore the following five sets of theory questions:

TQ1a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their organizations' perceptions of the jolt?

TQ1b: How did the jolt affect organizations' perceptions of their political environment?

TQ2a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe the worldviews of their organizations?

TQ2b: How did the jolt affect the worldviews of their organizations?

TQ3a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their communication practices with their organizations' political stakeholders?

TQ3b: How did the jolt affect their communication practices with their organizations' political stakeholders?

TQ4a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their work activities and responsibilities?

TQ4b: How did the jolt affect their work activities and responsibilities?

TQ5a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their political stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of their organizations?

TQ5b: How did the jolt affect the political stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of the boundary-spanning GRPs' organizations?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.

— Zora Neale Hurston (1942), *American writer and anthropologist*

The Qualitative Genre and Rationale

A professor of rhetorical criticism, in whose class I was a student, counseled us to let our method of rhetorical analysis arise from the text. Translation: The text should drive the method used to analyze it; a method of analysis should not be imposed on the text. The same is true when considering qualitative or quantitative inquiry. A study's methodology should depend on its overall research purpose and central research questions (Poggenpoel, Myburgh, & Van Der Linde, 2001).

This study's research purpose is to learn of and explore the experiences of boundary spanners, those organizational members who manage organizational-environmental interdependence, in organizations enduring a major "jolt" (A.D. Meyer, 1982) in their political environment. Its central research questions are:

- In what ways have the jolt and subsequent changes in the political environment in Maryland affected boundary-spanning GRPs and the work they do?
- Why did the jolt affect them as it did?
- What can be learned from their experiences that informs the theory and practice of the specialized form of public relations, government relations?

This study's research purpose and central research questions oblige investigation with qualitative research methods. Qualitative inquiry seeks understanding of a phenomenon through those who have experienced it: "Qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other

actions” (Hughes, n.d.). What were their experiences of that phenomenon? What meanings did they make of it? Why those experiences and those meanings?

As such, qualitative inquiry applies a constructivist perspective to research. By applying such an emic, or insider, perspective, “reality” and “truth” are understood to be individualized and constructed. An external, objective “reality” or “truth” cannot be captured and asserted as “universal,” because such a universal reality or universal truth does not exist. What “reality” and “truth” are are matters of individual perspective. Thus, the goal of qualitative inquiry is idiographic knowledge, which personalized, subjective knowledge.

This study, as I have envisioned it, required qualitative inquiry of individual lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Individual lived experience is one of Marshall and Rossman’s three genres, or “nuanced traditions” (p. 60), of qualitative research. Case studies and microanalyses, respectively, are the best methods of inquiry for the other genres, society and culture and language and communication. Interviews are best for studies of individual lived experience because their “primary strategy is to capture the deep meaning of experience in [individuals’] own words” (p. 61). Interviews are advantageous when a researcher’s “concern is with establishing common patterns of themes between particular types of respondents” (Warren, 2002, p. 85), as my concerns are. My goals are for individuals to describe richly their experiences of the same phenomenon and to explore any meaningful similarities — or differences — in those experiences.

To accomplish these goals, I originally proposed conducting active, semistructured interviews with 12 to 15 informants. To achieve the depth I sought, I

anticipated conducting two 60- to 90-minute telephone interviews with each informant. This was not meant to be, as I explain below.

A New and Improved Research Design

Legendary football coach Tom Landry said: “Setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with that plan” (1975, as quoted in “Winners Don’t Quit,” 2005). With my apologies to Landry for co-opting his inspiring words, by mid-January 2005, I came to realize that my plan (i.e., my dissertation research design) for achieving my goal (i.e., earning a doctorate) was not a plan I should stay with. With the permission of my committee, I changed my dissertation research design to address the challenges that I had faced in the initial weeks of conducting my research. Below details the chronology of events that led me to change my design.

Once I rose to candidacy in mid-November 2004, I submitted my research application to the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and conducted four successful, albeit tedious, pretest interviews. The IRB approved my application on December 13, 2004. Upon learning that the IRB approved my application, the Department of Communication released official departmental letterhead and envelopes to me for my solicitation mailing. This mailing was dropped on December 22, 2004, to 63 potential participants. I also sent the mailing to two friends who live in the Annapolis and Baltimore areas to check on the receipt of the letters and the speed of their delivery. Each mail package contained a personalized introduction letter (Appendix A); an informed consent form (Appendix B); and a postage-paid, pre-addressed envelope for returning the form to me. I included a handwritten postscript on each letter,

acknowledging I understood how hectic the 2005 legislative session would be for that person but was hopeful that he or she would consider participating in my project.

My two friends reported receiving their letters approximately on December 28, 2004. I also installed a counter on my project Web site (<http://www.geocities.com/simoneterp/LSTwebsite.html>; no longer operational) to keep track of the number of visitors to the site. I “wrote off” the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day, assuming that many people take off from work at this time.

On December 29, 2004, I received an e-mail from one person who had received my mailing. She declined to participate because she was not involved in government relations, as I had thought. She gently pointed out that asking people to participate in two long phone interviews was unrealistic and asked me to call her for suggestions. Although she believed my study was interesting (and believed that other people would as well), she thought I would have better luck getting people to participate in my project if asked them for one approximately 60-minute interview, with the opportunity for follow up. She also recommended two potential participants. I considered her concerns legitimate and appreciated her suggestions, but I was optimistic about recruiting participants with my original research design intact.

Several days into 2005, when day after day the counter on my Web site would uptick by just one — from my daily visit to check the counter — I began to worry: I am throwing a party and no one is showing up. On January 7, 2005, I received this e-mail message: “Thanks for inviting me to participate in your study. I must apologize. . . the next few months are going to be extremely hectic and I just don't know how I'd find the time for the interviews. Sorry. Good luck with finding others and with the analysis.”

This person's message confirmed my suspicions to explain the lack of participation or even curiosity about my study.

Eventually, one person did agree to participate (and used the Web site to access the on-line scheduler). We had a productive 90-minute phone interview on January 10, 2005. This person was insightful, chatty, and forthcoming — a perfect informant. We also covered everything I had intended to in this one interview, using the original interview protocol that was amended after the pretests. He suggested moving beyond the Smart Growth/Priority Places issue. He believed that I could learn much from people who worked for nonprofit organizations, unions, and trade associations in Maryland involved in other issues. Case in point: He had shown his wife, a government relations professional for a state teachers' group, my letter. He told me that she would be eager to speak with me about how transitioning from years of Democrats in the governor's office to a Republican had affected her and her organization.

On January 12, 2005, the Maryland legislative session began. On January 17, 2005, a person called me to decline. She explained that her organization strictly interprets its 501c(3) tax-exempt nonprofit status and does not engage in any activities that could even remotely qualify as political advocacy. Her board instructed her not to participate. However, she too believed that my study was interesting and recommended someone for me to contact. She suggested that I consider two changes to facilitate participation: One, scale back my request from two interviews to one interview and two, change the timing of the study. She pointed out that the legislative session was the busiest, indeed worst, time of year for the people I would like to participate in my study.

She thought that people would be more willing and available to talk to me once they had the time — that is after the legislative session adjourned April 11, 2005.

I conducted an interview with another person on January 20, 2005. He could fit only one interview in his schedule but did instruct me to call or e-mail him to follow up. As of the end of January, I had scheduled two more interviews but they were not to take place until early May. In late January, I persuaded the president of the Annapolis/Anne Arundel County Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America to distribute flyers about my study at its next chapter meeting. The president of the Maryland chapter agreed to publicize the study in the chapter's next newsletter as well.

Although I was buoyed by the two interviews I had conducted, the scheduling of two others, and people's helpful suggestions and good wishes, by the end of January I was disappointed with the lack of progress. I realized that I would not be able to finish and defend this project during the spring 2005 semester as I had hoped. I also knew that if I ever was to finish this project, I must change the research design.

On January 29, 2005, I sought approval from my dissertation advisory committee to change my research design. By February 8, 2005, all committee members had approved my request to make these changes:

WHAT: One 60- to 90-minute telephone interview, with the opportunity for follow-up

***Rationale:** I deduced that asking people to commit to two long interviews likely was one of the two major problems with my study. To participate in any study is an imposition on one's time; what I asked people to do appeared to be participation-prohibitive. I learned from the pretest and actual interviews that I could rein in the scope of the study without sacrificing its scholarly nature. I could ask fewer questions, thus decreasing the length of time I would need to speak with my informants. (My prospectus included 17 theory questions; my dissertation was scaled back to include five sets of theory questions.) I figured*

that asking people to participate in only one interview would increase the attractiveness of participation.

WHO: 20 to 25 (or more if needed) GRPs working directly for or on behalf of 501c(3), 501c(4), and 501c(6) organizations operating in Maryland

Rationale: *The length and number of interviews enjoy an inverse relationship of sorts (Warren, 2002). If I conduct shorter interviews, I then would need to conduct more interviews overall. Given the standards set by earlier University of Maryland dissertations (i.e., Hon, 1992), my qualitative interviewing experiences (e.g., Tuite [a.k.a. Simone] & McComas, 2003), and Warren's (2002) guidelines, I proposed to interview 20 to 25 informants to achieve informational sufficiency for my study. (If after interviewing 20 to 25 people informational sufficiency has not been achieved, I would continue to conduct interviews.) This then required an expansion of the pool of potential informants. Rather than limiting this pool to boundary-spanning personnel in 501c organizations involved in the Maryland Smart Growth/Priority Places issue, I solicited the participation of boundary spanners in Maryland 501c organizations who engage in political advocacy on a variety of issues.*

WHEN: Interviews would be conducted as soon as committee approval was secured and would continue until information sufficiency was reached

Rationale: *As several people pointed out to me, the timing of this study was problematic. Asking GRPs for interviews during the 90-day Maryland legislative session was the second of the two major problems with the original research design. Although I thought going into the study that asking GRPs for their time during their bread-and-butter time of year might be a challenge, I did not anticipate it being the obstacle to participation it evidently was. It was akin to asking a certified public accountant for three hours of time in the middle of income tax season. I forged ahead with this schedule in an attempt to finish the doctoral program by the end of the spring 2005 semester, which also coincided with the retirement of my dissertation advisor, Dr. Larissa A. Grunig, and of one of my committee members, Dr. James E. Grunig. Both of them received emeriti status, which allowed them to continue serving in their capacities on my (and others') committee. This, as well as having the latitude to solicit participation after the Maryland legislature ended in mid-April 2005, allowed me to set December 2005 as my new graduation goal.²*

Once I secured committee approval to change my research design, I immediately edited my project Web site to reflect the changes. On February 9, 2005, I sent out a

² I set December 2005 as my new graduation goal after revising the research design but before I was affected by Hurricane Katrina. I explain how that situation pushed by graduation date back to May 2006 later in this chapter.

second solicitation mailing to my original pool of potential participants (Group 1). This mailing included a personalized letter, acknowledging the problems with the initial parameters of participation and asking for one 60- to 90-minute interview (with the opportunity for follow-up) that could be conducted after the legislative session ended, if preferred (Appendix C). I asked those who wanted to postpone their interview until after the session ended to use an enclosed response device. I would then contact them after the legislative session ended to schedule an interview. I directed those who wanted to schedule an interview in the short term to my Web site and the on-line interview scheduler. I also included a printout of my Web site in this mailing, thus turning the Web site into a “push” technology rather than a “pull” technology (I am not able to include this printout as an appendix because I took down the Web site in mid-August and lost all hard and electronic copies of it during Hurricane Katrina). I included the informed consent form and a postage-paid, pre-addressed envelope that could be used to return the timing preference response device and informed consent form to me. On April 21, 2005, I sent out a last appeal to Group 1 on a 8.5-inch by 5.5-inch yellow card stock postcard (Appendix D).

Ultimately, I sent a three-wave mailing to Group 1, which included 63 people. Dillman’s (1977) Total Design Method (TDM) for mailed questionnaire design and data collection inspired this multi-wave solicitation procedure. TDM’s reliance on multiple waves of mailings is one reason why this method consistently yields survey response rates in the 70% range (Dillman, 2000), a statistic that enticed me to use TDM. My positive response rate was not quite that good: The positive response rate for Group 1 was 19% (12 people out of 63). Four people contacted me to decline participation, but

ultimately 12 others agreed to participate and ten of them completed interviews with me. The last postcard mailing, which dropped after the legislative session ended, generated most of these interviews. These ten interviews were transcribed and used in the analysis.

On May 3 and 4, 2005, I sent out an initial mailing to in-house government relations and public relations professionals and for-contract lobbyists (Group 2) working directly for or on behalf of Maryland 501c organizations. This mailing contained a two-page letter (Appendix E), an informed consent form, a printout of my project Web site, a “please contact me” form, and a postage-paid return envelope. The please contact me form was for individuals to alert me that they wanted me to contact them about arranging for an interview rather than self-scheduling their interviews through the project Web site.

I sent only one mailing to Group 2, which included 403 in-house professionals and 125 for-contract lobbyists, because of the overwhelmingly positive response this mailing generated. I had anticipated sending out a second mailing to this group; given the sheer number of people who agreed to interviews, this was not necessary. I purposely chose to send this mailing to an overly large number of people out of fear of a low response rate. Seven people contacted me to decline for various reasons and I declined interviews with 37 people. I eventually conducted interviews with 34 people from Group 2, of which 30 interviews were transcribed and used in the analysis, and 10 people from Group 1.

Although I had reached informational sufficiency by about the 25th interview, I continued to conduct interviews because of the variety of organizations that people worked for. The positive response rate for Group 2 (69 out of 528) was 13.1%. The

positive response rate for my overall solicitation efforts was 13.7% (81 positive responses from both groups' mailings out of 591 people contacted).

I turned down 37 people (all of whom were members of Group 2) who wanted to participate, e-mailing them this message:

I just received your paperwork indicating your interest in participating in my dissertation project; thank you for responding to my call for participants. As it (happily) turns out, my project now suffers from an embarrassment of riches: Many more people responded to my mailing than I had *ever* imagined would.

Consequently, as much as I truly do appreciate your willingness to be interviewed for the project, I already have more than enough interviews completed and scheduled to make my project solidly dissertation "worthy."

Once the project is completed sometime in the fall, I will be sure to send you a copy of the executive summary of my dissertation. Thanks so much!

Everyone I turned down will be sent a copy of the executive summary of my study's findings.

I chose to turn down many of the people I did because they responded to my mailings after I had completed or scheduled many interviews. After I had completed a number of interviews, I did begin to turn down some potential informants because they declined to have their interviews audiotaped. Beyond that, I did not "cherry-pick" whom to interview; the 44 GRPs I interviewed were the first 44 people who contacted me to participate.

Why did so many people respond to my call for participants? I have several theories. The first has to do with the timing of the call. People received the Group 2 mailing after the session ended, during the early summer lull, when presumably they had an hour or so to spare. The second has to do with my study's topic touching a nerve. The 2005 legislative session was widely considered by my informants to be one of the most

bitterly partisan and contentious sessions in recent and not-so-recent memory. I suspect that my study provided an opportunity for people to vent some steam. The third has to do with the tone and verbiage of the letters included in this Group 2 mailing. These introductory letters had a much friendlier and less academic tone than did the original solicitation letter sent to Group 1. (I did lighten up the tone and language contained in the second and third mailings to Group 1, in an attempt, along with the changes that obviously eased the burden of participation, to encourage participation.)

Because I have done some professional work writing copy for and developing direct mail packages, I am particularly proud of the mailings that I developed for this project. They read and looked impressive; they communicated, “She is serious and means business.” One informant complimented me, saying

It’s a really interesting project. I think you did tap into something and to your credit what you sent to folks was good material. It piqued your interest and showed that you had some passion behind this. People responded to that.

I estimate that I spent several hundred dollars on postage for all of the groups’ mailings. Each piece of the first and second Group 1 mailings needed a regular 37-cent stamp plus another regular stamp on the return envelope. Each piece of the third Group 1 mailing required a regular stamp (37 cents). Postage for all those mailings totaled \$116.55. Each piece of the Group 2 mailing needed 60 cents of postage plus a regular stamp on the return envelope, or 97 cents of postage for each of the 528 pieces, or \$512.16. The total postage costs were \$628.71. The per-completed-usable-interview cost of postage was \$15.72 (40 interviews and \$628.71 worth of postage). Other sizeable expenses included copying, ink jet cartridges for my printer, business reply envelopes, paper, transcription machines, audiotapes, labels, long-distance phone calls, a monthly

contract for the on-line scheduler, and — of course — tuition. I was willing to spend whatever money was necessary to get enough people to participate so I could finish the project.

The Research Strategy: Qualitative Interviews

Whether a researcher executes long, in-depth, elite, ethnographic, or phenomenological interviews, he or she is executing qualitative interviews. Conversation grounds qualitative interviews, where two engaged parties, the interviewer and informant, dynamically interact to extract and mine informants' perspectives and perceptions of reality (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Warren, 2002).

The major purpose of qualitative interviews is “to discern meaningful patterns within thick description” (Warren, 2002, p. 87). Qualitative interviews are “active” interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Active qualitative interviews have a semistructured, or semistandardized (Berg, 2001), quality to them, in that the interview does not strictly adhere to a regimented question-and-answer format. Active interviews are “social interactions” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 3), recursive encounters that participants simultaneously extract meaning from and imbue with meaning. Active qualitative interviews thus exemplify the transactional model of human communication. The interviewer and the informant synchronously encode and decode verbal and nonverbal messages throughout the active interview (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 2001). I conducted the interviews as conversations rather than interrogations or the administration of the survey.

As could be inferred from the preceding discussion about qualitative, semistructured interviews, by virtue of the interviews' active, conversational nature, a

researcher is a fully engaged participant. Warren (2002) characterized the qualitative interview as “a kind of guided conversation” (p. 85). Conversations unfold as people communicate. This requires the active participation of the interviewer, through asking questions, attentively listening, encouraging the flow of the conversation, and otherwise guiding the interview. Participants in interviews qua conversations jointly construct meanings made during the talk session (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). I will discuss the ethical issues raised in this last point in a subsequent section (“Veracity”).

Shuy’s (2002) observation that “When one person is the designated question asker, the power of the interaction clearly falls to that person” (p. 542) illustrates that the balance of power is tipped in the favor of interviewers in an interview situation. However, Shuy said that face-to-face interviews offer a more balanced power dynamic than do telephone interviews, because of the contextual naturalness of face-to-face interviews. Telephones set up a “superior-subordinate relationship” (p. 542). Nevertheless, as I will note shortly, save nonverbal communication, contextual naturalness can be achieved during telephone interviews, which would then minimize the power imbalance between the interviewer and informant.

In contrast to Shuy’s (2002) thinking, I believe that the power balance between the informants in the study and me as the interviewer favored the informants. Without their participation, I would neither be able to complete this dissertation nor my doctoral degree. Benefits (beyond receiving an executive summary of my findings and perhaps winning a \$100 American Express gift card) may only accrue to informants indirectly, whereas benefits will accrue to me directly. I need them more than they need me. By

participating in the study, they granted me a tremendous kindness, for which I am indebted.

Also in contrast to Shuy's (2002) thinking, informants wield a great amount of power in a semistructured, active interview. Informants may reveal information that takes interview conversations in an unexpected direction, one that the interviewer had not prepared for. Interviewers typically rely on open-ended questions, which grant informants freedom in how they answer those questions. For example, I started off each interview by asking informants to tell me about their professional background and how they wound up working for their organization. Several informants used this question as a springboard to tell me about their life stories, stories that were filled with asides and tangents. Although it was sometimes difficult, perhaps even inefficient (but always interesting), to have ceded power to informants like this in qualitative interviews, this was necessary in keeping with the spirit and intent of qualitative inquiry. I truly wanted to learn of and from my informants' experiences, so I extended to them the freedom to tell me their experiences: "Qualitative researchers only gain control of their projects by first allowing themselves to lose it" (Kleinman, Copp, & Henderson, 1992, as cited in Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 3).

The Interview Protocol

In a semistructured active interview, the interviewer relies on an interview protocol that contains the pre-determined questions that should "guide" an interview and should form the basis of each interview in the study (Dunford & D. Jones, 2000; Patton, 1990). An interview protocol is useful to keep an interviewer "on track" in any one semistructured active interview, which is a "largely improvisatory" (Wengraf, 2001, p.

202) exercise, and across a set of such interviews (Patton, 1990). An interviewer can refer to the interview protocol to provide a systematic and focused framework for an interview rather than being bound to it. The role of the interview protocol in a semistructured active interview is analogous to the role of the speech outline in an extemporaneous speech (as taught in basic public speaking courses at the University of Maryland and the University of South Alabama). My original interview protocol (which I had tested in my pretest interviews) was extensive because it was to guide me through two 60- to 90-minute interviews with each informant. The interview protocol I wound up relying on for my one-hour long or so interviews was less extensive but appropriate given the shortened length of the interviews and their conversational nature. See Appendix F.

Warren (2002) cautioned, and I know this to be the case from my experiences as an interviewer, that an interviewer must be flexible and attentive. Diverge from the interview protocol if necessary, carefully listen to what an informant is telling — or not telling — “you.” However, as one would come back to his or her speech outline when giving an extemporaneous speech, come back to the interview protocol in the interview.

Just as the phrasing of items in a survey instrument design is crucial (Sudman & Bradburn, 1983), the phrasing of questions in an interview guide is no less crucial. Interview questions should operationalize theory questions, linking the theoretical to informants’ “reality” (Wengraf, 2001). At a basic level, an interviewer can do that by phrasing interview questions in the informants’ language, or “idiolect” (Berg, 2001; Wengraf, 2001, p. 64). For example, I never used the term “boundary spanner” in the interviews. This term, as I explained earlier, was something several people had

questioned, even teased, me about. Rather, I would use more familiar, everyday vernacular such as “communicator,” “representative,” “bridge,” or “liaison” to convey what I meant instead of “boundary spanner.”

Interview questions typically should be open ended to allow informants to expound on their experiences. Open-ended questions should not constrain or presuppose informants’ answers: “The truly open-ended question allows the person being interviewed to select from among that person’s full repertoire of possible responses” (Patton, 1990, p. 296). Examples of open-ended questions that, if carefully worded, grant informants’ access to their full repertoires include Spradley’s (1979) grand tour questions and Patton’s (1990) experience/behavior questions, opinion/values questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, and sensory questions. For example, I asked informants, “Tell me about what you do in your job as director of government relations (for example).” This typically generated long, detailed answers, replete with anecdotes, into which I could interject probe questions.

Wengraf (2001) noted that an interviewer occasionally might find it necessary to ask closed-ended questions or questions that yield dichotomous answers. Interviewers should be sure to probe or otherwise follow-up on informants’ answers to these questions. Sometimes, toward the end of an interview, if an informant had not commented about the, for example, grassroots activities of the organization, I would ask him or her, “Does your organization engage in any grassroots activities?” This is phrased as a “yes” or “no” question. Sometimes, an informant would just respond “yes” or “no” and then I would have to ask follow up questions (i.e. “What’s your involvement with those activities?” or “Why doesn’t your organization do grassroots activities?”). More frequently, however,

when I asked a closed-ended question, the informant would respond with an answer far beyond “yes” or “no.”

Asking too many questions may cause informants to suffer from interview “fatigue” or to feel as if they have been subjected to an interrogation. Interviewers can keep the interview conversation flowing by using prompts; statements; silence; filler responses; probes; follow-up questions; and other natural, improvised verbal and non-verbal interventions (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Warren, 2002; Wengraf, 2001). These are all natural components of everyday conversation and thus of conversation-styled interviews. I relied on all of these conventions during the 44 conversation-styled interviews, with the exception of non-verbal interventions. Telephones, which I used to conduct the interviews, hamper non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and gestures.

Pretesting

Qualitative research designs should and likely will evolve as research is conducted; a fixed research design in qualitative inquiry is “both impossible and inappropriate” (Patton, 1990, p. 51). Assuming that design changes will occur, conducting a pretest study is an efficacious way to minimize changes that will likely be needed as the research is on-going. A pretest can reveal the flaws and kinks in the research design in advance of the conduct of the actual research, thus allowing a researcher to enter the field with a more appropriate research design. King et al. (1994) considered pretesting a necessary step in research projects involving qualitative interviews.

Rather than jumping into the study “cold,” I developed a pretest to evaluate the internal validity of the questions (Are my questions asking what I have designed them to ask?) that comprised the original interview guide. This pretest was designed to also assess my abilities as an interviewer, the process of interviewing by telephone, and the time needed to complete an interview.

I conducted mock interviews with two acquaintances in the first half of December 2004. They are GRPs who worked for Washington, DC-based 501c(4) organizations in late 1994 and 1995. These dates are significant because during this timeframe the Republican Party, during the 1994 mid-term election, won majority control of both chambers of the U.S. Congress. Over the years, the Republican Party had periodically controlled the Senate. What truly jolted the nation’s political environment in 1994 was that the Republicans had taken over the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time since 1954, a jolt similar to the jolt that occurred in Maryland in 2002.

As boundary-spanning GRPs who worked for 501c(4) organizations during a major environmental jolt, my acquaintances met nearly all the criteria I had established for my study’s potential informants. Glesne (1999) recommended pretesting “with people as close to the realities of the situation as possible” (p. 38), if not people from the actual sample. I preferred to “reserve” my sample for the study rather than tap into this pool of people for the pretest, in retrospect a smart move given my initial difficulties in securing participation. I was confident that because my acquaintances closely “resemble” my study’s potential informants, my pretest interviews with acquaintances fairly represented real interviews with my study’s informants.

I used these practice interviews to detect any problems with my research design, problems that I resolved before going into the field. As readers know now, my research design changed significantly after going into the field; and my pretest interviews had nothing to do with the changes. However, my pretest interviews were helpful in deciding what areas of the study I could rein in. After I changed my research design, I eliminated exploring the notions of loyalty and distance between boundary spanners and their organizations. I also decided to explore some narrower topics (e.g., entrepreneurship and buffering) within the context of broader topics (e.g., boundary spanning) rather than as stand-alone topics.

I conducted the practice interviews as if they were real interviews for my study (Berg, 2001), from engaging in small talk and other social niceties to audiotaping the interviews. There was one difference: At the end of the interview sessions, I asked my acquaintances to e-mail me with their opinions of the quality and quantity of questions I asked, my interviewing skills, the length of the interview, the overall interview process, and the like. I also asked them to make recommendations on how I could improve on these points. I thought that they would feel more comfortable about being honest with their opinions by telling me in a less personal way — e-mail — than on the phone. I then reviewed the tapes to assess the interviews on these same points, as well as whether the questions I asked elicited the kind of data I had anticipated and whether my acquaintances' answers offered the depth needed for my research to be credible and meaningful.

These peer- and self-evaluations were helpful as I determined whether some theory questions should be eliminated from the study (effectively constricting the scope

of the study, as I had to do when the research design changed), whether the interview guide required a complete overhaul or just fine-tuning, and whether I needed to adjust the interviews' logistical considerations or my interviewing approach. The time and labor I expended conducting the pretest was a wise investment in my study (Berg, 2001) and in the study's achievement of Lincoln and Guba (1985)'s four "canons of quality" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 191): truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality.

The four interviews I conducted with my two acquaintances went well. Each interview was long, as had been expected (between 60 and 90 minutes). They bordered on tedious and toward the end of each interview, I did think they began to resemble interrogations. My feelings were confirmed after I listened to the tapes of the four interviews. However, the questions I asked were eliciting the kind of answers they were designed to. I also found that not every question on the protocol needed to be asked because many of my acquaintances' answers spoke to more than one question.

Interviewing by Telephone

Although only a few studies have compared the relative merits of in-person and telephone interviews in academia, the extant studies have found that face-to-face qualitative interviews generally are more advantageous (Shuy, 2002). The advantages of face-to-face interviews include better response rates, increased accuracy of responses, lower interviewer workload, slower-paced interviews, greater "contextual naturalness," better ability to handle complex issues, responses that are more thoughtful, greater likelihood of self-generated answers, and a greater balance of power between the interviewer and informant (pp. 541-543). There are some advantages to telephone

interviews (e.g., greater efficiency and standardization of questions) but they appear to be limited to survey interview or polling situations.

Shuy (2002) attributed the increased accuracy of responses to the contextual naturalness of a face-to-face situation. A face-to-face interview “compels more small talk, politeness routines, joking, nonverbal communication, and asides” (p. 541).

However, as I know from my interviewing experiences, it is possible to compel all of these things, nonverbal communication excepted, during a telephone interview.

Among the most significant advantages of conducting interviews face to face is that they are conducted in the physical presence of both parties: Informants convey meaning through their nonverbal communication behaviors such as facial expressions, eye movement, gestures, and body language, meaning otherwise lost in non-face-to-face interview situations. Further, by not “being there” during the actual interview, an interviewer may lose additional meaning that could be derived, for example, from the informants’ physical environment. In one of my first interview experiences as a graduate student, the informant’s cluttered desk and office reinforced her verbal messages to me.

Shuy (2002) offered criteria that a researcher could use to decide if in-person or telephone interviews are more appropriate for a study. His criteria included the type of interview (i.e., survey or qualitative), the complexity of the issues and questions, and the need for contextual naturalness. A researcher’s final choice will affect the quality and type of information gathered in the interviews, Shuy cautioned, so the researcher should choose carefully. Although several of Shuy’s criteria should have encouraged me to conduct face-to-face interviews, and despite my knowing the advantages offered by face-to-face interviews, one of Shuy’s criteria trumped all other considerations: “The

economic, time, and location constraints of the project” (p. 539). At the time of data collection (i.e., January through June 2005), I did not reside in Maryland, the area where the informants are located. Thus to collect the data I had to conduct the interviews by telephone from my then-home in Mississippi. In fact, Berg (2001) believed that when a researcher faces geographical issues such as this, collecting qualitative data by telephone is the logical method. I grant that telephone interviewing is not an ideal method; but given the circumstance, it was the only feasible, reasonable method. I continue to be grateful that my committee acknowledged this to be the case. I believe that conducting my interviews by telephone was an effective way to collect the data. Further, I do not believe that my data are of lesser quality because they were collected by telephone rather than in person.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues abound in all forms of research, more obviously in clinical trials for a new pharmaceutical product, less obviously in relatively innocuous qualitative interviews about people’s experiences of a phenomenon. Yet ethical issues, regardless of their obviousness, do abound and researchers must carefully address them. For this study, I have considered several of the ethical issues discussed in Patton (1990); Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000); and graduate courses in qualitative methods and research design that I took.

Promises

Patton (1990) cautioned against making promises that cannot be kept. I did not falsely promise anything to my informants, in the form of benefits that might accrue to them or to their profession, in exchange for their participation in my study. I did not

deceive them into thinking that this study is anything other than as I presented it in the introductory solicitation letters and the Web site I designed about the study. Although this study, as I have discussed in the introduction, does have applied significance, its purpose is basic research, to contribute to the body of knowledge in public relations. Its purpose is not action research intended to effect social change (Greenwood & Levin, 2000).

I made two promises to my informants that I of course intend to keep. The first promise was that I would send a copy of an executive summary of the study soon after I have successfully presented it. This offer was made in the informed consent form (which I will discuss shortly) and again at the end of the interview. (People whom I turned down for interviews will also receive a copy of the executive summary.) The second promise I made was designed to encourage participation in my study and to thank those who did. I promised to enter the names of all informants who complete an interview with me into a drawing for a \$100 American Express gift card. Once I have finished the executive summary, I will write each informant's name on a slip of paper, crumple all of the slips, and place them in a bowl. My husband will then draw one slip of paper from the bowl; this person is the winner of the gift card. When I mail the executive summaries, I will also notify everyone in the drawing of the results (without revealing the winner's identity) and send the gift card to the winning informant.

Risks and Confidentiality Considerations

I did not foresee that this study would subject my informants to psychological stress, legal liability, ostracism by others for participating in this study, or political repercussions (Patton, 1990). As it turned out, I was right. However, an informant's

agreement for the interview to be audiotaped may present a minimal risk in that there exists the chance, albeit slight, for his or her identity to become known. An audiotape and its corresponding transcript are a trail of evidence that could lead back to the informant. However, as is standard practice, only I have access to the interview audiotapes, my interview notes, and transcripts.

I made two copies of each interview tape and my notes. I expected that these copies would provide me with two layers of protection (and peace of mind) against the loss or destruction of the data I have collected. I had all originals and copies of the data in a locked, fireproof filing cabinet in my home office. However, Hurricane Katrina flooded my home on August 29, 2005, with about six feet of brackish water. I recovered all of the tapes but could not salvage them. I had evacuated with electronic and hard copies of the interview transcripts and notes, and these (along with drafts of this manuscript) were intact. As the American Psychological Association recommends, I will destroy all of the remaining intact data (i.e., written notes, transcriptions, and the like) five years after the completion of my dissertation.

I assured, indeed promised, my informants that I will do everything in my power so their identities will remain confidential. I was only able to offer them confidentiality; because as the informed consent form explained, I will know their identities and thus will have the ability to link answers to individual informants. Anonymity is not possible because by participating in this study, informants revealed their identities to me.

In all work emerging from this study, I revealed neither the identities of informants nor their organizations, unless I had received permission to do so. I did quote informants for illustrative purposes as part of the dissertation. Direct quotations — which

offer raw, deep, richly illuminating insight from informants (Patton, 1990) — enhanced the “human presence” in the study. I redacted any information in quotations that might have revealed the identity of informants or their organizations. Further, I attributed quotations using non-specific identifying information.

Informed Consent

Before a person participates in almost any research project, he or she must give his or her informed consent to participate. By giving informed consent, a person acknowledges full understanding of what he or she is “getting into” by participating in a study. A person indicates informed consent by reading and signing an “informed consent form.” This form, which the University’s Institutional Review Board requires, clearly and honestly describes the study’s purposes and procedures, risks and benefits to participants, participants’ rights, and considerations of confidentiality. Please see Appendix B for this form.

Veracity

Fontana and Frey (2000) said “veracity of the reports made by researchers” was another ethical issue for qualitative interviewing: Is a researcher’s rendering of a phenomenon “true” to the informants’ experiences of that phenomenon? Fontana and Frey’s concerns about veracity are related to the idea of reflexivity in qualitative research.

Reflexivity

Qualitative inquiry endeavors to discover subjective knowledge. The goal is to learn of informants’ knowledge of a phenomenon, but to accomplish this researchers must be aware of and acknowledge their own “subjective lenses” (Glesne, 1999, p. 176) toward that phenomenon — by being reflexive. To ignore the need to be reflexive is

unethical and antithetical to what qualitative research is all about. When researchers “out” themselves in this way, they provide the information that consumers of research need to disentangle “the researcher” from the informants’ perspectives of the phenomenon under investigation. Reflexivity also provides consumers of research with insight into why a researcher interpreted the informants’ perspectives as he or she did.

The guiding principle I abide by when conducting qualitative research is this: It is not my perspective of a phenomenon that is of ultimate interest; what is of interest are the informants’ perspectives of a phenomenon. I am the research instrument for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Yet being a qualitative researcher is more than just being the flesh-and-blood equivalent of a survey questionnaire. Being a qualitative researcher is about giving “voice” to and making meaning of informants’ experiences and perspectives. If someone were interested in my perspective of a phenomenon, then he or she should solicit my participation in a qualitative study. (In fact, one informant invited me to participate in a qualitative study. I participated in her study in November 2005.)

Not revealing my subjective lenses with regard to this study would both diminish my informants’ contributions and cast doubt on the veracity of the study. Thus, I heed Maxwell’s (1996) exhortation that researchers be cognizant of their motivations and the implications thereof for the research project. Awareness is enough because “attempting to purge yourself of personal goals and concerns is neither possible nor necessary” (p. 16).

First, I have undertaken this research project not because boundary-spanning GRPs in 501c organizations are an oppressed people or because shifts in political parties’ control of elected offices are eroding the foundations of U.S. democracy. Although I

would like to say that altruism is the driving force behind this research project, I cannot. It is driven by self-interest: I undertook this research project because I am pursuing a doctorate, which requires the completion of a dissertation that contributes to the theory and practice of public relations.

Second, I voted against Ehrlich in the 2002 gubernatorial election. Although Ehrlich's election played a role in the development of this study, my views regarding his election did not play any role in the execution of the research or the data analysis. I know that if I am to achieve my goal of completing a methodologically sound and veracious dissertation, I must compartmentalize my opinions. I believe that I am a mature-enough researcher to know better than to "enter the field with preconceptions that prevent [me] from allowed those studied to 'tell it as they see it'" (Denzin, 1978, p. 10).

Coder Reliability

When two or more researchers analyze the same qualitative data, they form a system of checks and balances. This system minimizes any one researcher's "presence" in the interpretation of the data and "ensures that naturally arising categories are used rather than those a particular researcher might hope to locate —regardless of whether the categories really exist" (Berg, 2001, p. 104). In studies where only one researcher analyzes qualitative data, such as with this study, that system of checks and balances does not exist. How can consumers of my study trust my analysis and interpretation of the data given my research "monopoly" of the data?

Consumers can trust me as a researcher, and the veracity of my study, because I have been openly reflexive. I cannot guarantee that my open reflexivity provides the equal protections against bias — conscious or otherwise — as would having more than

one coder review the data. Yet I have strived to make readers privy to my subjectivities, motivations, and biases as they may relate to this study, in an earlier section. Further, Lincoln and Guba's (1985)'s four canons of "qualitative confirmation" — truth-value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality — guided my analysis and interpretation of the data. Qualitative confirmation (S.I. Miller & Fredericks, 1994) addresses the question of "How can we make a case that qualitative data or findings warrant the inferences about the topics we are studying?" (McLean, Myers, Smillie, & Vaillancourt, 1997, "Abstract" section, para. 1). Truth-value represents the idea that a depiction of a phenomenon, for example, being studied is in fact a faithful or trustworthy depiction of it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): Is the depiction credible? Findings about a phenomenon have credibility if those with direct experience of that phenomenon considered a description or interpretation of it accurate or reflective of their experience, or that those without direct experience could recognize that phenomenon.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) second canon is applicability: Could a study's findings "fit" other contexts? Could the findings be "transferred" to bring meaning to or illuminate other situations? Applicability does not entail generalizability, however: "External validity is never the hallmark of qualitative research. Rich responses and opportunity for fresh discovery are key" (Hon, 1997, p. 9).

Consistency is the third canon. If Researcher B discovered similar findings in his or her own qualitative study when adhering to the research design and thought processes of Researcher A's earlier study, then A's study has a high degree of consistency. The consistency of A's study reinforces its trustworthiness.

The final canon is neutrality, the spirit of which is captured by the notion of confirmability in qualitative inquiry. Would others draw the same conclusions as the original researcher did when looking at the same qualitative data? If the answer is affirmative, then the original researcher was successful in minimizing his or her own biases and subjectivities when drawing conclusions; the study has confirmability.

Population Sample

Before Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.'s assumption of the governorship of Maryland in January 2003, the state's last Republican governor had been Spiro Agnew. Agnew took office in 1967 but resigned in 1969 to become President Richard M. Nixon's vice president. They were re-elected in 1972. Agnew resigned from the vice presidency in 1973 because of financial improprieties dating to his time as Maryland governor (Crystal, 1996).

In the years bookended by the Republicans Agnew and Ehrlich, a succession of Democrat governors helmed the state: Marvin Mandel (1969 to 1977), Blair Lee III (1977 to 1979), Harry Hughes (1979 to 1987), William Donald Schaefer (1987 to 1995), and Parris N. Glendening (1995 to 2003) ("Maryland at a Glance," 2003). As a long-time strongly one-party (meaning Democrat) state ("Two-Party State," 2003), to say that Ehrlich's election as governor (beating the two-term Democrat Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend) "jolted" Maryland's political environment would not be an exaggeration. As such, Maryland offered a unique, contemporary "laboratory" for exploring the implications of low-level cataclysmic change on players in a political environment.

Maryland's political environment teems with boundary spanners. Elected and appointed officials, their aides, committee staffers, executive department bureaucrats, and for-contract and in-house government relations professionals function as boundary spanners, as many others do, in political environments. The question of "Whom does one interview?" (Warren, 2002, p. 87) requires a two-part answer.

The first part of my answer is that ultimately, I am interested in the individual lived experiences of boundary-spanning GRPs at certain "player" organizations. These are organizational members whose work activity involves one or both of the two modes of boundary-spanning: information processing and external representation. I envisaged that these are the people, the "informants," who would participate in this study. These individuals and their work experiences are also the units of analysis for the study. Lindlof (1995) and Holstein and Gubrium (1995) suggested this nomenclature (i.e., "informants") for referring to participants in interview-based studies. Other researchers use appellations such as "interviewee" (Gaddis, 2001) and "participant" (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1994). For Holstein and Gubrium (1995), these terminological differences represent more than semantic differences. To them, the differences in terminology represent differences in perspective. They referred to "respondents" as "passive vessels" throughout their book. Yet Hon (1998) and Warren (2002), both experienced qualitative interviewers, used the terms "respondents" and "participants," when surely neither considered the individuals in their studies to be "passive vessels." Warren viewed these individuals as "meaning makers" (p. 83).

However, I chose to follow Lindlof (1995) by referring to the individuals included in this study as "informants." According to Holstein and Gubrium (1995), the term

“informants” has evolved throughout its use in ethnographic studies. More than merely describing or telling researchers about their culture, informants also interpret their culture for researchers. Given both this evolution and the constructivist nature of qualitative inquiry, the term “informants” is apropos. I also believe this term better recognizes these individuals’ roles in and contributions to this study than would “interviewee,” “participant,” or “respondent.”

The second part of my answer is that many “player” organizations exist in Maryland’s political environment that could have been selected as the study’s population. I first compressed this range to nonprofit organizations, specifically 501c(3), 501c(4), and 501c(6) organizations, operating in Maryland. These are organizations for which the political environment is paramount and whose existences transcend elections and a political party’s control of powerful offices. Although the same points could be made about for-profit corporations, their “business” is business and profit. I am interested in 501c groups because their “business” is to effect changes in public policy and public opinion, either directly or indirectly for what they perceive as the greater good.

In a bow to my personal interest in land-use management policy, I had originally compressed the range of potential 501c organizations to those with environmental, business, or agricultural interests having stakes in the Smart Growth policies championed by former Maryland Governor Glendening. His Smart Growth policies were intended to act as a litmus test to determine the affect of these organizations toward the current Republican governor’s ascendance to power. That is, did they view a Republican’s ascendance to power as a boon or as a bane? The point of this is to compare the experiences of boundary-spanning GRPs at “boon” and “bane” organizations. As I

discussed earlier in this section, I eventually decompressed the range of 501c organizations eligible for my study. I solicited participation from boundary-spanning GRPs at numerous 501(c)3, 501(c)4, and 501(c)6 organizations operating in Maryland on a variety of issues and interests.

I employed a stratified purposeful sampling strategy (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Such a strategy “illustrates subgroups [and] facilitates comparisons” (p. 28). My rationale for using this sampling strategy reflects that of Dunford and D. Jones (2000). Their study included participants who worked for industries that were affected for better or for worse by the jolt of “extensive deregulation” (p. 1210). My study seeks to include informants who work for 501c organizations that were affected for better or for worse by the jolt of Ehrlich’s election.

To determine an initial stratified purposeful sample, I reviewed mass media coverage of the former governor’s Smart Growth policies, Web sites of organizations surmised to have a stake in the issue, and Web sites about the Smart Growth issue that operated independently of any Maryland 501c organization. My Group 1 sample included 63 potential informants at 34 organizations. I compiled the expanded stratified purposeful sample (Group 2) from the membership directory found on the Web site of the Maryland Government Relations Association (<http://www.mgra.org>; Although the list was publicly available, I did request and receive permission from MGRA’s president to contact its members). I included only MGRA members employed by 501c organizations. I also used the list of registered lobbyists obtained from the Web site of Maryland State Ethics Commission (<http://ethics.state.gov.md.us>) to compile my Group 2 mailing

database. I included in the mailing database only lobbyists who were registered to lobby for 501c organizations.

A researcher uses a theoretical sampling strategy when he or she “seeks out respondents who seem likely to epitomize the analytic criteria in which he or she is interested” (Warren, 2002, p. 87). A stratified purposeful sample, used in this study, is an example of this strategy.

In her dissertation, Hon (1992) interviewed nearly three dozen public relations professionals. Plowman (1995) conducted 23 interviews for his dissertation; more recently, Hung (2002) interviewed 40 public relations professionals for her dissertation. Despite the range in the number of interviews conducted for each of these University of Maryland dissertations, each researcher conducted enough interviews presumably to achieve the “informational sufficiency” (Snow, 1980, p. 103) needed to answer their research questions. When a researcher ascertains high levels of “taken for grantedness” and “theoretical saturation” in the information elicited through his or her interviews, and experiences a “heightened confidence” (p. 104) about that information, informational sufficiency has been achieved.

Warren (2002) noted that there are “norms,” but no strict rules about how many interviews should be conducted for a nonethnographic qualitative study. She did offer this helpful guideline: A publishable study should include 20 to 30 interviews.

As I have previously noted, I estimated that I achieved informational sufficiency by about the 25th interview. However, I continued interviewing, 44 interviews total, because the people I was interviewing represented such a variety of 501c organizations and interests. I included 40 of these interviews in my analysis. I believe capturing so

many perspectives, beyond what was sufficient for the study, was a worthwhile expenditure of my time. Non-specific information about each informant's professional background, title, and organization is provided in Appendix G. I have not included the length of time informants have served in their various positions. Given the unusually long tenures of some informants in their jobs, compounded by the "small town" atmosphere of Annapolis, someone could easily determine the identities of these informants. Suffice it to say that all of the informants' tenures pre-date the 2002 gubernatorial election. Thus they all are qualified to comment on the effects of the jolt of Ehrlich's election on their work lives.

I neither transcribed nor included in the analysis interviews with four informants. Although their interviews were insightful, none of these informants had worked long enough in their current positions (or generally in government relations for or on behalf of 501c organizations operating in Maryland) to have experienced the jolt of the 2002 gubernatorial election.

Data Collection and Management

Interview data that I collected are my interview notes and audiotapes. Only two informants declined to have their interviews audiotaped. For those two non-audiotaped interviews, I took more detailed notes than those taken during audiotaped interviews.

Audiotaping

Patton (1990) offered this rationale for audiotaping interviews: "It all comes to naught if the interviewer fails to capture the actual words of the person being interviewed. . . There is no substitute for these data" (p. 347). My informants' words are my study's raw data; to not have audiotaped my informants' words was to risk losing

these data. Without these data, this study would have been toast. I turned down many people willing to participate because they had indicated they did not want their interviews audiotaped. I had the luxury of being able to turn down people for this reason because there were so many other people willing to participate and be audiotaped. I decided to interview the two people who did not want to be audiotaped because of the prestige of their organizations.

I found that the most efficacious method for audiotaping telephone interviews was to use the speakerphone feature on the telephone and a high-quality audiotape recorder. There are devices that allow for direct audiotaping from a telephone into a recording device; I have found that these devices are troublesome and unreliable. My primary recording device was a combination recorder/transcription machine. I also used a secondary recording device, a basic audiotape recorder, to audiotape the interviews. I have audiotaped many telephone interviews previous to this study without technical problems and did not have any technical difficulties with this study. Once I confirmed the informant's decision regarding the audiotaping of the interview, I placed him or her on speakerphone and then hit the record buttons. An ancillary benefit of using the speakerphone feature is that note-taking was much easier when both of my hands were "free" than when one hand was holding the telephone receiver.

The shortest of the 40 analyzed interviews lasted 42 minutes, the longest 96 minutes. The average length of those interviews was 61 minutes. I spent about 41 hours conducting analyzable interviews for this study (61 minutes x 40 interviews ÷ 60 minutes). I conducted the first interview on January 10, 2005, and the last on June 24,

2005. I conducted two interviews in January, one in February, one in April, 21 in May, and 15 in June.

Preparing the Raw Data

I interviewed 44 people, two of whom declined audiotaping but did grant in writing their consent to be interviewed. For these two informants' interviews, I took copious notes, which I later typed. I did not transcribe the audiotapes from four interviews because the informants had not professionally experienced the 2002 gubernatorial election. I transcribed audiotapes from the 38 recorded interviews using a transcription machine. The transcripts were typed, double spaced, and paginated. I typed my handwritten notes from each interview into their corresponding places in the interview transcript.

Wengraf (2001) discussed the “debate” of whether selective or complete transcription is better; I know qualitative researchers in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland carry on this debate as well. All the interview transcriptions I had done previous to this study were complete, or verbatim, transcription. In spite of the disadvantages of complete transcription, such as the labor intensity and time commitment, I feel more comfortable and confident in managing the interview data this way. Yes, transcribing 38 interviews was an extremely time-consuming — but worthwhile — process. I believe that I have a deeper understanding of the data having done the transcription myself rather than if I had hired others to help me.

I preferred to do complete transcription for three reasons. First, it includes the pauses, asides, and my parenthetical interjections about the informants' tone of voice and nonverbal communication, and the like. This results in a “closer” representation of the

actual interview than does selective transcription (Wengraf, 2001). Second, I would have been unsure of what information to selectively transcribe until listening to all of the interviews. Then I would have had to go back and listen to each interview tape again to do the selective transcription. To me, this would have wasted time and seems biased toward auditory learners. I am a visual learner: I need to see the representation of the data before I can truly begin analyzing it. Third, I agree with Patton (1990) that complete transcriptions are “the most desirable data to obtain” (p. 349). Complete transcription, in my opinion, better suited my strengths as a researcher and the contingencies of the study.

Coding, Reducing, and Organizing the Data

I had to code, reduce, and organize 40 interviews’ worth of raw data before I could enter the data-transformation stage of the research process. Here is how I *originally* envisioned the process of coding, “the process of breaking down, examining, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 61):

1. I will code the transcripts with an a priori coding scheme. (Some categories will be “content specific,” meaning they emerged from the study’s conceptualization [Schwandt, 1997]). Some content-specific categories will represent what boundary spanners should be experiencing — according to the extant (mostly quantitative) research — as their organizations experience an environmental jolt and subsequent dealings with that changed environment. Other content-specific categories will represent the opposite of what the literature suggests boundary spanners should be experiencing. The “noncontent-specific” categories emerge from “common sense reasoning” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 16) about what I could expect to find in the data. These categories should be useful for coding data that speak to the perceptions, opinions, and affects of informants.
2. I will re-examine thoroughly the transcripts to let an a posteriori coding scheme emerge. As opposed to the a priori categories that emerge from the study’s conceptualization and my reasonable expectations, the “a posteriori context-sensitive” categories emerge from the transcripts (Schwandt, 1997), the informants’ voices themselves in typewritten form. This is an inductive endeavor. I then will code the transcripts using this scheme.

Although a posteriori coding is a hallmark of grounded theory, which I am not doing for this study, I anticipate that such coding would be useful for two reasons: One, I will not be able to, in advance of collecting the data, divine an exhaustive list of categories for the data. Two, a posteriori coding allows the meanings of coding categories of all varieties to evolve as the data transformation process moves forward (Schwandt, 1997).

Below is the true story of how I coded, reduced, and organized 40 interviews-worth of data into manageable, “Leah-friendly” units:

I purchased a large multipack of differently colored highlighter markers. I then typed up a checklist of the five sets of theory questions and printed 40 copies of it. I stapled a checklist to the front cover of the each informant’s folder, which contained the transcript, notes, and other information. I then methodically and repeatedly read through the hard copy of each informant’s interview transcript (which included the notes I took during the interview) to refamiliarize myself with the data.

Next, for each theory question, I developed a list of indicators, an a priori coding scheme. These indicators were the kinds of information I knew look for in the transcripts that would answer or be relevant to each theory question. This served to operationalize the theory questions’ concepts. For example, one set of theory questions was “How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe the worldviews of their organizations? How did the jolt affect the worldviews of their organizations?”

I will use this concept to illustrate my coding process. A worldview is a concept difficult, but not impossible, to operationalize, as Babbie (1989) said “prejudice” is. Further, the term “worldview” is not a word that most people, such as my informants, use in everyday language. I had to determine what kinds of information would be in the transcripts that would make tangible the concept of worldview, information that indicated

the presence of some sort of overarching perspective or mindset about an organization's relationship to the environment and how that relationship and the environment "worked."

I coded the data that informed the worldview theory question using utterances that espoused the values associated with symmetrically and asymmetrically presupposed worldviews. For example, for symmetrical value of responsibility to others, I looked for utterances that spoke to the organization's willingness to interact with other organizations and stakeholders and consider their viewpoints. These utterances focused around the organization's involvement (as accomplished by the informant) in coalitions and whether these coalitions were comprised of "strange bedfellows." If an informant described being involved in these activities, or a willingness to should such opportunities arise, I coded that as indicating symmetrical values. Conversely, if an informant described declining such activities or being opposed to organizational involvement in those activities, I coded that as indicating asymmetrical values. I also looked for data that would contextualize these codings. For example, were partisan considerations a factor in their involvement (or lack thereof)?

The symmetrical value of decentralized management (and its asymmetrical counterpart of centralized management) would be realized in the data as the participatory nature of the organization's internal decision-making process and an informant's involvement. I coded these values based on an informant's description of interactions with the organization's decision-making body and how this body arrived at decisions. I also coded these values based on the informant's activities and responsibilities within the decision-making process, as well as his or her position within the organization.

I coded the symmetrical value of autonomy (and its asymmetrical counterpart of control) based on the degree of self-management an informant had in the conduct of his or her work. Who did an informant answer to, how frequently, and on what sort of matters?

The coding of utterances related to achieving organizational self-interest and engaging in dialogue was tricky. I coded informants' utterances related to the desire to further organizational self-interest as indicating asymmetrical values. I coded utterances related to engaging in dialogue as indicating symmetrical values. But informants generally spoke of furthering organizational self-interest (an asymmetrical value) through engaging in dialogue (a symmetrical value) with critical stakeholders. That much of these data overlapped was evident from the overlap of the two colors I used to code these utterances.

Coding also served to reduce the data, distill them to their essence. In qualitative inquiry, reducing the data is essentially an exercise in "framing" (a concept I discussed in Chapter 2), the process by which boundary spanners cull through available information and package that selected information for the consumption of other organizational members. Framing involves the selection, neglect, emphasis, or de-emphasis of certain information — exactly what data reduction should entail (Wolcott, 1994).

Next, armed with a colored highlighter marker assigned to that theory question, I combed each transcript, guided by my indicators, and underlined or bracketed off all the information related to that theory question. I frequently found that after going through a few transcripts that I had to expand my indicators for that theory question, an example of a posteriori coding. I also frequently noticed recurring themes in informants' answers,

such as semantic and metaphor choices, that could not be readily categorized into a theory question. I kept track of these themes, too.

I eventually reviewed each transcript at least five times, once for each theory question. Some of the transcripts had so many ribbons and brackets of color that they resembled Jackson Pollack paintings. Is using colored highlighter markers a primitive way of coding and organizing data? Perhaps. Is this an embarrassingly simplistic, even juvenile, way to do things at the doctoral dissertation level? Perhaps. However, as I have mentioned I am a visual learner; so for me this was an appropriate and effective method to the madness (or is it madness to the method?) of coding, reducing, and organizing a huge amount of data. I believe my coding process was essentially the same as the coding process used by Hon (1992) for her dissertation: “I then assembled the findings by grouping individual statements under the research question for which each utterance seemed most relevant” (p. 147). I did what she did: grouped statements into categories.

Transformation

At this point, I began the “most difficult” and “most creative” phase of the study: data analysis (Berg, 2001, p. 102), or as Wolcott (1994) equivalently called it, “transformation.” I did not rely on qualitative data analysis software (e.g., Atlas, NVivo, or The Ethnograph) during this phase. I am a bit of a Luddite in many aspects of my life, including that of being an analyst and interpreter of qualitative data. I am confident in relying on the capabilities of Microsoft Word and Excel to help my qualitative data “crunching” because of my familiarity with these programs and their intuitive simplicity. Instead, I relied on “index sheets” (Berg, 2001).

For each theory question, I copied and pasted all the color-coded data from the transcripts into one document. All the data relevant to that theory question, categorized by informant, was contained in one document, rather than being spread across 40 transcripts. Data that were highlighted by multiple colors in the transcripts indicated that they informed more than one theory question. I compiled index sheets for these data as well, which was useful for exploring connections among the topics of the theory questions (such as perceptions of the jolt and legitimacy). These index sheets were printed on legal-sized paper, thus leaving me with a wide column to jot down my notes and thoughts during the transformation phase. I needed every last bit of blank space in those wide columns and in the margins of the index sheets.

Data transformation is the metamorphic process by which qualitative researchers turn the raw materials they have collected — data — into a finished product to be consumed by other researchers and interested parties. Cooking offers a useful analogy: A chef would not serve the ingredients of a cake — flour, sugar, and eggs — to guests. A chef serves his or her guests the actual cake — the *transformed* flour, sugar, and eggs. The chef transforms by mixing, baking, and decorating, whereas the qualitative researcher transforms through the description, analysis, and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994). During this phase, I embarked on a macroanalytical and speculative endeavor, “transcend[ing] factual data and cautious data and begin[ning] to probe into what is to be made of them” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 36).

Description answers a study’s basic “what” questions (Wolcott, 1994; Patton, 1990). Description offers a depiction of a something — a phenomenon, event, or

experience — as informants impart it to the researcher. The researcher's role vis-à-vis this information is as a messenger, not as an interpreter or pundit.

Many researchers present these answers using “thick description” (Geertz, 1973b), a concept of which Geertz's (1973a) richly detailed observation of a cockfight in Bali is an exemplar. Patton (1990) advocated using thick description, noting that it helps readers make their own sense of answers. I am reminded here of Fox News' sometimes-questionable claim qua slogan: “We report, you decide.”

Wolcott (1994) was less enamored of the use of thick description, worrying that thick description would lead to an unnecessary level of detail because “there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes ‘thick description’” (p. 14). Researchers in the description phase of data transformation should be concerned with the “development of the narrative or presentational account” (p. 17); they need to tell stories, stories that must be told well.

With interpretation, the responsibility for “explaining the findings. . . attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework” (Patton, 1990, p. 375) falls to the researcher, not the consumer. Wolcott (1994) differentiated “analysis” from “interpretation.” Analysis answers the “why” questions whereas interpretation answers the “but what does it all mean” and “so what” questions. Wolcott did not use the term “analysis” in its broad, common meaning in qualitative research; he reserved the term “transformation” for that. Analysis, as Wolcott meant it, is “the systematic procedures followed in order to identify essential features and relationships” (p. 24) in the data. He suggested several plans-of-attack for reaching “analytical affirmability” (p. 24), including identifying patterns and themes in the data;

doing comparisons; and “crunching” the data by, for example, content analysis or discourse analysis.

Chapter 4 contains the results of my description and analysis efforts. I let the informants tell their stories, to an extent letting consumers make their own sense of informants’ lived experiences. But I also analyze their experiences and provide theoretical context by relating their experiences back to the conceptual framework of Chapter 2. In Chapter 5, I analyze my analysis from Chapter 4 and interpret the results of that “deeper” analysis. In doing so, I explain and derive theoretical and applied significance from informants’ experiences.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

There are no facts, only interpretations.

—*Friedrich Nietzsche (1887), German philosopher*

This chapter describes and analyzes the data collected from the interviews to answer the study's first central research question (In what ways have the jolt and subsequent changes in the political environment in Maryland affected boundary-spanning GRPs and the work they do?). As the researcher, I obviously have taken an active role in reducing and classifying these data. To help ensure that the informants are speaking for themselves — and to minimize my voice — I have included many verbatim utterances. This study is, after all, designed to capture informants' individual lived experiences of being boundary-spanning government relations professionals (GRPs) for organizations negotiating a jolt in the political environment and, for lack of a better term, its aftershocks.

Given the number (40) of informants included in this study, I believe that assigning a unique identifying number or pseudonym to each of them would be confusing. Rather, I attribute utterances to in-house GRP informants with generic forms of their real job titles and which type of 501c organization they work for. Utterances of informants who are for-contract GRPs are attributed as such. I opted not to use informants' real job titles because many of them were specific-sounding enough to potentially reveal the identities of informants or their organizations (or clients) or both. I have tried to provide at least one utterance from each informant per theory question. I was careful to not rely too heavily on the utterances from only a handful of informants in

my analysis. Appendix G provides more information about informants and their organizations (albeit non-specific information, to guard against potential identification).

Another clarification is necessary: In-house GRPs work for organizations whereas for-contract GRPs work for clients. Rather than repeatedly making this distinction throughout the text, phrases such as “informants and their organizations” should be understood as “informants and their organizations and clients.”

And a final clarification before turning to the results of the theory questions: Although it is unusual to quantify trends in a qualitative study, I do so here to demonstrate the results of my purposeful stratified sampling strategy. My goal for this strategy was to secure participation from some informants with varied perceptions of Ehrlich’s election. Did they perceive the election of a Republican governor as a positive or negative event? Would the loss of a Democrat in the governor’s office be perceived as positive or negative from an organizational point of view? Were they and their fellow organizational members excited, disappointed, nonplussed, hopeful, or indifferent to the prospect of an incoming Republican administration? Including both negative- and positive-minded informants in the analysis helped me highlight and contextualize differences in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As serendipity would have it, of the 40 informants, 17 perceived Ehrlich’s election to be a boon to their organizations and 17 perceived it to be a bane. Six informants expressed neutral feelings toward Ehrlich’s election as it related to their organizations. Further theoretical explanation of my boon-bane-neutral assessments are provided in the results for Theory Question 1. Readers will see that I apply these characterizations to informants throughout this chapter to put their perceptions and utterances into appropriate context.

Theory Question 1: Perceptions of the Jolt and How It Affected Annapolis

TQ1a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their organizations' perceptions of the jolt?

There was a balance between informants who perceived Ehrlich's election as a boon for their organizations and those who perceived it as a bane. Their perceptions predominantly were based on implicit associations about the relative "friendliness" of political parties toward their organizations' interests and issues.

TQ1b: How did the jolt affect organizations' perceptions of their political environment?

The jolt ratcheted up the existing dynamism and complexity in the relatively stable Annapolitan political environment so that Annapolis became a turbulent field rife with uncertainty. Informants perceived politics as an asymmetrical game of competition.

In November 2002, the outcome of the Maryland gubernatorial election jolted the state's political environment. Republican congressman Robert H. Ehrlich, Jr. beat Democrat Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, the two-term lieutenant governor under Glendening. Congressman Ehrlich became Governor Ehrlich in January 2003; he is the state's first Republican governor since Spiro Agnew in 1969. I provided details about this jolt in a section ("The 'Jolted' Political Environment in Maryland") of Chapter 1.

However, in the course of conducting and analyzing the interviews, I realized my Chapter 1 "backgrounder" on the jolt was inadequate. There was *way* more going on in Annapolis related to Ehrlich's election than I had committed to paper. I realized the necessity of having informants explain what was really going on in Annapolis, from a first-hand (first-perceived?) perspective, beyond what I already had described. It is the only way to provide thorough, "accurate" context for the informants' individual lived experiences of working in Annapolis before, during, and after the jolt as well as for understanding the results of the other theory questions (in this chapter) and their

implications (as presented in “Chapter 5: Discussion”). Thus, this section contains much in-depth atheoretical background information about the jolt. I have related this information back to the conceptual framework from Chapter 2 that corresponds to this theory question (“Organizational Environments”).

I tried and rejected numerous organizational structures for this section before deciding to bundle the findings for theory questions 1a and 1b. I believe that this structure optimizes the section’s readability while minimizing redundancy.

Dimensions of the Environment

Organizational environments vary along two main dimensions. The first dimension is the static-dynamic dimension, which describes “the degree to which environmental factors remain basically the same over time or are in a process of continual change” (Duncan, 1972, p. 36). Lauzen and Dozier (1992) translated this dimension to a public relations context: It is “the degree to which attitudes, behaviors, and membership of key publics change over a specified period of time” (p. 211). The second is the simple-complex dimension, which is “the number and variety of environmental factors that organizations must consider in decision-making” (Rose, 1985, p. 323). Within a public relations context, this dimension becomes “the range of publics that are of interest or concern to the organization” (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992, p. 211).

Increased Dynamism and Complexity

Based on my analysis, I believe that had the informants — boon, bane, and neutral — used this theoretical language, they would have described the pre-jolt environment as dynamic-complex. One would be hard-pressed to find any political environment in the United States that is anything less than dynamic-complex. If nothing

else, regular election cycles cause enough continual change to keep these environments in a state of flux.

However, in so far as a political environment could ever be simple-static, the pre-jolt environment in Annapolis was simple-static compared with the dynamism and complexity of the post-jolt political environment in Annapolis. There was a high degree of change in the attitudes, behaviors, and membership of political stakeholders — dynamism — during the jolt’s timeframe. The jolt also expanded the range of political stakeholders of interest and concern to the informants’ 501c organization. This dramatically increased the complexity in the Annapolitan political environment.

Ehrlich’s election wrought a political environment that became, as a for-contract GRP put it, “more partisan, more acrimonious, more confrontational” since Ehrlich’s election than in earlier years. That partisanship escalated throughout his term. This assessment was universally held by the informants, regardless of whether they perceived the jolt as a boon, bane, or neutrally.

Informants portrayed Annapolis’s political environment before Ehrlich as a friendly place where the political divide was not so personal, public, and seemingly intractable as it is now (notwithstanding the infamous years-long feud between former Democrat governor and current state comptroller, William “Donald” Schaefer, and Glendening). One for-contract GRP reminisced: “I do know that you had personality and policy conflicts in the past that were every bit as bitter. But they managed to get beyond them.”

Annapolis, since Ehrlich’s election, has evolved (perhaps “devolved” is more apropos, depending on one’s point of view) to be like Capitol Hill. . .and informants did

not mean that as a compliment. Many informants echoed one for-contract GRP's sentiment about the partisanship in Annapolis: It "is just as nasty as anything that's going on over on Capitol Hill. And we've never had to experience that here." Several of them wondered if Ehrlich, who had come to Congress during the 1994 mid-term election cycle that put the Republicans in charge of both chambers, had brought what an in-house GRP for a 501c(6) organization called, "cut-throat Capitol Hill politics to Annapolis." The department director of another 501c(6) organization, who neutrally viewed Ehrlich's election, said of him: Ehrlich has a "streak of partisanship a mile long. If you're on the wrong side of the aisle, you won't get anything from him. . . He's very aware of what's going on politically with any organization he's working with."

From these comments readers can begin to get a flavor of the Annapolitan political environment:

- An executive director of a 501c(6) organization: "There's all this backbiting and it has become just an ugly, ugly place."
- A for-contract GRP: "The problem is there is too much testosterone in Annapolis right now. There's just too much marking turf."
- A for-contract GRP: "It just gets petty. You don't see the Democrats hanging out with the Republicans late night at the bar on Monday night after session, not like they used to. They go to different places. There's not a real camaraderie anymore."
- A department director for a 501c(6) organization: "It's gotten fairly nasty. The Republicans and Democrats alike have gotten difficult to deal with and the way they interact with each other and the governor's office has been pretty shrill, pretty belligerent. Republicans have been shrill and belligerent; Democrats have been shrill and belligerent."
- The department director of a 501c(6) organization: "It's gotten to be partisan. Each side has what I call, 'They got their wolf up.' They went from being a puppy to being a wolf! So they've got their big bark up."

What could have happened to the town where, as the assistant executive director of a 501c(6) organization recalled, a member of the Republican leadership and the Democrat chair of a powerful committee once happily “time shared” a staffer? Over the next few pages, as informants describe what has happened to the political environment of Annapolis, I provide theoretical context.

“The Ground Itself Is in Motion”

But labeling the post-jolt political environment in Annapolis as dynamic-complex does not do justice to informants’ descriptions of what Annapolis has become. Post-jolt Annapolis, as informants described it to me, qualifies as a “turbulent field.” The amounts of dynamism and complexity in the environment are so high — the environment is so jolted — that “the ground itself is in motion” (Emery & Trist, 1965, p. 26). A turbulent field is characterized by increased competition between increased numbers of organizations and stakeholders in the environment. This means more factors must be included in an organization’s political calculus than in a non-turbulent field (e.g., a simple-static environment). This turbulent field is the most challenging type of environment. The turbulent field of Annapolis challenged informants because they were the organizational boundary spanners responsible for the “communication function of management through which organizations adapt, alter, or maintain their [political] environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals” (Long & Hazleton, 1987, p. 6).

The dynamism and complexity in post-jolt Annapolis, which are to such levels that “the ground itself is in motion,” cannot be attributed solely to the jolt. This is contrary to my working assumption as I began this study. Yes, Ehrlich’s election was the

genesis of the partisanship, informants told me. But it is insufficient for explaining the devolution of Annapolis into the maelstrom of partisanship it has become. Indeed, one for-contract GRP noted, “Don’t think that the level of conflict that you have had over the past three years was the inevitable outcome of a Republican being elected.”

Annapolis is a turbulent field not just because a Republican governor was elected after so many years of Democrat governors. It is because of personalities. It is because of the difficulties of sharing power (for Democrats) and elation at finally having some power in the state government (for Republicans). It is because of efforts to recapture (for Democrats) or retain (for Republicans) the governorship in 2006. It is because of the manipulation of issues and the budget process to the advantage of one’s political party and to the detriment of one’s political opponent. These are just some of the factors that challenge informants and that require informants and their organizations to account for them in their decision-making and actions.

Ehrlich’s election unleashed unprecedented environmental complexity, in terms of “the range of publics that are of interest or concern to the organization” (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992, p. 6). It also affected the “membership of key publics” (p. 6), which is a factor in environmental dynamism. Informants said that it is no longer just Democrats who matter in the political calculus; everyone matters. Whereas previously informants may have bypassed engaging with Republican lawmakers, because of political trends over the past few years coupled with Ehrlich’s election, they no longer can afford to do so. Although Maryland remains an overwhelmingly Democrat (i.e., blue) state, over the years Western Maryland and the Eastern Shore have been trending red (i.e., Republican). Republicans have been defeating the conservative (in terms of fiscal and even social

matters) Democrats from these areas, thus allowing the Republican Party to make inroads in the General Assembly. The heavily populated areas in Maryland, such as Prince George's and Montgomery counties, and Baltimore City, remain deeply blue. These red inroads have encouraged Republicans in the blue General Assembly. As the president of a 501c(6) organization noted, "They finally have a voice in state government." The election of Ehrlich emboldened them even more, as the department director of another 501c(6) organization explained:

Republicans clearly believe that their star is in the ascendancy, that they're going to continue to build their numbers in the General Assembly, that they're going to hold the governor's office in 2006, that their fortunes have reversed. They don't think that the Ehrlich administration's election in 2002 was an aberration. They think it's the beginning of a trend. . . That's what they think and that's how they act these days.

Since Ehrlich's election, as the department director of a 501c(6) organization explained: "The difference now in the playing field is that they're all players, every one of them is a player. And you've got to analyze so many more pieces of the chess game." So there are Democrat and Republican chess pieces on the turbulent "chessboard."

Dynamism is also a factor of the "degree to which attitudes [and] behaviors of key publics change over a specified period of time" (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992, p. 6). Informants cited an embittered Democrat Party, which is hungry to reclaim the governorship in 2006, as contributing to the turbulent chessboard of Annapolis. The Democrats have experienced great difficulty with, one, accepting that their party lost the governorship, and, two, that this entails sharing power with Republicans. The department director of a 501c(6) organization recounted attending a Democrat fundraiser a couple of years ago and the impression the Democrats' rhetoric left on him: "And the rhetoric was, the Democrats look at this state as theirs. It was almost proprietary. They were very

offended that they lost when they felt that they shouldn't have lost." Democrats no longer call all of the shots, as the president of a 501c(6) organization noted.

However, no informants expressed *any* surprise at the outcome of the election. . .disappointment or anticipation, perhaps, but never surprise. As politically savvy insiders, privy to the campaigns' internal poll results, gossip, and unconventional wisdom, even informants working for organizations that officially endorsed Kathleen Kennedy Townsend were not surprised when she lost the 2002 gubernatorial election. The conventional wisdom, as voiced by the executive director of a 501c(6) organization, had been it was her election to lose: "She's got it. We're a state that's always elected Democrats; she's a Kennedy!" Around Annapolis, although people considered her a nice person, they did not regard her as a particularly effective lieutenant governor or strong campaigner. This informant continued, "I think the Democrats realize now, many of us realized it years ago or when the 2002 election was going on that they had the weakest candidate ever and that there was no way she was gonna win." Some Democrat-leaning informants believed that in a strange way this thinking probably helps their party rationalize the 2002 loss and gives them hope of reclaiming the governorship in 2006.

However, to reclaim the governorship in 2006, Democrats also want to make sure that Ehrlich does not have a strong record to run on, further compounding the turbulence on the chessboard. As a for-contract GRP observed: "They couldn't get used to the fact that the governor wasn't a Democrat anymore. . . So they've set out on a four-year plan that [Ehrlich] must fail to make sure the next governor will be one of theirs." The executive director of a 501c(6) organization added, "They will do anything and everything to put this governor on the spot and make him veto anything and everything

that is ‘feel good.’” The Democrats are trying hard to checkmate Ehrlich’s “king”; they want that Republican piece off the chessboard and replaced with a Democrat king.

This attitude is manifested in numerous ways in Annapolis. Many informants observed that the General Assembly passes legislation designed to publicly and politically embarrass the governor, to put him in the political hot seat, and to prevent him from getting a “win.” The committee chair of a 501c(4) organization said, “Democrats are raising issues knowing that they aren’t really going to change policy but it might make a good headline when the governor says something bad about this thing that’s popular.” He said this is reciprocal: “Republicans are raising issues because they know it will be uncomfortable for the Democratic leadership to reject them.”

Evidence of “rally ‘round the party” also is found in the changing role of the party caucuses in the General Assembly. Informants noted that in the pre-Ehrlich era, the party caucuses met infrequently and were largely ceremonial. Now the caucuses meet much more frequently and on the Democrat side even are involved in “telling the [committee] chairmen what to do,” according to the president of a 501c(6) organization. Committee chairs traditionally have had a tremendous degree of autonomy. Whereas informants previously once may have overlooked engaging with party caucuses, they have become “environmental factors that organizations must consider in decision-making” (Rose, 1985, p. 323). Ehrlich’s election put party caucuses on the chessboard. On an organizational level, this served to increase the range of relevant stakeholders that an organization needed to factor into its political calculus. On an environmental level, this served to increase the complexity in the political environment, as per Lauzen and Dozier’s (1992) simple-complex dimension.

So, too, do a breed of activist groups new to Maryland. According to the president of a 501c(6) organization: “Ehrlich’s election spawned these progressive advocacy groups. . . These groups can only survive where there are Republicans. But now Maryland’s a competitive state and they really thrive as being anti-Republican. They’re something new we’ve had to deal with.” They merit their own pieces on the chessboard, further exacerbating its turbulence.

Since Ehrlich’s election, the political environment of Annapolis has become crowded with more stakeholders and competing organizations; it is more complex. Since Ehrlich’s election, the attitudes and behaviors of stakeholders and others have changed, making the environment more dynamic. The changes in the dynamism and complexity of this political environment have effected a fundamental change in the “personality” of Annapolis. After all, a jolt “transforms fundamental properties of states of the system” (A.D. Meyer et al., 1990, p. 94). Before Ehrlich, Democrats and Republicans were engaged in a friendly “gentlemen’s” game of chess. Since Ehrlich, they have been engaged in an unfriendly, zero-sum game of chess, as the informants illustrated. All agreed this turbulent field, this turbulent chessboard, has presented many challenges for them as boundary-spanning GRPs. Even those who perceived the jolt as a boon for their organizations expressed this. One for-contract GRP observed: “The function of what we do as lobbyists has had to grow because of all the complexity and competition there is here now. The marketplace of ideas in Annapolis has expanded.” And all informants agreed, most with disappointment and frustration, that politics in Annapolis likely would never again be a friendly game of chess. As the department director of another 501c(6)

organization lamented: “Once that partisanship exists, I’m not sure if you could ever get rid of it. The genie is out of the bottle.”

Interorganizational Networks

Stakeholders, which comprise an organization’s environment, are linked to each other and the organization to form an interorganizational network (Hatch, 1997). But stakeholders and organizations are comprised of people who function as the links between them in the network. Information flows among these boundary spanners (Hatch, 1997), information organizations need to make strategic and appropriate decisions about how to communicate and act (Aldrich, 1979; Terreberry, 1968). I offered the possibility, in Chapter 2, that because stakeholders and organizations are comprised of people, the flow of information among them should be looked at as occurring though an “interindividual” network rather than an interorganizational network, as if the network were a social circle.

Although there are advantages to applying an interindividual perspective to interorganizational networks, doing so is fraught with the challenges posed by relationships among human beings. Those relationships represent “the highest level of systems complexity” (Bivins, 1992, p. 366; Borden [1985], as cited in Bivins, 1992), as became evident when I followed informants’ suggestions to look at the relationships among the three major players in the state government (i.e., the governor, speaker of the House of Delegates, and president of the Senate).

But informants did not mean the institutions; they meant the people: Ehrlich, Michael E. Busch, and Thomas V. “Mike” Miller, Jr., respectively. The department director of a 501c(6) organization noted about the jolted environment of Annapolis: “It’s

not just about partisanship; it's also about the personality and the DNA of the big players. Unless you get to know these three guys, it's hard to really get a feel for what's happening here.”

I have already introduced Ehrlich; this is an opportune time to introduce the other “two guys,” Busch and Miller. Busch became speaker of the House of Delegates in 2003, after 16 years in the House. He presides over a chamber with 98 Democrats and 43 Republicans. He was elected speaker after the former speaker, Casper R. Taylor, Jr., the House's presiding officer throughout the Glendening administration, was narrowly defeated in 2002.

Miller has presided over the Senate since 1987. He was elected to the House of Delegates in 1971 and his constituents promoted him to the Senate in 1975. No other Maryland Senate president has served longer; he is the longest-serving Senate president in the country (Maryland Democratic Party, 2005). The Democrat Party overwhelmingly dominates the Senate, as in the House: 33 Democrats to 14 Republicans.

These three politicians are mutual stakeholders as well as stakeholders of the informants and their organizations. They are all members of the same expansive social circle. The relationship among these three politicians is complicated, as the informants illustrated, and that has compounded the initial jolt of Ehrlich's election. Their relationship illustrates the effect that dysfunction in the interindividual network can have. Information flowed between these individuals (and their staff members); but flowing information does not mean necessarily that a dialogue is occurring or that conflicts are being resolved. Information exchange does not lead always to information processing.

According to several informants, Miller and Busch, in spite of their shared party affiliation, do not share a relationship nearly so positive as Miller and Taylor (the former speaker) did. The assistant executive director of a 501c(6) organization vividly called the relationship between the presiding officers a “bloodletting”: “Mike Busch and Mike Miller are always at each other’s throats.” Ehrlich and Miller did not start off positively in 2003 when the Senate refused to confirm Lynn Buehle, the governor’s nominee for secretary of the Maryland Department of the Environment. By all accounts, this was unheard of: The confirmation processes of cabinet secretaries are normally considered formalities. Informants who mentioned this, including one for-contract GRP, roundly perceived it as a “slap in the face on Day 1” from Miller to Ehrlich.

The issue of legalizing slot machines in Maryland has strained the relationship between Ehrlich and Busch. Ehrlich campaigned on the idea of allowing slots in Maryland as a means to raise state revenues without having to raise taxes. Ehrlich was elected during a major budget crisis in the state. To compound this budget crisis, in the last legislative session of his administration (2002), Glendening and the General Assembly agreed to a plan that mandated increased funding for public education in the state. But the Thornton Commission’s educational funding plan did not provide a mechanism for the state to raise funds to do so. The state had effectively imposed an unfunded mandate on itself and did so in the middle of a budget crisis.

Ehrlich came into office and inherited both a worsening budget crisis and a mandate to implement the unfunded Thornton Commission plan. Ehrlich has steadfastly refused to entertain anything but slots to increase state revenues. The department director of a 501c(6) organization believed that, “The whole budgetary crisis and the slots issue,

actually they're one and the same quite frankly." As much as Ehrlich advocates allowing slots in the state, Busch opposes them. So they have been split over slots, as well as several other issues. As one for-contract GRP described the split: "They are at a stalemate [on slots] and they have beat each other about the head until they're woozy."

Slots even affected the work of informants whose organizations had nothing to do with slots, thus even adding yet another factor in the political calculus of "bystander" organizations. The department director of a 501c(6) organization said slots "spills over into other things and they become more partisan when they really shouldn't be." Several informants intimated that if it were a Democrat governor who wanted slots (Glendening was anti-slots), Marylanders already would be pulling the levers of one-armed bandits all over the state.

Ehrlich, Busch, and Miller, as mutual stakeholders, are interdependent. As much as they might not like it, they have to engage with each other (if nothing else, to fully discharge their responsibilities as elected leaders of the state). Their rapport may barely rise to the level of civility (as Ehrlich charged in his 2005 State of the State address [Mosk, 2005]). They are individuals linked in an interorganizational network and a social circle. They cannot not communicate. Unfortunately, the content and flow of their communication are marked by dysfunction. Because these mutual stakeholders are stakeholders of my informants' organizations, their dysfunction permeates the political environment, ratcheting up its already high levels of dynamism, complexity, and turbulence.

Uncertainty

The natural tensions between 501c organizations and governments make political environments inherently uncertain (DeHoog & Racanska, 2003). Uncertainty is a function of the available quantity of quality information (Sutcliffe, 2001). In a political context, for example, this is a function of a 501c organization's ability to obtain sufficient high-quality information from political stakeholders about a policy issue. Lacking such information, boundary-spanning GRPs may have difficulty gauging the stakes of that issue and the odds of success or failure of organizational plans vis-à-vis that issue. Abounding uncertainty prompts these organizations to engage with political stakeholders through their boundary-spanning GRPs to reduce the uncertainty. This is the strategic-reduction-of-uncertainty approach (M. Taylor et al., 2003).

Political environments are rife with uncertainty; a political environment like Annapolis that is a turbulent field is even more uncertain. But as Hatch (1997) reminded, "Environments do not feel uncertain; people do" (p. 89). The people in my study, the informants, felt uncertain about Ehrlich aides who were new to Annapolis and thus did not belong to the informants' social circles. They felt uncertain along Lauzen and Dozier's (1992) simple-complex dimension. Informants also felt uncertain because the partisanship in the first-time-in-a-generation two-party government made things unpredictable and volatile. They felt uncertain along Lauzen and Dozier's (1992) static-dynamic dimension. "Expect the unexpected" could have been the professional motto for any one of my study's informants.

Uncertainty, Dysfunctional Communication, and Social Circles

The Ehrlich administration brought tremendous personnel changes throughout executive-branch departments and agencies (these changes, as mentioned earlier, are being investigated by the state). This compounded environmental complexity because of the changes in “membership of key publics” (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992, p. 6). Because the Democrats had been dominant for so long, many of the new people were unknown entities to the Annapolis community of GRPs. They thought: “Who are these new people? What do they know about their subject area and the Annapolis ‘system?’ Can we work with them? What policy changes will they try to effect that will affect my organization?” The GRP community was faced with the uncertainty that comes with making the transition from an administration of the dominant political party to one of a minority party that had been out of power for decades.

Dynamism may be a factor of the complexity in the environment. The staff factor exacerbated the partisan environment of Annapolis. Informants pointed to Ehrlich’s staff as a major contributing factor in the changed atmosphere of Annapolis pre- and post-Ehrlich’s election. All of these informants — boon, bane, and neutral, and regardless of what they thought of Glendening — gave his legislative and senior staffs high marks. A department director for a 501c(6) organization (a boon informant) called Glendening’s legislative staff “phenomenal.” The president of a 501c(6) organization summed up informants’ compliments: “Glendening had a very competent, very strong and responsive staff, senior staff in particular.” Ehrlich’s legislative team uniformly received low marks. The department director for a 501c(6) organization assessed the Ehrlich staff situation:

“I’m hoping that other people have pointed this out to you because a lot of us talk about it down here. There is a piece missing administratively.”

My analysis revealed that informants believed the “missing piece” was one or a combination of the following: that there was only a thin pool of Republican staff talent in a heavily Democrat state, that his staff people were not effective cultural interpreters, and they had a penchant for being closed-lipped. I discuss each of these in turn below.

The Democrats had controlled the executive branch of Maryland for more than a generation. Thus Democrat governors had a wide, deep talent pool from which to pick staff. Many people in this Democrat pool had been preparing to work on the Second Floor — the Annapolitan slang for the governor’s office (located on the second floor of the State House) — throughout their careers. They had risen through the ranks. The result was, according to the president of a 501c(6) organization, “The folks in the Glendening administration were deeper in their field, more expert, more substantive.” When Ehrlich came into office, he did not have a similar talent pool of Republicans with executive-level experience or credentials. Without a significant Republican talent pool in Annapolis, the Republican governor-elect was forced to look elsewhere for talented people.

Ehrlich turned to the familiar: the Judiciary Committee in the House of Delegates, his committee when he was a delegate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and Congress, where he had served since 1994. Three senior members of the governor’s Legislative and Policy Office (LPO) served on or for the Judiciary Committee. According to several informants, the Judiciary Committee’s approach to legislation is different than other committees. It frequently focuses on killing, not passing, bills. The senior vice-president

of a 501c(6) organization said, “The committee is always in the mode of saying ‘no.’” As such, people affiliated with this committee are not trained to go out, sell issues, and develop good public policy. Rather, the culture of this committee is such that people are trained, as the informant characterized it, to “nitpick and find problems.” The vice president of a 501c(6) organization said: “It’s a very different skill set. They don’t have the skills needed to get things passed.”

Informants differentiated between knowing people and the ins-and-outs of Annapolis and being an effective lobbyist, which is essentially what LPO staff members should be. A for-contract GRP elaborated: “Just because you understand what’s going on in the legislature doesn’t make you a lobbyist. There are skills that lobbyists bring to the job.” He listed some of these skills: “You’ve got to get into people’s heads and get them to trust you. You’ve got to make arguments and convince people to vote for things that sometimes they don’t want to. You’ve got to find their soft spots.”

Ehrlich also tapped people from Capitol Hill to work on the Second Floor in his LPO. Informants traced a panoply of problems to his Hill people. These aides were almost exclusively *not* members of informants’ social circles; they were outsiders. Social circles represent opportunities for the sharing and exchange of critical information that reduces uncertainty and that facilitates organizational decision-making (Aldrich, 1979; Terreberry, 1968). I hypothesized in Chapter 2 that the information shared among members of a social circle (who all know and presumably like and trust each other) may be of higher quality than information gained from other sources. Higher quality information may result in more accurate perceptions of the environment and situations, which in turn may result in smarter organizational engagement and better rapport with

stakeholders. Dealing with stakeholders who are not within a boundary spanner's social circle may have significant ramifications for the organization.

Considerations of social circles aside, informants said that the information did not flow easily or at all from these aides. Dysfunctional though the communication among Ehrlich, Busch, and Miller often was, at least they communicated. I believe that the ex-Hill aides in Ehrlich's LPO were not functioning adeptly as boundary spanners between their organization (viz., the LPO) and its stakeholders (e.g., my informants' organizations and executive-branch agencies). This compromises the abilities of boundary-spanning GRPs to do their jobs, further compounding the environmental dynamism, complexity, turbulence, and uncertainty with which they must contend.

Informants gave the ex-Hill aides credit for knowing how to run a congressional office but questioned their skills for establishing a new administration. The department director of a 501c(6) organization concluded, "They just don't know the state government." First, at the federal level, things are often accomplished through the interactions between congressional and executive-branch aides. Not so in Annapolis, according to this same informant: "It's the individual member you really talk to down here; you actually work with the member as opposed to staff." Second — and this may seem trivial but it is not — many of Ehrlich's legislative aides did not use the "right" lingo. They were not fluent in "Annapolis-ese" as the executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization said:

There was a joke among us because they kept referring to the State House as the Hill, which is DC jargon. There's no hill where the State House sits. These guys would say, "Oh, I've got to go to the Hill," and we're thinking: "Well, no. It's actually called the State House."

Third, the Capitol Hill people did not know the inner workings of Annapolis. They were not familiar with Annapolis's laidback style; they did not know the people. Before readers think that informants were being unduly harsh on a bunch of new folks in the throes of acclimating themselves to Annapolis, it bears mentioning that even the most frustrated informants cut Ehrlich's legislative team some slack. Annapolis's community of GRPs had chalked up the 2003 legislative session, the Ehrlich administration's first, as, in the words of a department director for a 501c(6) organization, a "break-in period."

But as time has progressed, many in this community have grown increasingly frustrated because they do not yet see that these Ehrlich aides are seriously attempting to get to know them or the Annapolitan system. These people are the critical stakeholders of interest and concern to organizations. An organization cannot incorporate them into its political calculus (as it should) if communication with them is nonexistent or dysfunctional. This exacerbates environmental complexity and uncertainty. This vice president of a 501c(6) organization found the aides gave the impression that they "thought of themselves as separate and apart in many ways." They were outsiders — something they were likely aware of — but never gave any visible signs that they were interested in becoming insiders and becoming part of established Annapolis social circles. She said: "People joke that his legislative staff never venture out of their offices. You'd rarely see them walking around talking to people. They stayed in their offices and when they did come out, they'd only talk among themselves." A for-contract lobbyist concurred with her: "These guys don't get out of their offices. You've got to be out in the hallway talking to people, out having a drink or doing stuff with them, getting to them. And they don't do that." These are lost opportunities for information flow.

The consensus among informants was that members of the governor's LPO were reticent to engage with others. Some informants shrugged this off, figuring this was the inevitable outcome of a staff that was less sophisticated and less responsive than should be expected at the executive-branch level. Several informants recounted different examples of situations where representatives from two executive-branch departments would show up at the same bill hearing, only to discover that they were testifying on opposing sides. The administration's right and left hands will only know what the other is doing vis-à-vis the General Assembly if the LPO staffers are boundary spanning and communicating effectively.

However, knowing that many people on Ehrlich's legislative team hailed from Capitol Hill, I surmised that there is more to their reticence than ineptness. I worked in the highly charged partisan atmosphere of Washington, DC, politics for Republican-leaning 501c(4) organizations during the 1990s. In that atmosphere, with a Republican-controlled Congress and Democrat President Clinton in office, politics became a zero-sum game. My employers were not always amenable to being forthcoming about our activities; we did not want to "show our hand" or expose a weakness. Loyalty was golden and disloyalty was unforgivable. We behaved as if we were under siege.

And my experiences were from outside Capitol Hill, looking in. I would imagine that people on the inside of Capitol Hill would have had similar, but heightened, experiences. Thus, I repeatedly nodded my head when an executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization observed, "The administration holds their cards very close to their chest, very close to their chest," when a for-contract GRP said, "Compromise becomes totally a dirty word and it really is thought of as capitulation," and again when a

senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization lamented: “They don’t reach out and try to talk to people or welcome people to come in and talk to them. It’s always a hassle.”

These symptoms of a partisanship-induced siege mentality may indicate an asymmetrically presupposed worldview. This mentality registers as a factor within Lauzen and Dozier’s (1992) static-dynamic dimension. I will revisit the Ehrlich’s administration seeming asymmetrical presuppositions in my analyses of subsequent theory questions.

Again, all the informants who believed Ehrlich’s LPO staff to be a major contributing factor in the changed atmosphere of Annapolis pre- and post-Ehrlich’s election agreed on certain points. Their agreement transcended their perceptions of his election as a boon or a bane. Members of Ehrlich’s LPO staff, from a procedural standpoint, after three legislative sessions, appears to have a better feel for what they are doing. However, his staff remains much more frustrating to deal with than the staffs of previous governors. I believe informants’ frustration stems from his staff’s inability or refusal to function as boundary spanners, even though that how this staff should function (normatively and positively) and has functioned traditionally. Of course, I am getting only the informants’ perspectives; but that is what this study was designed to do. Ehrlich is exceedingly loyal to his people and continues to be so in the face of private and public criticism of his staff’s effectiveness. Boon informants lamented that his strong sense of loyalty to his aides, although admirable, was detrimental to his political agenda and ambitions (and presumably, their organizations’ political fortunes as well).

Uncertainty and Partisanship

The attitudes and behaviors of organizations' critical stakeholders (e.g., Democrats and Republicans) changed dramatically after the jolt, increasing environmental dynamism and uncertainty (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). Informants described a partisanship in Annapolis that caused people and issues to be more unpredictable and volatile than before the jolt. This further contributed to their uncertainty about stakeholders and the political environment. The partisanship caused people and issues to be more unpredictable and volatile since the jolt than before. Several informants spoke of being caught off guard when bills that were thought to be going nowhere unexpectedly gained momentum. As the department director for a 501c(6) organization (who was a neutral informant) explained:

What in our judgment is a bad bill may suddenly start flying through the legislature because somebody could use it for political gain. With shenanigans like that we get caught in the crossfire. That makes the landscape a lot tougher to work through.

In some cases, an issue just comes out of nowhere, as seen in this anecdote from a senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization:

The volatility is much more heightened in terms of people going off on the partisan bent on anything. You might think something's simple and then suddenly it's huge for no reason. There was a bill that we had worked on all interim with the Department of Health. On the last day of session some Republican wanted to amend it to regulate abortion clinics. The bill gets sent back to committee and it dies. It was instantaneous. *On the last day of session.* So it's stuff like that that can flair up and you never see it coming. Shit just happens.

Uncertainty and Organizational Learning

As per the strategic-reduction-of-uncertainty approach, perceived environmental uncertainty compels organizational engagement with stakeholders. Environmental jolts,

which cause or compound uncertainty, place even greater urgency on organizational engagement. Organizations, through their boundary spanners, obtain the critical information needed for strategic decision-making. Some of that critical information may come in the form of “lessons learned” from the experiences of other organizations. Research has found that people are as aware of others’ mistakes as their own mistakes (“Study: Brain Sees Others’ Mistakes as Their Own,” 2004). Organizations, which are comprised of people, thus also are aware of and can learn from others’ mistakes and experiences, as my informants indicated. Further, the lessons informants learned from these indirect experiences helped to reduce the uncertainty they perceived about how to engage with their critical stakeholder, the Ehrlich administration.

Before I illustrate my findings about organizational learning, Maryland’s budget process needs to be explained. Like party caucuses, this is another environmental factor (Duncan, 1972; Rose, 1985) that organizations had to consider with renewed significance after Ehrlich’s election. Additionally, many informants cited this process also as a factor in the escalating partisanship in Annapolis, which in turn ramps up the turbulence in this already turbulent field.

The governor holds most of the state’s purse-strings because of the state’s “executive-dominated model of budgeting” (Maryland League of Women Voters, 2004). The governor submits the state’s operating budget to the General Assembly. The General Assembly only can reduce or make conditions on the appropriations. The General Assembly cannot add to the budget or move money around; essentially its members have little latitude or leverage to reshape the state’s operating budget. To the General Assembly’s advantage is that once it is done making its albeit limited changes to the

budget, the budget immediately goes into effect. The governor does not sign the budget but presumably, again because of the restrictions placed on the legislature, the budget still largely reflects the governor's priorities.

Maryland is the only state with the budgeting power so greatly tipped in the governor's favor. As such the governor of Maryland is considered to be the most powerful governor in the country (Maryland League of Women Voters, 2004, para. 5). Several informants, such as the department director of a 501c(6) organization, mentioned this to me: "This idea that nothing can get in unless you say it gets in; it's a huge investment of power in the chief executive in Maryland." The state director of a 501c(4) organization discussed the implications of the governor's budget power on the Baltimore City legislative delegation. Even though the delegation is strongly Democrat and progressive minded, it often must support Ehrlich because of the governor's budget power. The informant explained: "Baltimore City is dependent on some financial assistance from the state and so the delegation needs to be on the governor's good side. He uses that quite a bit."

Many informants expressed this recurring theme: that to accomplish his objectives the governor would "lean on" people and organizations so they would see things his way and that dissent would be at their peril. Several bane informants, such as this department director for a 501c(4) organization, mentioned that they were "wary about tangling with this governor because of his budget power." One neutral informant, a department director who described her 501c(6) organization as "aggressively nonpartisan," was careful to always look over her shoulder: "Nowadays making an off-handed comment about a Republican legislator can come back to haunt you. If it got back to the

[governor's office], it'd be the kiss of death. They don't forget." A for-contract GRP corroborated this department director's fears, saying: "You have to be careful about what you say, so much more so. . . You have to be very careful you don't get quoted in the wrong context as being disloyal or whatever."

Several informants acknowledged being wary of criticizing or questioning the Ehrlich administration, either directly or publicly, because they did not want their organizations to be subjected to retaliation. This retaliation factor is yet another "new" environmental factor organizations must take into account (Duncan, 1972; Rose, 1985). The executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization said: "If you say 'That's a bad idea,' they ask, 'What's going on?' We can't have that relationship with the governor severed. We do need to continue working with him. So it's a fine line."

Even some boon informants found themselves in sticky situations with the Ehrlich administration. As much as Republicans are implicitly associated as allies of "business," Republicans reciprocally see business as their ally. This can be problematic, as the president of a 501c(6) organization explained: "With a Republican governor like Ehrlich, he expects our support even more. It's just assumed we'll be 'there' for them. Sometimes we're not because the issue's just not of interest. So that makes it a bit more difficult."

Why does this culture of fear seem to exist? In addition to the governor's budget power, the answer is because there are several well-publicized examples of people and organizations that have run afoul of the Ehrlich administration and have paid a price for doing so. Example 1: The General Assembly has had to convene a probe of questionable firings of many long-time state employees. Many Democrats have alleged that the

firings, which they believe went far beyond the normal firings that occur when a new administration takes office, were part of a systematic program to “purge state agencies of Democrats deep in the bureaucracy” (Nitkin, 2005, para. 1). These employees’ presumed transgression: being Democrats. Example 2: The governor has banned all state employees from communicating with two journalists from the *Baltimore Sun*. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit upheld his ban, which the newspaper had challenged on First Amendment grounds, on February 15, 2006 (Mosk & Wagner, 2006). The journalists’ presumed transgression: writing articles critical of the Ehrlich administration. (Ehrlich said the ban was “about accountability to the public, and it’s about responsibility with respect to reporting the facts” [as quoted in Mosk & Wagner, 2006, p. B3]). Example 3: Several informants mentioned that they knew of organizations that have been ignored since the start of the administration and that the governor has sniped at publicly. The organizations’ presumed transgression: endorsing Kathleen Kennedy Townsend for governor in the 2002 election. Example 4: Informants pointed out that the administration has shunned other organizations that had once enjoyed excellent relations with the governor. One organization watched as the funding for a historically fully funded bond initiative it supported was taken away. These organizations’ presumed transgression: dissension when the governor expected their support.

Informants wanted to find neither themselves nor their organizations on Ehrlich’s “persona non grata” list, given his status as a critical stakeholder. They were aware of how the Ehrlich administration treated some of its stakeholders and did not like what they saw. They learned lessons from the negative experiences of others. This critical information was internalized and helped to modify their organizations’ and their

decision-making and behaviors. Organizational learning research tends to explore organizations' direct experiences (Baum & Rowley, 2002), but it is clear from my informants' experiences that organizations can learn from indirect experiences as well. I found this to be the case in Simone ([a.k.a. Tuite] 2003). Further, public relations educators could attest to the power of public relations case studies as teaching tools in the classroom. Similarly, public relations professionals could attest to the power of crisis management case studies, both good (e.g., Johnson and Johnson and the Tylenol crisis) and bad (e.g., Exxon and the Valdez crisis), as tools for real-world organizational learning.

Uncertainty and Subjectivity, Perceptions, and Implicit Associations

Here I revisit the boon-bane-neutral breakdown of informants' descriptions of how their organizations perceived Ehrlich's election. I discussed this breakdown briefly in the introduction to Chapter 4 to illustrate my pleasantly unexpected success at achieving a purposeful stratified sample of informants. This discussion is more atheoretical in nature than theoretical but I do provide theoretical context where appropriate.

I have so far contextualized my findings in this section with objectivist (or modernist) concepts such as interdependency, interorganizational networks, information-flow approach to resource dependency theory, and the strategic reduction of uncertainty approach. But, following the blended approach I took in Chapter 2, the context for this subsection's findings are subjectivist (or postmodernist) approaches such as Weick's (1969, 1979, 2002) enactment theory. Organizational perceivers, in this case boundary-spanning GRPs, "enact" and bring life to political environments based on their

perceptions of it. They see the environment in a certain way (remember, environments are not uncertain; people feel uncertain about the environment [Hatch, 1997]), and try to make sense of it for themselves and other organizational members. The organization uses this perceived and reified information in its decision-making about how to engage with the environment. Thus what an organization “thinks” about the stakeholders its political environment (e.g., are they friendly or unfriendly to the organization’s goals?) is an assessment arising from the perceptions and interpretations of boundary-spanning GRPs.

I wanted to learn how organizations, through their organizational perceivers, thought of Ehrlich’s election. Not “how” as in process, but how as in “What did they think?” This information would allow me to situate an informant’s data into the context of whether Ehrlich’s election was a positive event (boon), a negative event (bane), or neither (neutral) to the organization. Although the tendency is to think of jolts in terms of how they may jeopardize organizations, they may be advantageous as well (A.D. Meyer, 1982).

I did not specifically ask informants, “Do you think that your organization perceived Governor Ehrlich’s election as a boon or a bane?” It seemed too jarring a question. Rather, I examined this question based on what informants said or implied about previous and current administrations’ friendliness toward the parochial interests of their organizations, the appearance or disappearance of certain issues from the political agenda, the waxing or waning importance of certain issues on the political agenda, informants’ personal political ideologies and leanings, organizations’ political ideologies and leanings, and informants’ interpersonal networks. These were perceptual prisms through which I believed, based on my research, informants would reasonably refract

Ehrlich's election and its impact on the Annapolitan political environment. Informants did indeed refract Ehrlich's election through all of these prisms, but I found that informants relied on implicit associations (Gladwell, 2005) as their primary prism.

As I discussed at the top of this chapter, my purposeful stratified sample yielded 17 boon, 17 bane, and six neutral informants. I believe that much of this 17-to-17 split was based on informants' implicit associations of what interests Republicans are friendly toward versus what interests Democrats are friendly toward.

The boon informants were both in-house and for-contract GRPs for stereotypically "Republican friendly" industries and interests: 501c organizations representing businesses of all sizes and the housing and development, extraction, medical and health care, agriculture, and animal husbandry industries. These informants all perceived Ehrlich and his administration as being sympathetic or empathetic to their interests. As the executive director of one 501c(6) organization put it, "Ehrlich's come in and has taken a more business-friendly approach to environmental issues." There was empirical evidence of his friendliness. The department director of a 501c(6) organization remembered that even as a candidate Ehrlich said, "Agriculture will have a seat at my table." After he was elected, Ehrlich followed through on his promise: "They had this huge nutrient management summit on the Eastern Shore and invited all the agricultural folks to tear down the program. To say what was wrong with it, what was right with it, what would you do different."

The previous governor, Glendening, had been perceived as unfriendly by the housing and development industry because they believed his nationally recognized Smart Growth program was a front for "no growth." The department director of a 501c(6)

organization explained that Glendening used Smart Growth more for environmental ends rather than to strategically target development to combat sprawl. This informant recounted that he and his industry colleagues were worried that the environmentalists would slowly put up obstacles to building in areas where development was supposed to go. This is exactly what they perceived happened.

From the perspective of informants with agricultural and animal husbandry interests, represented in this paragraph by the executive director of a 501c(6) organization, Glendening was viewed as someone who “downright wanted to put us out of business” and whose departments of environment and natural resources “were always attacking us.” He and another informant in this industry, the executive director of another 501c(6) organization, offered as Exhibit A Glendening’s nutrient management program. This program was enacted in the wake of the 1997 pfiesteria crisis that affected the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The latter executive director said: “It wasn’t a farmer-friendly plan because the government just implemented it. They did not request or receive adequate input from the very people they were trying to regulate. That was Glendening’s legacy.”

The bane informants tended to hail from 501c organizations whose parochial interests involved the environment, education (both public and higher), and the legal profession. These informants’ perceptions of the two governors were wholly opposite from the boon informants. The committee chair for a 501c(4) organization acknowledged that Glendening, a Democrat, was “much more open to our perspective.” The board member of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization found: “There was a lot of communication back and forth between us and Glendening’s staff on Smart Growth. .

.And he made the legislation happen.” Conversely, a for-contract GRP saw Ehrlich as someone “who didn’t seem at all interested in higher education as one of his priorities.” Higher education was one of Glendening’s priorities.

The outright appearance or disappearance and waxing or waning importance of issues on the political agenda with the Ehrlich administration also factored in my analysis of whether an organization perceived the Ehrlich election as a boon or a bane.

Glendening was adamantly against legalizing slot machines in Maryland and building the Intercounty Connector, a new thoroughfare designed to connect interstates 95 and 270 through Howard and Montgomery counties. Ehrlich is an equally adamant proponent of both. For organizations that were in sync with Glendening on these issues, Ehrlich’s election was a bane, as this co-chair of a 501c(4) organization intimated: “Before [the election] we knew that even if a [issue] bill passed, Glendening would veto it. Now we don’t have that luxury.” For those that supported those issues, the outcome of the election was a boon. Ehrlich firmly opposes increasing the state sales tax, thus removing this as an option for responding to the budget crisis he inherited upon taking office.

Organizations opposed to increasing the sales tax were heartened by Ehrlich’s opposition and viewed his election as a boon. The department director of a 501c(6) organization recalled: “The sales tax to us is like the third rail on the Metro. . . But the governor came up right up front and said, ‘No sales tax increase.’ So we were very happy with that.”

When the governor removes an option for increasing state revenues from the table (i.e., increasing the sales tax) and his preferred method of raising revenues (i.e., slots) is bogged down in a partisan quagmire, the reality is that the state’s budget must be trimmed. Sometimes funds are diverted from some programs to others, robbing Peter to

pay Paul so to speak. Decisions about what programs to divert money to and from largely reflect the priorities of the administration in power. The department director of a 501c(3) organization suspected that the Ehrlich administration's rationale for continuing to divert funds from a much-needed environmental program to other budget priorities was simply, "We can put off dealing with [the environmental issue] for a couple of years."

Other informants noted that two of Glendening's priority issues were the environment and higher education. Although Ehrlich obviously cannot ignore issues of such import, the consensus is that these are not two of his top priorities. As such, 501c organizations involved in these issues no longer have an ardent supporter like Glendening to champion their interests. These issues have waned on the agenda of the state's chief political executive.

Interestingly, both boon and bane informants accused these two governors of inventing issues for political gain. A few boon informants, including this executive director of a 501c(6) organization, believed that Glendening manipulated the pfiesteria scare in the Bay into a "political issue." This informant suggested Glendening did so because "he needed a re-election issue," and further, he accused Glendening's pfiesteria action commission of being "a sham; it was not based on science because you couldn't do anything scientifically valid in two months." From his and other like-minded informants' perspectives, it was political grandstanding that had some memorably gross news footage (e.g., dead fish whose skins looked like they had been eaten away by acid) that allowed Glendening to cement his image as a pollution-intolerant champion of the environment.

A couple of bane informants marveled at the coincidence of a Republican governor taking office and the sudden appearance of a medical malpractice (or liability,

depending on one's semantic frame) insurance crisis in Maryland. As one informant, the committee chair of a 501c(6) organization, noted, "Our belief is that Ehrlich really didn't want a solution; he just wanted the problem. It was more fun to have the so-called problem. There wasn't really a crisis at all." He and his like-minded colleagues believed, "As long as we have a Republican governor, this issue is a live grenade."

I was not able to ascertain the gubernatorial preference of six informants and their organizations. The political affiliation of the governor seemed not to matter to them, personally or professionally, or their organizations. The department director of a 501c(6) organization noted that his organization's interests could be "spun" to appeal to both Democrats and Republicans. The president and CEO of a 501c(3) organization, whose organization's issues one would implicitly associate with Democrats, noted:

I don't see Democrats as being any more helpful to our positions than Republicans in the generic sense. Neither of them has a naturally helpful position on the issues that are important to us. . . . Whether [the governor] is a Republican or Democrat doesn't make much difference. They're all defending their particular constellation of economic activities and doctrines. There are some differences but they're around the edge mostly.

Neutral and boon informants did point out that wholesale political change such the election of Ehrlich — regardless of the party affiliations of the winner and loser — creates many opportunities, mainly because of the massive turnover in personnel. The changes in membership of key stakeholders (a factor in Lauzen and Dozier's [1992] static-dynamic dimension) created dynamism, which in turn created positive opportunities. More extensive personnel turnover will occur when making the transition from the governor of one party to another party, as compared with going from Democrat governor to another Democrat. First, extensive turnover puts GRPs on a more equal footing with each other. As the department director of a 501c(6) organization explained,

“To a degree, everyone is starting over; everybody was kind of starting from scratch,” in getting to know the new people throughout the executive branch. Second, as the department director for a 501c(6) explained about the extensive turnover that came with Ehrlich:

Actually it put a few extra cards in our hand. When you have massive turnover in the executive branch, there’s some opportunity for centralized decisions to filter down. That’s sometimes tougher to do that when you’re in Year 6 of an administration. . . You know it’s tougher sometimes for all those incremental changes in policy seats of power. It’s sometimes tougher for a centralized decision to sort of permeate in the same way it can when folks are just hitting the ground.

No informant perceived Ehrlich’s election as an absolute boon or an absolute bane. Many informants from both camps tempered their initial perceptions of Ehrlich’s election after he took office, the 2003 legislative session began, and the “honeymoon” ended. The fantasy (or nightmare) is never so good (or bad) as the reality. I present an example from each camp.

A president and CEO of a 501c(6) organization, representing the boon camp, said: We “thought we’d have greater access and greater sense of being on the same wavelength. That sense is often there but their words are unmatched by action.” Representing the other camp is the committee chair of a 501c(4) organization. He described the situation in which his organization has counterintuitively, yet pleasantly, found itself. When Glendening was in office, his fellow Democrats in the General Assembly sometimes did not want to tackle bold environmental legislation that might put the governor in a difficult spot. The General Assembly, with a Republican governor in office, no longer shows such restraint. His organization has seen unexpected positive movement on issues (an example of favorable unpredictability in the environment),

which he attributes to the Democrats desire to: “put Governor Ehrlich in the hot box. . . . We’ve been much more successful in getting our bills passed in the legislature because the Democrats want to embarrass the Republican governor to show what a lousy governor he is.” This informant even joked his organization may campaign for Ehrlich’s reelection if only to keep up forward momentum on environmental issues.

But this contention can backfire. A for-contract GRP recounted an anecdote about an Ehrlich bill that would have provided a small tax break for veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. It was a publicly popular idea that would not have cost much money. On the last day of the 2005 session, the Democrat-controlled General Assembly killed this bill — again, a bill that originated from the Republican governor’s office. The explanation given was that this bill needed some work and that it would be brought back in 2006 as House Bill 1 and Senate Bill 1. Insiders’ conventional wisdom was that the bill was so good that the Democrat-controlled General Assembly did not want to let the Republican governor score political points from it.

Even informants who perceived Ehrlich’s election as a bane were able to look beyond their organizations’ parochial interests to appreciate that his election heralded an era of greater oversight and a return of checks and balances. A government in which power is divided between the two parties makes for more effective government. . . or so the theory goes. The state director of a 501c(4) organization said: “I think 26 years or whatever it was of one-party domination wasn’t necessarily good for Maryland. The Democrats got lazy and now they are having to demonstrate what they stand for, which is a good thing.”

But such are the perils when one political party controls both the executive and legislative branches of government. President George W. Bush, a Republican who has been in office for nearly one and one-half terms, has yet (at this writing in early 2006) to veto a bill sent to his desk by the Republican-controlled Congress (Burek, 2005). Several informants suspected that the former one-party situation in Maryland's government had led to, in the words of a department director of a 501c(6) organization, "sketchy legislation getting rubberstamped." The executive director of a 501c(6) organization observed that if the General Assembly passed a bill, Glendening's signature was a "fait accompli."

I found, as strongly as Ehrlich's election was viewed as a boon or as a bane, that in all cases, his election has not turned out to be so good or so bad as the informants initially perceived. In spite of the disappointment with the reality of the Ehrlich era that some boon informants experienced (to date), not one wished for a different outcome for of the 2002 gubernatorial election. And despite the inadvertent successes that some bane informants had enjoyed, not one wished for the same outcome of the 2002 gubernatorial election.

Goal Re-Evaluation

As seen in this preceding subsection, implicit associations about stakeholders may cause organizations to re-evaluate their goals and, relatedly, their expectations of what could be realistically achieved. Some organizations may expand the scope and number of goals; others may scale back. Dynamism and complexity in the environment and interdependency will also spur goal re-evaluation (M.I. Harrison, 1994; Emery & Trist, 1965; Terreberry, 1968). As I will discuss in the ensuing sections of Chapter 4, most

organizations' government relations communication strategies and activities had been affected to some degree by the jolt. Strategies and activities are the means to an end; goals are the end. If the means change, would the end change too? And further, did expectations of what the organizations could accomplish, or what the informants could accomplish for the organizations, change?

An organization's legislative goals likely shift from year to year for myriad reasons. I mean "re-evaluation" in the sense that an organization pushed for a bill under Ehrlich that they would not have under Glendening and vice versa. In the case of the informants who described that the jolt affected their organizational goals, goals were changed by "dialing it back" or "kicking it up a notch." This reflects re-evaluation at the level of program goals and objectives (Cutlip et al., 2000). The jolt and its aftershocks did not affect the "raison d'être" — typically outlined in mission statements — of any of the informants' organizations. This was even true for one 501c(4) organization, whose worldview, political legitimacy, and communication practices were changed by the jolt. The co-chair vowed that in spite of the jolt and all it had wrought for her organization, "Our goal has not changed: to keep [this situation] from happening in Maryland."

I found evidence for changing expectations and government relations program goals, in positive and negative directions. As I had expected, the direction of change was associated with whether the jolt was a boon or a bane to the organization.

Social circles are a factor in whether and how organizational goals change. One for-contract GRP said he had a difficult relationship with Glendening but an excellent relationship with Ehrlich. To have this boon informant tell it, he and Ehrlich and Mrs. Ehrlich are close friends. (I did not try to corroborate his claim.) He called his positive

relationship with Ehrlich a “huge addition and resource to the things I do.” His long-time clients know of this relationship and so, according to this informant, once Ehrlich took office, “Their expectations of what I could do for them increased.” This is related to the personal influence model of public relations practice. I discuss many more findings related to this model in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Implicit associations about the friendliness of political parties toward certain issues are another factor. A for-contract GRP, a boon informant, said that several of his 501c(6) clients with business interests increased their expectations once Ehrlich was elected: “They fully expected us to be able to avoid [certain anti-business issue bills] from going anywhere. So far we’ve been able to deliver.” He believed that Ehrlich and emboldened Republican members of the General Assembly were integral to his successful meeting of the client’s increased expectations. Another for-contract GRP concurred: “My business clients certainly expected that life was going to be easier for them once Ehrlich came into office. Their goals have reflected that.” He then added, with a laugh, “But clients always expect you to get them what they want regardless of who the governor is!” The vice president of a 501c(6) organization said her members’ expectations about what could be accomplished grew under Ehrlich because he was seen as “somebody who would give us a fair shake.” Conversely, a boon informant, a president, remarked that even with a governor who is perceived as business friendly, his organization neither significantly changed nor expanded its goals by pursuing proactive legislation to help the members: “The members don’t seek to get a lot out of the government. I sometimes jokingly say we’re ‘dedicated to the preservation of the status quo’; we’re pretty defensive.”

A governor's legislative priorities are yet another factor. An executive director, a bane informant, admitted that with Ehrlich in office, his 501c(6) organization has: "dialed back what we think the organization can accomplish. The possibilities are lessened." Another bane informant, the state director of a 501c(4) organization, said: "We have to fight harder to pass anything. The bar is higher." When I asked him to clarify this, he explained that his organization had to work harder with Ehrlich as governor (compared with Glendening or another Democrat) to achieve the same legislative result.

These two bane informants work for organizations that advocate issues not at the top of Ehrlich's priority list. As such, their organizations' political legitimacy has also been affected negatively by the jolt. They were politically savvy enough to realize this and dialed back their organizational goals much like how their organizational legitimacy (as they perceived the Ehrlich administration conferred on them) had been dialed back.

Another informant, a for-contract GRP, recounted how he dealt with a client whose political legitimacy was negatively affected by the jolt but whose legislative goals increased regardless: "Their expectations were somewhat unrealistic given who the governor was. I had to educate them about what was doable and what wasn't." This client organization lacked political savvy, but it at least had enough to realize that it needed a for-contract GRP. A department director expressed exasperation that he always cannot dissuade the members of his 501c(6) organization's board of directors from adopting "some fairly futile legislative agendas. They have unrealistic expectations." He attributed their unrealistic expectations to low levels of political savvy.

Several informants characterized members of their organizational decision-making bodies (i.e., a legislative or executive committee) or clients as very politically

savvy. I noticed that these same informants all said that the jolt did not affect the members' (or clients') expectations of what could be accomplished legislatively. The department director of a 501c(6) organization complimented her members, saying: "They have a really good grasp of the political process. That gives them a pretty realistic sense as far as what we have to deal with at the state level."

Whether they perceived Ehrlich's election in 2002 as a boon, a bane, or neither, the study's 40 informants must engage with stakeholders in what they all agreed is a political environment that is more dynamic, complex, turbulent, and uncertain than before. To tweak yet again Long and Hazleton's (1987) definition of public relations, which I have adopted for this study, because of the jolt of Ehrlich's election, informants are responsible for "a communication function of management through which organizations adapt, alter, or maintain their [*dynamic, complex, turbulent, and uncertain political*] environment for the purpose of organizational goals" (p. 6). There are more environmental factors and new stakeholders to consider. The membership, attitudes, and behaviors of key stakeholders have changed; indeed the personality of Annapolis has changed.

But these adjectives I used to describe the political environment are my academic words, not theirs. Using plain English, they would say "partisan." But as the informants have illustrated in this section, partisanship makes for a dynamic, complex, turbulent, and uncertain political environment. In retrospect, I also should have asked informants, "Please describe in one word your feelings about working in Annapolis's current political environment." I am confident that informants overwhelmingly would have answered, "Frustrating." The palpable frustration they voiced during the interviews is difficult to

capture on these pages. They expressed frustration from their organizations' parochial perspectives and from their personal perspectives as taxpaying citizens of Maryland. As the department director of a 501c(6) organization, resigned to the new status quo of the Annapolitan political environment, said: "A lot of things just don't happen because of the other conflicts and the partisanship."

Theory Question 5: Perceptions of Organizations' Political Legitimacy

The results for theory questions 2, 3, and 4 follow the results for Theory Question 5, which I am presenting out of numerical order. Discussing the topic of organizational legitimacy within the "Foundational and Middle-Range Theories of Public Relations" section made sense for the purposes of constructing the study's conceptual framework. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it makes more sense to present the results for Theory Question 5 immediately following the results for Theory Question 1, as if it were the second theory question, rather than at the end of the chapter. In the data-transformation phase, I noticed that much of the same data informed both of these theory questions. I believe that this is because how an informant perceived the jolt as a boon or bane for the organization reflects the degree of political legitimacy the informant believed the Ehrlich administration would confer on it. Further, I believe that to fully grasp my analyses for theory questions 2, 3, and 4, readers need "foundational" knowledge about informants' perceptions of their organizations' political legitimacy, as well as informants' perceptions of the jolt and its affect on the political environment of Annapolis.

Theory Question 5a

TQ5a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their political stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of their organizations?

Informants operationalized organizational legitimacy as political status. I found that congruency of values between an organization and a political stakeholder was the major determinant of the organization's political status. Congruency of values translated to high political status, which translated to inclusion and meaningful participation in unofficial and official dialogic and decision-making opportunities with the political stakeholder. The converse was true for values-incongruent, and thus low political status, organizations.

One of the main principles of public relations taught in undergraduate courses is to know the audience. One-message-fits-all-audiences strategies do not work. Effective communication is predicated on knowing the audience's opinions of the communication professional (as an individual), the organization, and its viewpoints before communicating with the audience. This knowledge may influence, for instance, the content and frame of the messages the organization communicates to that audience to how the organization communicates those messages. The principle of knowing one's audience is essentially what Theory Question 5a explored: What did informants believe that elected officials and their staffs thought about their organizations in terms of their organizations' political legitimacy?

Legitimacy is an implicit and important aspect of public relations because organizations and stakeholders are interdependent and thus are of mutual consequence (J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992). Organizational legitimacy is a salient aspect of this interdependence, which boundary spanners, as public relations functionaries, are responsible for managing (Cutlip et al., 2000; J.E. Grunig, 1992). Thus organizational legitimacy looms largely in boundary spanners' work activities and responsibilities.

Stakeholders are of consequence to organizations because they confer legitimacy on organizations (Finet, 1993; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Extrapolating from that, political stakeholders confer political legitimacy on organizations. Political stakeholders

confer legitimacy for many reasons, including their perceptions that the organization is responsible and needed and that it conforms to societal norms, expectations, and values (Baum & Rowley, 2002; J.W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; W.R. Scott, 1987). Politics is competition of values, making Harris's (1997) assertion that, "Legitimacy cannot be defined independently of values" (p. 313) particularly applicable to discussions of political legitimacy.

Boundary-spanning GRPs' engagement with political stakeholders will influence the political legitimacy conferred on their organizations and, circularly, an organization's political legitimacy will influence the engagement between boundary-spanning GRPs and political stakeholders. In practical terms, what a GRP believes stakeholders think of the organization will influence how the GRP does his or her job. This theory question looks at the first part of that last sentence ("what a GRP believes stakeholders think of the organization"; other theory questions (e.g., "Theory Question 4: Boundary Spanning") address the last part of that sentence ("how the GRP does his or her job"). In Chapter 5 ("Discussion"), I will interpret the findings of this theory question within the context of the findings for the other theory questions.

Legitimacy as Political Status

My analysis determined that informants operationalized the academic concept of legitimacy as their organizations' political status, that is whether or not they were in the good graces of and had clout with the governor and other political powers-that-be. Informants discussed their organizations' political status in terms of the degree and quality of access to the governor and the Second Floor and of inclusion in (or exclusion from) the policy-making processes of the state government. Their understanding of

political status reflects Roy's (1981) conceptualization of political legitimacy as the "distance" between a 501c organization and political stakeholders cum decision-makers. The closer to the corridors of power an organization (or a person) is, the higher its political status (i.e., political legitimacy). Further, with higher political status comes greater access and inclusion; with lower political status comes less access and inclusion, perhaps even exclusion. Thus, legitimacy (i.e., status) directly affects boundary spanners' abilities to manage organizational interdependence with stakeholders (J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992).

Clues From Stakeholders About Organizations' Political Status

Interdependence with stakeholders may have positive consequences, which will affect the work lives of boundary spanners, for organizations. Organizations with high political status will have an easier time than lower-status organizations engaging with political stakeholders for advocative, educational, and information-sharing purposes (Boris & Krehely, 2002). Informants who believed that political stakeholders accorded their organizations high political status found this to be the case. They spoke of the ease of interacting with members of the governor, his staff, and executive department officials. The president of a 501c(6) organization described how members of the Glendening administration welcomed their often last-minute visits: "Many times we'd call the Secretary of Planning or Smart Growth and say: 'We're in the statehouse right now; are you guys available?' And the response was always 'Absolutely.' And they'd spend an hour with us." Interestingly, the Glendening administration conferred high status on this organization even though they often clashed on policy. In fact, this informant considered Ehrlich's election a boon for his organization.

Being actively sought out and listened to by the Ehrlich administration also led informants to conclude their organizations had high political status. A for-contract GRP noted that his input, on behalf of his 501c(6) client, was sought out by Ehrlich administration officials: “The Secretary of Health wanted to talk to us and so we spent an hour and a half this morning on the phone with him.” A president believed that the Ehrlich administration accorded his 501c(6) organization high political status because, “Ehrlich is aware of our positions and our stances and our needs and is empathetic to them.” A senior vice-president said that, “Ehrlich would single us out in a crowd,” as evidence that he accorded her 501c(6) organization in high status.

Interdependence with stakeholders may have negative consequences, which will affect the work lives of boundary spanners, for other organizations. Political stakeholders’ dislike of organizations also provided informants with clues about their organizations’ low political status. A state director is sure that the Ehrlich administration accords his 501c(4) organization low status. This informant said, “Ehrlich has fought against our right to exist,” even while a member of Congress. Other informants believed that Glendening accorded their organizations low status because of what they perceived as his disdain for their industry. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization explained: “Glendening wanted to put us out of business; he had no use for us. His administration put forth policies that had the very real potential of driving the industry from Maryland.”

Some informants asserted that the Glendening administration excluded their organizations from the policy-making processes. This minimized the consequences — influence — their organizations had for this stakeholder. Interdependence is about

mutual consequences (J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992). When consequences are not mutual, the organization may become dependent on the stakeholder. Then the organization becomes vulnerable and without “voice” in the stakeholder’s decision-making and thought processes. This increases turbulence and uncertainty for the organization.

Informants interpreted such exclusion as the administration’s low regard for their organizations. An executive director said the Glendening administration “neither requested nor received adequate input from the people they were trying to regulate,” specifically her 501c(6) organization and its sister organizations. The Glendening administration would not allow these organizations to be “proximal” (Roy, 1981). It kept them at a distance from the political decision-making structure. Intentional distancing solely could be a function of these organizations’ political legitimacy. Or it could be a function of factors such as the Glendening administration’s worldview and political considerations surrounding the issue in question.

The Ehrlich administration similarly has excluded other informants’ organizations. An assistant executive director believed the Ehrlich administration’s low regard for her 501c(6) organization has resulted in decreased inclusion in the state’s policy-making process: “Glendening would seek our opinion on appointments to the state [executive agency]. With Ehrlich, we have obviously lost that role.” The department director of that same organization described how the Ehrlich administration excluded it from a major executive-level commission. She believed the snub was no mere oversight: The Ehrlich administration invited four members of her organization to sit on this commission, members who “we’ve never even heard of before.” They are not in leadership positions in the organization. Yet by including these members on the

commission, the Ehrlich administration undercut this organization's argument that it had been excluded: "Ehrlich can negate our charge of saying that we were not asked to participate." The assistant executive director also described how her organization's counterparts in other states have been useful in campaigns to legalize slot machines, a cornerstone of Ehrlich's legislative agenda: "When the governor of Florida wanted slots, what tipped the scale was that [our counterpart organization] got full tilt behind it." Ehrlich has asked neither directly nor indirectly for her organization's help on slots, in spite of three difficult, unsuccessful years trying to push slots forward. This to her was the biggest clue about just how low Ehrlich regards her organization.

For some organizations, no inference is necessary to figure out that the Ehrlich administration accords them low political status. No gray area exists about an organization's political status when, as the vice president of a 501c(6) organization recounted, "One of Ehrlich's legislative people was standing outside and as I said 'Hello,' he told me, 'Don't write, don't call, don't visit.'" The Ehrlich administration initially conferred a great amount of political legitimacy on her organization. They collaborated like "partners in crime" on a major legislative initiative. But her organization defined "meaningful" reform on this issue differently than the administration and it quickly fell from favor. It became politically illegitimate — *persona non grata* — to the Ehrlich administration: "In his view, we weren't with him. That wasn't a good thing, we didn't stick by him. . . We couldn't be with him 100% on this, so we were no longer seen as a loyal supporter." A political stakeholder confers political legitimacy on organizations that engender its "good will and approval" (Boyd, 2000, p. 344). This organization no longer engendered the good will and approval of the

Ehrlich administration; that they had shared values was not enough. It lost its political legitimacy (in the administration's eyes) and as a result, its access and inclusion.

Two informants from another 501c(6) organization reported a somewhat similar experience. They explicitly were instructed to not contact the Ehrlich campaign and, later on, his administration. The department director recalled, "After we endorsed his opponent, Ehrlich made it very clear to us that we were on his 'Do Not Call list,' as in don't even bother to call." Unlike the first organization, Ehrlich already held this organization in low regard. Other informants mentioned that if an organization was not "with" the Ehrlich administration on an issue, then the Ehrlich administration saw that organization as being against the Ehrlich administration. Such an organization would be reduced to a "persona non grata" with the Ehrlich administration.

Other informants and organizations were persona non grata during the Glendening administration. As a for-contact GRP explained: "Glendening and I openly hated each other. Everybody knew we hated each other. So for eight years I wasn't in the mansion and I wasn't on the Second Floor."

Informants' Perceptions of Their Organizations' Political Status

Informants also had definite ideas of what they thought their organizations' political status was, not just what they thought political stakeholders thought. As the department director of a 501c(6) organization noted, the access an organization had to the corridors of political power "depends on your profile." By profile he meant whether an organization was a big player (i.e., high status and much clout) or not-so-big player (i.e., low status and little clout) in Annapolis. Informants for not-so-big players matter-of-factly avowed their organizations' status as such. For instance, they made comments

including, “We’re not one of the movers and shakers in Annapolis” (a department director of a 501c[6] organization), “We don’t really register on the political scene” (the executive director of a 501c[6] organization), and “We’re not really seen as a player” (a regional director for a 501c[3] organization). A department director for a 501c(6) organization noted, “We’re not a large powerful organization,” adding, “But a lot of times we’re in with big players.”

Informants at big-player organizations were also adept at assessing their high political status, as seen in these comments:

- An assistant executive director for a 501c(6) organization: “We are the 800-pound gorilla in the state for our issues. There’s no organized group or even coalition of groups that I would say is comparable to us. We’re pretty hard to ignore.”
- The department director for a 501c(6) organization: “We do have a pretty fair amount of clout in Annapolis.”
- The executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization: “Fortunately our organization’s recognition is high in Maryland so when I say [my name] from [organization’s name], it resonates with people. We have a fair amount of respect from people so it’s not hard to gain access.”
- The department director for a 501c(6) organization: “We are a pretty prominent organization in Annapolis.”
- The department director for a 501c(6) organization: “We have polling that shows that our organization’s recommendation of a candidate positively affects one-third of the undecided vote.”
- The senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization: “I work for one of the bigger names in town.”

I noticed that informants provided comments about their organizations’ status as big players as background information, for purposes of context. They commented in a throwaway “Oh, by the way” style. Informants at not-so-big-player organizations alerted me to their organizations’ status as such much differently. It was as if they wanted me to

know that they were not suffering from any delusions about where their organizations fit into the pecking order in Annapolis.

Where Does Political Legitimacy Come From?

If political legitimacy begets organizational access to political stakeholders and inclusion in policy-making processes, what makes an organization politically legitimate? To phrase this question another way, on what criteria do stakeholders confer legitimacy? My analysis of the interview data determined that an organization's political legitimacy was a function of several factors. I discuss them below.

Grassroots and grasstops activities affect an organization's political legitimacy. (I discussed these activities in detail in "Theory Question 3: Models of Public Relations Practice.") An organization's use of rank-and-file ("grassrooters") and VIP ("grasstoppers") members to contact elected officials or to provide testimony resonates loudly with elected officials. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization explained, "There's nothing more compelling than somebody who actually has to do the job, who's actually going to have to deal with the impact of the bill that's under discussion."

These activities also demonstrate that an organization and its positions have supporters who are willing to make their association with the organization publicly known. Krippendorf and Eley (1986) explained that organizations "receive public support for their work only to the extent that citizens believe their supportive participation is worthwhile" (p. 14). This is a twist on agenda-setting and implied third-party endorsement theories: Lawmakers may think, "If my voting constituents think this organization and its opinions are legitimate, then perhaps so should I."

Hearing from constituents may even provide lawmakers with the rationale to explain their votes or positions. As a for-contract GRP explained, “We understand the power that grassroots activities have to either give a legislator cover to make a tough vote or to educate that legislator about what his constituents think.” This engenders a positive connection — good will — between an organization and lawmakers, thus increasing the regard the elected official has for the organization.

Working in coalitions also affects an organization’s political legitimacy. Informants at not-so-big player organizations mentioned actively seeking out opportunities to work with some more prominent and powerful organizations — the big players. Big-player organizations transfer some of their own political legitimacy to not-so-big player organizations when they work together. When a not-so-big-player organization collaborates (or participates in a coalition) with a big-player organization, this implies that the big-player organization considers the not-so-big-player organization to be politically legitimate, with something positive to add to the political equation. Again, in a twist on agenda-setting and implied third-party endorsement theories, other political stakeholders may follow the big-player organizations’ lead of considering the not-so-big players organization to be politically legitimate.

This is explained by applying Krippendorf and Eeley’s (1986) support “principle” to organizations instead of public citizens: Organization A will support Organization B only if B is worthy of A’s support (or if supporting B is worth A’s while). Big-player organizations will not squander their own political legitimacy working with (and thereby transferring legitimacy to) unworthy not-so-big-player organizations.

Informants at some organizations, typically big players, noted that other organizations frequently sought to collaborate with them. The department director of a 501c(6) organization said, “We’re a frequently demanded coalition partner as you might imagine.” A senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization joked about the burdens of being popular: “Other organizations generally come to us to work together. I don’t need to seek out any more meetings to go to. I have enough. We’re invited to get involved in lots of different things, some odd things too.”

The clout or prominence in the community of an organization’s members, meaning either people (as with an issue advocacy group) or organizations (as with a trade association), may affect that organization’s political legitimacy. A department director for a 501c(6) organization said of his members: “They’re active in their communities; they’re often involved in many volunteer endeavors, from volunteer fire departments to PTAs to civic associations. These are natural things for them to do and it’s one of the big reasons we’re so effective.” A department director pointed to the voting habits of her 501c(6) organization’s members as a factor in its political legitimacy: “Our polling shows that about almost 90% of our members are registered voters and about 85 to 88% of those people vote. They’re a huge, huge bloc.” The senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization said: “[My member companies] are really huge employers in almost every community. So that brings them and us some clout.”

Some informants indicated that donating to campaigns and having a PAC enhanced their organizations’ political legitimacy. Note that I wrote “enhanced”; no informants alluded to money enabling their organizations to go from persona non grata to best buddies with any political stakeholder. But money does help bridge the distance

between an organization and political stakeholders; it gets the organization closer to the corridors where political decisions are made. To wit, the executive director of a 501c(6) admitted, “When we spread our PAC money around we’re essentially buying access to legislators and candidates.” The executive director of another 501c(6) organization said that having a PAC “helped with getting introduced to a lot of people who must have thought, ‘Hey, he must have some money coming with him.’” A for-contract GRP said: “Donating to campaigns gets you recognition and access. It gets you the opportunity to tell your story.”

But not always, according to the committee chair of a 501c(6) organization. His organization’s “fairly healthy PAC” donates to only the candidates it endorses; it does not hedge its bets by donating to all candidates. During the 2002 gubernatorial campaign, the PAC donated to the Townsend campaign. However, some members of his organization supported Ehrlich and personally donated to his campaign. The informant tells this cautionary tale: “They said, ‘He’s a good guy; he’s not against us.’ They tried to communicate with him after the election and got nowhere. So you had people who’d donated \$10,000 to him and couldn’t get their calls returned.” Money could not bridge the values-gap Ehrlich perceived between himself and the 501c(6) organization to which these donors belonged.

Non-financial subsidies also contribute to organizations’ political legitimacy. Informants believed that conducting research and fielding questions from elected officials and their aides enhanced their organizations’ political legitimacy. A department director believed that his 501c(4) organization’s functioning as a “clearinghouse” for information about his industry sector positively enhanced its political legitimacy. A department

director believed that elected officials sought his 501c(6) organization's help because of its already high degree of political legitimacy: Political stakeholders "know who we are so we end up fielding lots of inquiries about [industry] issues. Our phone is the one that rings for the most part. It helps policy makers in understanding issues that would affect us." Helping out policy makers enhances the organization's political legitimacy, which causes policy makers to ring the organization's phone when they need information, which further enhances the organization's political legitimacy, in an upward spiral.

Providing information subsidies and functioning as an expert source for the media also enhance political legitimacy. The media, as "objective" third-party purveyors of information to the public, privilege the issues and viewpoints they cover. According to agenda-setting theory, media attention of an issue ostensibly begets public attention, which ostensibly begets politicians' attention (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The committee chair for a 501c(6) organization recounted how he became the go-to person for information and quotes on an issue for several *Baltimore Sun* reporters. He believed the media coverage enhanced not only his personal political legitimacy, but also that of his organization and its viewpoints. A member of the board of directors attributed her 501c(3)/501c(4) organization's ability to minimize its decreased political legitimacy under the Ehrlich's administration to the frequent media appearances of the organization's media-savvy executive director. One president and CEO practiced media advocacy (e.g., see Wallack et al., 1993) to draw public and political attention to his 501c(3) organization's issues. He believed that the media attention contributed to the political legitimacy of his organization and its viewpoints.

Informants from nonpartisan organizations believed that nonpartisanship enhances their organization's political legitimacy in the two-party political situation in Annapolis. As Harris (1997) said, "Legitimacy cannot be defined independent of values" (p. 313). Legitimacy is a function of similar values. A nonpartisan organization, which transcends value-laden politics, may have "buffered" its political legitimacy against the values conflicts that embroil partisan (and bipartisan) organizations and political stakeholders.

Some politicians likely feel more comfortable working with organizations they perceive as nonpartisan than those perceived as partisan. The higher their comfort level with an organization, the more political legitimacy they confer on it. The department director of a nonpartisan 501c(6) organization said: "Officials are much more comfortable in working with an organization that has no political baggage if you will. They can feel free to like us. All of them regardless of party can like us and there's no downside to it."

Of course, politicians may feel most comfortable working with organizations that openly subscribe to a similar political perspective. Such politicians confer great political legitimacy on these organizations because of their shared values. But there are dangers because other political stakeholders may withdraw political legitimacy from these partisan organizations. The department director of a 501c(6) organization observed: "Some organizations are pegged as obviously Republican especially now with a Republican governor. I watch them struggle with a completely Democrat-controlled General Assembly because of this. Their pieces of good legislation never go anywhere."

As this remark implies, when members of one political party perceive an organization as close to the other party, the organization is seen as a “stalking horse” for the other party, as the executive director of a 501c(6) organization labeled it. This may diminish an organization’s political legitimacy, as has happened with this informant’s organization. He said: “The Republicans are leery of us but that’s paranoia. My organization is nonpartisan.” His organization may be nonpartisan, but some political stakeholders perceive it as partisan. It is their perception that counts. A president observed that his 501c(6) organization is often in sync with Ehrlich, which is beneficial yet challenging: “There are a lot of challenges for us right now to not be seen so much as in Ehrlich’s pocket. And that means maybe not being with him or even opposing him in the future.” This, he added, will continually challenge his organization, and presumably others, given that Democrats will continue to dominate the General Assembly for the “foreseeable future.”

Focus also affects an organization’s political legitimacy. An organization does not want to become overexposed and seen as weighing in on every last little issue. I call this the “Gloria Allred syndrome,” after the omnipresent media-savvy attorney who has a penchant for becoming involved in issues as varied as the Scott Peterson murder trial to Michael Jackson’s parental fitness to the Kobe Bryant rape allegations. Some believe that her involvement in so many issues dilutes her legitimacy and effectiveness (Sanello, 1998).

Focusing on the bills that are immediately relevant to an organization enhances an organization’s political legitimacy. If an organization weighs in on everything, does what that organization “say” carry any weight? Probably not, as the executive director of a

501c(3)/501c(4) organization noted: “If we start using our voice on every single bill, then we’re less powerful when we speak. So we are a bit judicious about what we work on.”

The executive director of a 501c(6) organization concurred: “If you start making comments on every bill and the legislators keep hearing from you on every bill, you’re going to lose your credibility. We want to focus only on the bills affecting our specific industry.” No organization wants to suffer from the Gloria Allred syndrome.

Involvement in too many issues also may stretch an organization’s resources, thus diluting its effectiveness that way. It becomes “distracting and then we’re pulled in 12 directions at once. We just don’t have the resources for that,” according to the executive director of a 501c(6) organization with limited resources. But another informant, the president of a 501c(6) organization long on clout but short on staff, stressed: “We have never failed to take a position on an issue or get involved because of a lack of manpower. We get it done.”

Boundary-Spanning GRPs’ Personal Legitimacy

By far the major factor affecting an organization’s political legitimacy was the personal legitimacy of informants. Boundary spanning influences organizational legitimacy and in fact may be “among the most important variables that potentially affect organizational legitimacy” (Finet, 1993, p. 59). It stands to reason that boundary-spanning GRPs influence an organization’s political legitimacy. Boundary-spanning GRPs are responsible for maintaining an organization’s political legitimacy (Aldrich, 1979). They do this through their external representation efforts on the organization’s behalf (Aldrich & Herker, 1977), which are enhanced (or diminished) by their personal political legitimacy. Their personal legitimacy was very much a salient aspect of their

professional lives. Although I never directly addressed this subject in the interview, I nevertheless collected much data about it. Informants attributed their personal legitimacy to a combination of factors such as:

- Longevity in Annapolis:
 - A for-contract GRP: “I got established as a lobbyist pretty quickly because I’ve been around Annapolis so long.”
 - The president of a 501c(6) organization: “I’ve been here for 30 legislative sessions, so I’ve seen it all and know pretty much everyone.”
- Personal experiences:
 - The department director of 501c(4) organization: “I came out of the industry, my in-laws were in the business. . . I started getting very active in the [organization] and wound up eventually being a volunteer lobbyist almost full time. That’s how I got to where I am today.”
- Professional backgrounds:
 - A senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization: “I was a bill drafter and committee counsel focusing primarily on [the issue] for several years.”
 - The president and CEO of a 501c(3) organization: “I’d worked in community organizing and service on [the issue] for more than 30 years before making the jump into advocacy work.”
- Social circles:
 - A for-contact GRP: “Actually I’m very close with both Mike Busch and Bob Ehrlich. They are both at my home a number of times a year. We’ve stayed close with them and their spouses.”

Being a former appointed or elected official also enhances one’s personal political legitimacy, party affiliation notwithstanding. One former state senator, now a for-contract GRP, observed: “I’m still viewed as a former colleague. Even the newer folks are aware that I spent a number of years on their side of the desk. So they understand me better and I understand them better.” This mutual understanding is one reason why so

many former lawmakers make the transition to government relations work. This revolving door phenomenon is not limited to Annapolis. Birnbaum (2005) noted the “fevered” bidding of Washington, DC, lobby shops and 501c(6) organizations for former members of Congress and White House officials.

Not all informants could trace their political legitimacy to the factors I have just discussed. Some reported relying on other people to help them get established in Annapolis. In doing so, these other people imparted some of their own political legitimacy to them (like big-player organizations do for not-so-big player organizations). Introductions serve as de facto vouchers for the positive attributes of the person being introduced. The thought process here is: “I already know and trust Person A; Person A knows and trusts Person B, whom I do not know. Perhaps I will take Person A’s vouching about Person B.” The political world does not have a monopoly on this thought process. Implied and implicit third-party endorsement can be found in every aspect of human relations, from obtaining employment to dating.

“Other people” sometimes meant for-contract GRPs. A senior vice-president recalled how her 501c(6) organization hired outside GRPs to help her acclimate to her new job. She said: “They’d keep their ears to the ground for me. They’d give me advice and talk to people for me, but they weren’t the ‘out front’ people. They were comfortable with that. I had to establish my own credibility.” The executive director of a 501c(6) organization said: “Legislators knew [for-contract GRP’s name]. He’d introduce me around to legislators I didn’t know. I got to know them thanks to his introductions. That helped to make a big difference in my recognition factor with legislators.” Many for-contract GRPs knew that clients hired them because of their personal legitimacy. As one

for-contract GRP with great personal legitimacy said: “The clients hire me because I am a known and respected quantity. I confer my credibility to them. It’s my relationships and access that they’re buying and utilizing.”

Some informants relied on their in-house colleagues to help get them established in Annapolis. One department director at a 501c(6) organization said that the colleague who hired her devoted much effort during her first legislative session to introducing her to people. His efforts enhanced her legitimacy to the point where she stood on her own during the next legislative session. The executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization attributed her political legitimacy to the efforts of other directors in the organization: “They were great tutors along the way, mentors I should say. They helped me learn the trade as I went along.” Another informant, the vice president of a 501c(6) organization, relied on the wisdom of a colleague’s well-connected relative: “She really helped me learn how to navigate Annapolis and meet people, the right people. She taught me about getting important information to them and networking with my peers. And then eventually I was good all on my own.”

Informants also believed that honesty enhances their legitimacy and their organizations in turn. The associate director of a 501c(6) organization said: “As any good advocate wants to do, I want to put our position out with honesty. That gets me respect and my organization respect.” A department director of a 501c(6) organization concurred: “So you tell everybody up front what you’re doing. If you’re honest with them then you really won’t have a problem with the politics of it. They know you’re doing what you have to do to represent your constituency.”

Informants also attributed their legitimacy to being reasonable. Being overly emotional or strident or a gadfly detracts from one's political legitimacy and the organization's in turn. When I worked in grassroots outreach, I always told my employers' grassroots members to be agreeable, respectful, and calm when dealing with elected officials and their staff. The adage of, "You'll catch more flies with honey than vinegar," is an adage for a good reason: It is true. As a for-contract GRP observed about the behavior of another for-contract GRP: "I've seen him testifying at bill hearings yelling at legislators telling them they're wrong, on behalf of his clients. What kind of representation is that? Being unreasonable probably doesn't help the client's cause too much." Another for-contract GRP believed that his clients' political legitimacy was enhanced by his "reasonable manner": "I'm not an adamant 'my way or the highway' sort of guy. I've always dealt with politicians and their aides in a very reasonable manner and I think that this helps." Another informant, an executive director of a 501c(6) organization, joked: "I have been accused of having a high opinion of my opinion. So I try to rein myself in so I don't alienate any more people than I have to."

Theory Question 5b

TQ5b: How did the jolt affect the political stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of the boundary-spanning GRPs' organizations?

The jolt negligibly affected the political legitimacy of neutral organizations; this was unsurprising given that these organizations were strictly nonpartisan in reality and perception. The jolt significantly affected the political legitimacy of boon and bane organizations, organizations that were partisan either in reality or perception. Ehrlich and his predecessor, Glendening, held opposite stances on many issues; they did not have congruent values. What was a values-congruent organization for Glendening was a values-incongruent organization for Ehrlich and vice versa. Many organizations saw their political status invert because of the transition from the Democrat Glendening to the Republican Ehrlich. Further, expectations about potential changes to an organization's political legitimacy

factored into informant's assessment of whether the jolt portended good or ill for the organization.

I will discuss the other major factor affecting an organization's political legitimacy within the context of Theory Question 5b. Political stakeholders perceive some issues and some opinions — and thus some organizations — as more legitimate than others. Again, I believe this comes down to values. A person's values are reflected in the issues he or she cares about and believes to be important. These then are the issues to which the person devotes effort, time, and money, and on which the person runs for elected office. A stakeholder is more likely to allow values-congruent organizations to have consequences (i.e., influence) on it than values-incongruent organizations. Values-congruency facilitates normative interdependence between organizations and stakeholders.

Political Stakeholders' Values and Priorities

My analysis determined that an organization's political legitimacy changed depending on a governor's priorities. This was as the literature on organizational legitimacy suggested (Baum & Rowley, 2002; J.W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; W.R. Scott, 1987). Priorities reflect one's values and values are an important component of legitimacy (Harris, 1997). A governor, or any elected official, will confer greater political legitimacy on organizations that share his or her values than those that do not. Glendening and Ehrlich had different priorities and values and thus with the jolt of Ehrlich's election, the political legitimacy of some organizations grew whereas others' political legitimacy withered. This obviously has tremendous implications for the work activities and responsibilities of boundary spanners.

Glendening's priority issues included Smart Growth, public and higher education, and environmental protection. This was to the delight of some informants, such as the committee chair of a 501c(4) organization, who said: "Compared to Ehrlich, Glendening was much more open to the environmental perspective. He was focused on it." This was likewise to the chagrin of others, such as the executive director of a 501c(6) organization who observed: "Glendening got his marching orders from the environmental groups."

Glendening and Ehrlich differed on health care as a priority. According to the senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization, "Glendening's office just wasn't as engaged as this governor's office is on health care." Another informant, a vice president of a 501c(6) organization concurred, saying: "Glendening wasn't a health care guy. I don't want to say he didn't care about health care, but health care wasn't on his radar screen. With Ehrlich it is."

Glendening and Ehrlich parted ways on other issues. Glendening opposed legalizing slots and constructing the Intercounty Connector, both of which Ehrlich strongly supports. Ehrlich has also pledged to not increase the state sales tax, an action Glendening never ruled out.

The Impact of Turbulence on Legitimacy

Finet (1993) noted that environmental turbulence threatens an organization's legitimacy. In a turbulent field like Annapolis, the political environment endured a jolt and now is characterized by higher levels of dynamism, complexity, and uncertainty than before the jolt. An organization cannot take its organizational legitimacy for granted in such a political environment; there are new political stakeholders — with different values and priorities than the "old" stakeholders — who now confer or withhold legitimacy.

For example, pro-environment, pro-public education, and anti-slots organizations enjoyed greater political legitimacy under Glendening than under Ehrlich because these issues better reflected Glendening's interests and values. Losing legitimacy further exacerbates environmental turbulence (Finet, 1993). Being delegitimized increases the distance between an organization and the political stakeholders who occupy the corridors of power, as this member of the board of directors of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization noted: "I know the [issue] groups don't feel that they have nearly as much room at the table with this current administration as they did with Glendening." According to a co-chair, the political legitimacy of her 501c(4) organization changed dramatically with the jolt of Ehrlich's election: "Our relationship with the governor's office went from very much a two-way street to a one-way street. The Ehrlich people don't even bother to pay us lip service."

Turbulence may also have positive implications for organizations: If the turbulence benefits stakeholders that share an organization's values, the turbulence may improve an organization's fortunes. An organization's increased legitimacy helps to calm turbulence in its environment (Finet, 1993); it moves organizations closer to the political stakeholders who wield decision-making power. Agricultural, retail, and pro-slots organizations have enjoyed greater political legitimacy with Ehrlich in office than when Glendening was governor. The turbulence improved their fortunes. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization said that under the Glendening administration, the agriculture industry was neither well received nor invited to participate in policy decisions affecting it. But soon after his election, Ehrlich told this informant and other agriculture representatives that they would "have a seat at my table." The president of a

501c(6) organization said, “I will say that our philosophy about [the issue] is listened to more readily with Ehrlich than during the last administration.” Another informant, the president and CEO of a 501c(6) organization, concurred: “There’s a greater sense of being on the same wavelength with Ehrlich than with Glendening.”

Theory Question 2: Worldviews

I now resume discussion of the theory questions in numerical order. One popular argument countering the notion of objectivity in journalism or social scientific research is that an objective human being is a logical impossibility. Human beings engage in these endeavors and thus objectivity in journalism or social scientific research cannot exist. Humans are subjective creatures. A combination of nature and nurture sees to that. That collection of subjectivities comprises what I refer to as a “worldview.” A person’s worldview influences how he or she perceives and engages with the world, his or her environment. Understanding what a person’s worldview is gives clues about what makes that person “tick,” why he or she thinks and acts as he or she does.

Organizations, as aggregations of humans, also have worldviews. Not all humans who aggregate into an organization will possess the same worldview, but the organization will adopt and enact one dominant worldview that guides — and facilitates or hinders — its perceptions of and engagement with the environment. The organization’s worldview is infused throughout its behaviors and communication.

Per the public relations literature (e.g., J.E. Grunig, 1992), organizations possess symmetrically presupposed and asymmetrically presupposed worldviews. I reiterate here what I discussed in Chapter 2 (in the “Worldviews in Public Relations” section). An organization that possesses a symmetrically presupposed worldview is open minded

toward and respectful of “others.” Symmetrically presupposed organizations appreciate that they have consequences on others and vice versa. The appreciation of such interdependence obliges them to seek balance among all parties’ interests, which can be attempted, if not achieved, through dialogue and collaboration. A symmetrically presupposed worldview enables the organization to embrace its existence as an open system and understand that rapport between it and its environment (or rather, stakeholders that comprise its environment) constantly needs to be negotiated. Symmetrically presupposed organizations also value innovation, equity, autonomy, decentralized management, responsibility to others, conflict resolution, and interest-group liberalism (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). They are concerned with their interests but also the interests of others; their motivations are mixed. By contrast, an internal orientation, a closed system, efficiency, elitism, conservatism, tradition, and centralized authority (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992) mark organizations with asymmetrically presupposed worldviews. These organizations focus on their own interests.

These worldviews are not mutually exclusive. An organization’s worldview can reflect both symmetrical and asymmetrical values. Thus I will write of an organization’s worldview as “defaulting toward symmetry” or “being symmetrically presupposed,” to convey that the worldview was a mix of symmetry and asymmetry, but more of the former than the latter.

Following the distinctions I made in the section of Chapter 2 that corresponds to Theory Question 2 (“Worldviews in Public Relations), I have delimited my use of the term “worldview” to the symmetry or asymmetry of the thinking, communication, and

behaviors of informants and organization. I use the term “cultural topoi” to refer to other facets of worldviews, such as the political perspectives, perceptual screens, and ideologies of informants and organizations.

Theory Question 2a

An organization would not announce on its Web site, “We have a symmetrical (or asymmetrical) worldview.” The organization’s worldview is manifested in many ways and through these manifestations the presuppositions of an organization’s worldview can be determined. To answer **Theory Question 2a (How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe the worldviews of their organizations?)**, I analyzed the interview data for manifestations of an organizational worldview, such as the organization’s willingness to meaningfully entertain, perhaps even incorporate, the perspectives of “others” in the decision-making process; to delegate authority; to encourage autonomy; to embrace innovation and risk; and to engage in dialogue. From these indicators I could distill the degrees of symmetry and asymmetry in the organization’s worldview.

I never explicitly asked informants, “How would you describe your organization’s worldview?” Yet clues abounded in the interview data about how informants would have answered had I asked that. I originally grouped the interview data into categories such as the ability to see multiple perspectives, accept an unfavorable outcome, and give credit to an opposing perspective (or person); the collaborative nature of the decision-making process for the organization’s (or client’s) government relations efforts; the organization’s record of seeking outside input and taking chances on new ideas and activities; and the organization’s involvement with unusual coalition partners. Woven throughout these categories were two overarching themes: an organization’s willingness

to cede some control over its decisions and activities (as related to government relations efforts and as realized through the thoughts and actions of informants and other organizational members) and the degree of dexterity exhibited in organizational thought and actions (as related to government relations efforts and as realized through the thoughts and actions of informants and other organizational members).

My short answer to this theory question is:

Organizations held symmetrically presupposed worldviews. That is, the organizations' worldviews were more symmetrical than asymmetrical. Further, the organizations' two most critical stakeholders in the political environment (viz., the Democrats who controlled the General Assembly and the Republicans who controlled the Office of the Governor) held asymmetrically presupposed worldviews.

My long answer follows.

Willingness to Cede Control

Organizations gain control over themselves by first giving up some control (J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). Worldviews influence how organizations engage with strategic stakeholders in their environments (Beyer, 1981), and their amenability to doing so (A.D. Meyer, 1982). Excellent organizations, whose worldviews tend toward symmetry, embrace active engagement (J.E. Grunig, 1992). Active engagement requires the organization to be open, and even vulnerable, to “others” and their informational inputs and perspectives. When an organization lets others “in,” it is ceding some control over itself to those others. (Doing this may seem altruistic, but there is a degree of self-interest at play here too.) Ceding control is indicative of a symmetrically presupposed worldview.

Two obvious ways that organizations cede control to external “others” is through member outreach and coalitions. As the state director for a 501c(4) organization said:

“There are four main ways to build support for your policies: grassroots outreach, coalitions, direct advocacy, and media. And every one of those is essential.” I deal here with the first two.

The interview data showed that all informants’ organizations engaged in member outreach activities (I discuss these grassroots and grasstops activities in detail in the results section for Theory Question 3.) Houston (2006) wrote: “‘Grassroots’ are not inert plant life; they are people, citizens, voters” (para. 14). Rather than having the organization’s GRP communicate with elected officials, an organization’s external members (i.e., donors to charitable and issue advocacy organizations or owners and employees of companies that belong to an industry trade association) communicate directly with the elected officials. This eliminates the GRP as “middle man.” The goal of grassroots outreach activities (such as letter-writing and phone-call campaigns) is for rank-and-file external members to leverage their positions as constituents of targeted elected officials to an organization’s advantage. The state director of a 501c(4)’s organization description of his organization’s grassroots efforts typifies other organizations: “We want our members to communicate with their legislators, through phone calls, emails, or written letters. We’ll go to every member we have in that district and ask, ‘Please make a phone call now.’”

Organizations also encouraged their “grassrooters” to go beyond standard in-session activities, as the executive director of a 501c(6) organization described: “We encourage our members, these people who have an understanding of the legislative process, in the off-session period to talk to their legislators in their home offices or even invite them to their [company] functions.” The department director of a 501c(6)

organization suggested to his members that they purchase tickets (using their personal money) to elected officials' fundraising events for visibility and networking purposes.

Informants uniformly embraced the idea of pushing their grassroots to make connections and get "out there." Encouraging autonomy is a symmetrical value (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). This also demonstrates a willingness and ability to cede control. The vice president of a 501c(6) organization attested: "We want all of our members to know their legislators well enough that legislators are calling them, rather than them calling their legislators for something. That's the kind of relationship we want our folks to have." One for-contract GRP was confident about his relationships with legislators. He was not worried about his clients becoming known around Annapolis, perhaps outshining him: "A lot of clients I want their faces to become known as well. . . I want public officials to know their names and faces and make an identification with my client and who they are."

One informant's willingness to cede control to his organization's grassroots surprised me. Here is why: Early on in the interview, this executive director of a 501c(6) organization avowed himself as a strongly partisan Democrat who neither could nor wanted to appreciate the Republican political perspective. He also alluded to his members' diverse political views and the growing number of Republican members. He was happily wedded to his own cultural topos about politics and seemed to let that drive his direct engagement activities with the organization's political stakeholders. (A cultural topos is the "systematic line of assumptions and arguments that reinforces a preferred pattern of social relationships" [Leichty & Warner, 2001, p. 61]). His personal worldview seemed to embrace the past and tradition, which is an asymmetrical value

(J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). So I was caught off guard when toward the end of the interview, he mentioned his efforts to modernize his organization's informal grassroots outreach program. He was encouraging the grassrootsers' autonomy. He acknowledged that as much as he could not function as an open system, the organization had to. These are symmetrical values (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). Even though he appeared unable on a personal level to appreciate the Republican perspective, he was eager for his grassrootsers — Republicans and Democrats alike — to engage with lawmakers on behalf of the organization. Political pragmatism trumped his partisan tunnel vision: He was willing to cede control over his organization's "message" to messengers who necessarily did not share his political ideology. Nor did he want to lose the valuable informational inputs that may have come from engaging with Republican political stakeholders. These stakeholders he could not bring himself to engage with, but he could bring himself to encourage his grassrootsers to engage with them.

Informants also reported that their organizations attempted to mobilize the grasstops, those external members who have been identified as key contacts for elected officials. Grassrooters are matched to their elected officials by zip code whereas grasstoppers are usually identified by inventorying which political VIPs they know and how well. The department director for a 501c(6) organization explained, "We're careful in our political work to make sure that for every elected official that we identify a member or group of members in our association that are key contacts for given legislators." The grasstoppers leverage their renown, connections, or rapport with elected officials to the organization's advantage.

Informants also described using members of their organizations (or clients' employees) to testify at bill hearings. They can offer their personal experiences and professional expertise as relevant to a bill. The typical process, as a department director of a 501c(6) organization explained, is, "I'll usually make an opening remark and then say, 'They [the organization's members] are here to tell you their own stories.'" This is considered richer testimony than testimony from the organization's in-house or for-contract GRP, as the president of a 501c(6) organization noted: "The less testimony I can give and the more that my members can give, the better off we are. Obviously I'm a lobbyist; they know I'm a lobbyist. The legislators know I get paid to speak to them."

The senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization was less enthusiastic about the value of member testimony: "We used to have members testify but now I think it's better if I testify. I'm quicker, more succinct, and can handle things better. I've got the credibility and don't need that member 'crutch.'" She thought it was more important for the organization's members to directly contact their elected officials, unless the organization needed "some kind of show" at a hearing. She also noted that bill hearings are "crazy": "You don't know when your bill will be called; testimony could be limited to one minute. How do you tell a CEO that he's got to sit around for eight hours because you don't know when he'll be called?"

Several informants cited the difficulties of motivating grassroots and grasstoppers about the political process, including disappointment with the partisan political environment in Annapolis, members' lack of time, and the notoriously difficult parking situation in Annapolis. Part of the allure of belonging to a 501c organization is that it works on behalf of members; members delegate their own involvement in the

political process to it. A president of a 501c(6) organization said that some of his organization's members have expressed this to him: "My members have never been eager to come to Annapolis. They say, 'That's why we hire you.'" He told me how he responds to them: "There are certain things where you have a lot more credibility than I do. I don't [work in the industry] all day like you do."

Credibility is why organizations use member outreach activities as part of their government relations programs, despite the risks to organizations. When grassroots and grassroot members engage with officials, they engage as organizational representatives. However, they are not under the organization's control. Organizations have to trade off credibility with control. Members may easily deviate from the organization's message or talking points. This is known as going "off message." As the co-chair for a 501c(4) organization explained, the Ehrlich administration consistently dismisses the organization's position on an issue by saying, "Well, we understand and respect their religious objections to [the issue] but . . ." She insisted that such dismissals are exactly why her organization never injects religion into the debate. Although she encouraged the organization's members to contact their elected officials and be visible in their communities, she discouraged them from bringing up the issue's religious or moral aspects. The organization requested grassroots only mention these aspects when addressing a religious organization and then only if asked. But all this informant can do is ask the grassroots to abide by these rules. The organization cannot control, or censor, what its grassroots say in the field.

Another problem with grassroots outreach is that members may not heed the organization's calls to action, as the executive director of a 501c(6) organization

observed: “I can only ask and I do ask. But I don’t have a sense of how many people listen to me. Thankfully I have a handful that are very active and can make a difference.” Conversely, when people are paid to communicate with elected officials, as in-house and for-contract GRPs are, they follow through with the communication.

What an organization loses in message control by using grassroots members it gains in credibility, which goes back to J.E. Grunig and White’s (1992) observation that organizations gain control by first giving up some control. The act or strategy of giving up of some control is motivated both by symmetrical values and self-interest, which is an asymmetrical value. From a “real-world” perspective, this is why organizational worldviews cannot be exclusively symmetrical or asymmetrical: mixed motives are almost unavoidable.

Elected officials want to hear what their constituents have to say, especially constituents who are motivated enough to contact them. The reasoning is that someone who is motivated enough to write a letter or make a phone call is a “likely voter.” Thus, an elected official and his or her staff are wise to listen to what that grassrooter — a voting constituent — has to say. Such contact is considered more genuine and credible than contact from a paid GRP (either in-house or for-contract) to an elected official.

I teach my undergraduate public relations students about controlled and uncontrolled information. Examples of controlled information are paid advertisements and organizational Web sites. Organizations control the content, placement, and timing of these information conduits. These conduits carry favorable messages about the organization. Consumers, simultaneously savvy and cynical, may perceive the messages as self-serving. Neither these information conduits nor their messages are considered

highly credible. To combat this, media relations professionals use conduits such as press releases and other information subsidies for the media. As conduits carrying uncontrolled information, they ostensibly have more credibility. Once a press release is distributed, a media relations professional has little to no control over it: no control over if and when a journalist ever writes an article based on that press release, no control over where in the journalist's publication the article would appear, and no editorial control over the content or tone of the article.

Charron (1989) said that journalists have "veto power" in the media relations game because "they determine the fate of the message" (p. 50). The organization has no control over the form of any news coverage that a press release may generate. But the upside is that any news coverage that press release does generate may be perceived as more credible than an advertisement. This credibility may stem from the implied third-party endorsement effect of media (which, although a tidy theory, has fallen into disfavor), and people's favorable perceptions of the news and unfavorable perceptions of advertising (Hallahan, 1999).

Media relations professionals often reconcile maintaining control over messages while maximizing the perceived credibility of sources and messages by using a mixture of uncontrolled and controlled information conduits. GRPs confront a similar dilemma: Member outreach offers less control but more credibility whereas direct advocacy offers more control but less credibility. GRPs reconcile this by frequently pairing member outreach and direct advocacy activities.

Coalitions are another way organizations cede control to others. Coalitions form when two or more organizations collaborate on a common goal. Sometimes a group of

friendly competitors, such as “sister” environmental or business 501c(4) organizations, may band together to speak with one voice on an issue. Sometimes coalitions are comprised of “strange bedfellows,” organizations that otherwise have nothing in common—they may even oppose each other on some issues—but whose interests may converge on an issue.

Trade associations (501c[6] organizations) are themselves coalitions of competitor organizations in an industry. They pool their resources to present a united front. A member organization of a trade association has chosen to not go it alone in the political environment in favor of ceding some control over its own destiny for the sake of the greater good of the industry. They trade off some of their autonomy to the trade association as a way to furthering their self-interests via the association. This also represents these organizations’ acknowledgments that they exist as open systems and they have responsibilities to others in its industry. These are symmetrical values (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). An executive director of a 501(6) organization alluded to this: “There is a leap of faith when you join a trade association that the association is going to work in the best interests of the industry and of your own company.” Thus trade associations, which are comprised of member organizations that are amenable to ceding control, are the products of the symmetrically presupposed worldviews of their member organizations.

The interview data showed that informants’ organizations worked in coalitions in some capacity. Several informants described their organizations’ involvement in formally organized coalitions that included sister organizations. A state director said that the members of a coalition his 501c(4) organization is part of constantly share

information at and outside of the regular meetings. Informants from sister organizations shared his positive assessment of this coalition.

Informants reported that their organizations worked with other organizations in loosely organized coalitions. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization described her organization's collaboration with other industry trade associations: "It doesn't go over well to go against your 'sisters' and be an outlier. What affects one usually affects us all. We try to go in the same direction with the same message but we're not in complete lockstep." A department director described how her 501c(6) organization and its sister organization worked together in a "tight" coalition about half of the time. Although it was rare for her organization to work against its sister, not so with other members of the expanded version of this coalition: "Sometimes we'll bring in [other organizations] to expand our coalition. And as often as we're together with [those other organizations] the other half of the time we're opposing them." Her statement exemplifies the clichéd political truism of "no permanent friends, no permanent enemies." I will discuss this truism in an upcoming subsection.

I asked informants to relate their organizations' experiences with another clichéd political truism, "Politics makes for strange bedfellows." What the department director of a 501c(6) organization described in the preceding paragraph only hints at what strange bedfellows truly are. Strange bedfellows are former speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich and U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton. They announced their joint efforts on health care legislation at a 2005 press conference (Milbank, 2005). Then there are world famous rock star-cum-political activist Bono and former U.S. Senator Jesse Helms, whose strange bedfellow-ship was forged over

concerns about the AIDS epidemic in Africa (Hocking, 2005). Collaborating with strange bedfellows indicates not only a willingness to forego some organizational autonomy, but a responsibility to others, an acknowledgement of being an open system, and desire for conflict resolution. These are all symmetrical values (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992).

Did my informants' organizations ever work with strange bedfellows? My interview data showed they did, even on a regular basis, and in fact were proud of this. Some seemed to delight in the shock value of strange bedfellows. A department director for a 501c(6) organization said: "There was this one coalition; people just looked in shock. It was the first time they ever saw [the pro-issue] interests and [the anti-issue] people on the same piece of legislation! People were just scratching their heads." Beyond a coalition's shock value and its standard advantages (e.g., pooled resources and strength in numbers), a coalition of strange bedfellows offers enhanced credibility. The president and CEO of a 501c(6) organization found that coalitions with the usual suspects did not surprise anyone, but showing up at "a hearing arm in arm with [strange bedfellows], people go: 'Whoa! Something's different!' And the credibility factor is enhanced considerably." Again, organizations will cede some control over their destinies when there is a likely and significant return on investment (ROI), such as enhanced credibility, that furthers their self-interest.

Were organizations that had not collaborated with strange bedfellows in coalitions open to the possibility? Based on some informants' direct answers and the general outreach efforts of organizations, I believe that all but two organizations would

collaborate with strange bedfellows if the situation called for it. I will discuss the exceptions first.

Strong partisanship negatively affected the scope of an organization's outreach efforts and thus its amenability to working with strange bedfellows. I again offer the experiences of the strong partisan Democrat executive director of a 501c(6) organization (whose encouragement of member outreach activities surprised me). He was one of two informants who did not describe personally engaging in any organizational outreach efforts that crossed partisan lines. He summed up his organization's outreach efforts: "So I guess now all I do is work with the Democrats because they're in power [in the General Assembly]." Further, he summarily dismissed the notion of his reaching out and getting involved in bipartisan efforts. When asked if he would be willing to participate in an executive branch-level bipartisan commission relevant to his organization, he replied, "No, I believe that it has a politically motivated and skewed view of [the issue] and I really don't have any desire to be involved with them." His organization's worldview cannot help but be affected by his stridently partisan cultural topos that he de facto imposes on it. In fact, his cultural topos was the main reason why I judged the organization's worldview to be the least symmetrically presupposed of them all. The result of having an asymmetrically presupposed worldview (and resulting asymmetrically presupposed communication and behaviors) is that his organization depends on, and remains in the shadow of, sister organizations that reach out across political party lines. However, the worldview was asymmetrically presupposed, not purely asymmetrical. That the organization engaged in member outreach efforts suggested symmetrical values.

I could not resist asking this informant about an as-yet hypothetical jolt: What would you and your organization do if Republicans controlled the General Assembly? He said with a laugh, “Suicide is one of my first thoughts!” and then continued more seriously: “If the Republicans were to come into power [in the General Assembly] we would just have to fight and fight and fight. Maybe try to get a higher visibility on issues and our work.” Although this hypothetical jolt would prompt him to engage more with strategic political stakeholders, the engagement would be confrontational, not collaborative. The former is an asymmetrical engagement strategy; the latter is symmetrical.

In discussing their outreach efforts, informants routinely used the words “bipartisan” and “nonpartisan.” The terms should not be used interchangeably, although they often are. The best way I can illustrate how informants parsed the differences between the terms is this: A bipartisan organization would donate money (not necessarily equal amounts) to the Republican and Democrat candidates for an elected office whereas a nonpartisan organization would donate to neither candidate.

Many informants’ organizations subscribed to bipartisanship. Informants were well aware of party affiliations and which political party they and their organizations were perceived as being friendlier with. As such, bipartisan informants took care to reach out and collaborate with officials who belonged to the “other” party. As the department director for a 501c(4) organization explained: “We try to secure Republican sponsors as well as Democrats; we just don’t get a lot of takers. It’s always good to have at least some sponsors from both parties, if it’s possible.” A for-contract GRP also spoke of reaching across party lines: “I’ve alluded to my clients’ sympathies for Republicans, but I

still have to have meaningful relationships with Democrats. One client actively participates in Republican politics but we make sure he's seen as supporting the [Democrat] leadership in the legislature." Given the political environment in Annapolis, none of the informants wanted their organizations labeled, or worse boxed in, as "Democrat" or "Republican." As I discussed in the findings for Theory Question 5, some organizations did get boxed in, which presented challenges for their informants and other boundary-spanning personnel.

Nonpartisanship helped informants and their organizations transcend the partisan fray, up to a point. It seems to be a way for them to resolve conflict, or rather, to preemptively avert becoming embroiled in the partisan conflicts in Annapolis.³ According to a department director, she and her 501c(6) organization are better off being nonpartisan: "It's the best of both worlds. We don't have a PAC, we don't attend fundraisers, we don't take people out for meals. We enjoy the benefits of not taking sides. Taking sides can come back to haunt you." Nearly all the informants touched on this, that taking sides, being labeled, or being seen as in someone's pocket caused trouble. (I explore this theme with greater detail later in this chapter.) Informants' comments about taking sides included:

- A for-contract GRP: "It gets little tricky dealing with both sides but you have to be able to do it."
- An associate director of a 501c(6) organization: "A legislator may not agree with us, but it's very important that they don't sense that we've got a political agenda with respect to we're favoring Republicans or Democrats."
- A department director of a 501(6) organization: "You have to be aware of the way the political winds shift here or you won't be successful. We do sometimes find ourselves with feet on both sides of the fence."

³ 501c(3) organizations, by definition and by law, must be nonpartisan (IRS, 2004).

One informant, whose personal politics leaned left but whose organization and coalition partners leaned right, described a situation that sounded like he was “in the closet,” pretending to lean right so he would not be “outed” as a left-leaner: “Our coalitions are thick with conservatives. I just shut my mouth and do my job. . . I’ll go meet with Democrats. Nobody’s picked up on that. I’ve explained it away as, ‘Hey, we work with him on other issues.’”

Nonpartisans see elected officials as just that — elected officials — and without party labels. A for-contract GRP said: “It doesn’t matter to me whether they’re a Republican or a Democrat or what have you. They’re a legislator and I’m a lobbyist. I see them as legislators and I don’t make any distinction Democrat or Republican.” They also see their clients as just clients, as a for-contract GRP said: “I don’t represent Republican clients or Democrat clients. I represent clients. I’ve got some bleeding hearts and some smokestack industries. I try to be nonpartisan and my client list is all over the board.” A member of the board of directors marveled at the ability of her 501c(3)/501c(4) organization’s in-house GRP to get along with everybody regardless of party affiliation: “I guess lobbyists think they can work with anybody.” A department director of a 501c(6) organization declared: “I try to make friends on both sides of the aisle. I just want to be buddies with everybody just in case.”

Informants described the ways they reached out to stakeholders in the political environment on behalf of their organizations. The ROI of outreach was realized in the increased visibility of informant and the organization, stronger connections, and better intelligence-gathering. The additional ROI was the increased flow of quality information that would positively contribute to organizational decision-making (Aldrich, 1979;

Terreberry, 1968). Outreach is motivated by self-interest, an asymmetrical value, but it also is motivated by the symmetrical values of acknowledging their functioning as an open system and responsibilities to others (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992). Informants recounted attending meetings of non-coalition collaborators, as the executive director of a 501c(6) organization) reported: “I’d attend the public meetings of the [region of Maryland] delegation, just to hear what’s going on. Most of the people I knew anyway but it was important to be there, to be seen, to show an interest.”

Sometimes the ROI was unexpected: A department director stumbled upon an unfounded malicious rumor about her 501c(3) organization while attending the meeting of a community group “just to hear what they’re saying.”

Outreach has asymmetrical and symmetrical motivations. Informants also reported attending routine executive-branch agency meetings during both the Glendening and Ehrlich administrations. The ROI for attending these meetings was not clear; yet informants continued to attend unproductive meetings, all in the name of outreach. Doing so testified that these organizations were committed to functioning as an open system, a symmetrical value (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & White, 1992), and being interdependent with these stakeholders. But doing so also testified that organizations were not going to give up on trying to be of consequence, to have influence and true voice, to these stakeholders. They were not going to give up on trying to further their self-interests. The state director of a 501c(4) organization critiqued the quarterly executive-branch agency meeting he attends: “We have these stiff meetings where there’s an exchange of information. . . I don’t know how productive they are, though. I don’t know how much they’ll really lead to but I’m glad to be a part of them anyway.”

Informants expressed similar sentiments about their participation in state-level task forces. The advantage most often realized is not that their recommendations are implemented but that participation in them, as a department director said, “expands your base.” The interactions between his 501c(6) organization and an opposition group warmed up because of their involvement in a task force. The president of a 501c(3) organization laughed when I asked him about participating in task forces. When prompted, he explained: “They make big recommendations about whatever the issue is, but they’re rarely implemented. So the actual benefits are difficult to discern except for the relationships you make with the other people who serve.”

Many legislators live in downtown Annapolis hotels during the 90-day legislative session. Many GRPs follow suit, as this for-contract GRP noted: “Many lobbyists stay at hotels, too. I stay at [hotel’s name] and every morning and evening I’m with a whole group of legislators that I can talk to. You can’t help but talk to them.”

Socializing is a major component of informants’ outreach efforts. One for-contract GRP joked: “Once every blue moon I actually eat a meal by myself. Not many meals but I do. That’s why I get so fat!” Another for-contract GRP noted that being personable and extroverted is helpful. A good GRP, he said, needs to be out and about: “Just being around, it’s so hands-on down here that it just lends itself to happening. You’re around; they’re around.”

I would describe one informant’s efforts to reach out as near pathological, but in a good sense. Whatever he is doing works because this for-contract GRP is effective and successful. He either belongs to or attends meetings of organizations that are “breeding grounds” for future state-level elected officials. He is active in charity organizations and

political campaigns. His outreach efforts are non-stop; as he told me, they are “24/7/365.” I encourage readers to read this block quote for its illumination of the workings of this informant’s mind:

For years, I’ve been networking and getting to know people all over the state. Maryland is a small, manageable state. It’s one where you can run into people. I give time and attention to people from the beginning. They may be an intern or a staff aide. That state trooper on the detail you meet could be the superintendent of the state police someday; you don’t know. As you go through life, you keep up the relationships. They’re genuine, not “user” relationships. And maybe someday these people who I’ve known from the beginning become a senator or delegate or key staffer in the governor’s office. So when people come onto the scene, I know them to some extent and don’t have to start off “cold.”

I can attest to the veracity of his claims. For Valentine’s Day in 1992, this informant sent boxes of good-quality chocolates to every intern (including me) and secretary in the Maryland General Assembly and governor’s office. (I belatedly thanked him for his gift during the interview.)

Nothing in the interview data about organizations’ outreach efforts caused me to suspect that these efforts were motivated purely by organizational self-interest. Of course such asymmetrical values were part of organizations’ motivations, but so were symmetrical values. A president expressed pride in his 501c(6) organization’s collaboration with an opponent organization: “It’s had a significant payoff. They know we’re not evil and we don’t think they’re stupid. Their ED [executive director] and I often run things by each other now. Everybody’s better off when it’s a two-way street.” This reflects the organization’s genuine desire to build bridges and expose itself to others’ perspectives; it reflects the organization’s symmetrically presupposed worldview. But building bridges and having a breadth of perspectives, although commendable and

useful by-products of engagement, were not organizational ends; they were means to organizational ends: furthering its self-interest.

The executive director of a 501c(6) organization appreciated that the behavior of other organizations became more symmetrically presupposed after Ehrlich's election: "We've had more positive contact with [organization] in the past couple years than ever before. We have a working relationship now whereas before that wouldn't have happened. So they've changed; maybe they realize that we're not the enemy." He did wonder, however, if these groups would "go back to their old habits" if a Democrat is elected in the 2006 election.

Informants' semantic and phrasing choices corroborated my analysis that their outreach efforts were symmetrically motivated, but again, my analysis is that their symmetrical motivations were means to organizations' ends. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization spoke of "having a dialogue" with people who did not agree with him philosophically. A department director of a 501c(4) organization spoke of "building bridges" to the executive branch. A department director of a 501c(6) organization said his dialogic engagement with an executive-branch agency involved conflict resolution: "Usually things are very cooperative and collegial. We'll negotiate with them when we have a problem with the way they're doing things or vice versa." The president of a 501c(6) organization pointed out, "We as an industry can be part of the solution and not part of the problem if we work together." A for-contract GRP alluded to searching for a happy medium as a way to resolve conflict: "You've got to find a combination of issues that can make the legislators happy and keep your client from going down the tubes at the same time."

The interview data revealed an unexpected theme related to symmetry: Informants professed disappointment and frustration over situations where they perceived lawmakers and staff to be disingenuous, uncommunicative, secretive, purposely unproductive, biased, closed minded, strident, dogmatic, partisan, and even mean. I have interpreted their distaste for asymmetrically presupposed behaviors and attitudes in the processes that are means for furthering organizational self-interest as a preference for symmetrically presupposed behaviors and attitudes. Arguably, an expressed or implied preference for symmetry means that an informant (and its organization) likely has a symmetrically presupposed worldview. Research on personality self-evaluation finds that the personality traits that people like in themselves are often the same traits they like to see in others (Mussweiler & Bodenhausen, 2002).

Several informants were on the receiving end of asymmetrically presupposed behaviors emanating from the Glendening administration, and they did not appreciate it. Some resented the Glendening administration's perceived intentional exclusion of their industries' input from policies that affected them. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization voiced this resentment, saying, "His administration's treatment of our industry didn't go over very well." Others found both Glendening (as a person) and his administration to be close-minded and dismissive. The president and CEO of a 501c(3) organization, whose personal political sympathies lie with Democrats but who viewed Ehrlich's election neutrally, said that Glendening and his staff refused to "entertain any discussions" of a social program before or after its funding was eliminated. To contrast, Ehrlich and his staff's open-minded behavior heartened this same informant: They "met with us, listened to us, and eventually acted to restore the program. Even with all the

budget problems in the state, they've never even considered re-eliminating it." This informant appreciated that his organization's symmetrically presupposed efforts toward political stakeholders were reciprocally met.

Counter to this compliment, the interview data were rife with complaints about the asymmetrically presupposed behavior of Ehrlich and his staff. A co-chair lamented her 501c(4) organization's "one-way relationship" with the Ehrlich administration. The executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization observed of the Ehrlich administration: "They're high maintenance. . . There's just not that two-way relationship and other lobbyists would say the same thing. It's a difficult way to work. They require a lot of work." A senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization faulted the Ehrlich administration for not being more upfront: "Ehrlich never tells anybody he's against them until it's over. I just don't think they know how to communicate about things."

Based on these and other statements from informants, informants perceived that the Ehrlich administration did not seem to acknowledge its interdependence with many of its critical stakeholders. It did not acknowledge that it should exist in Annapolis as an open system. It also seemed to value centralized authority. These are all asymmetrical values (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992).

Informants also expressed sentiments (not directed at the Glendening or Ehrlich administration) that indicated a preference for symmetrically presupposed behavior and attitudes. The associate director of a 501c(6) organization appreciated dealing with people who could, for example, "make an argument from their slant, but they'll still tell you the truth. And if you ever need to get information from someone, those are the people to go to."

“Breadth of Perspective” in Organizational Decision-Making

As I noted in Chapter 2, GRPs and their organizations have much to gain from engaging with stakeholders that hold cultural topoi different from their own (Leichty & Warner, 2001; Springston et al., 1992). This “breadth of perspective” (Culbertson, 1989, p. 3) contributes to the effectiveness and success of both GRPs and their organizations. Seeking breadth of perspective demonstrates that an organization has a responsibility to others and to appreciate and consider their interests. Engaging in meaningful dialogue takes commitment, time, and hard work. These symmetrical values may undermine the asymmetrical value of efficiency, the organization’s ability to forge ahead without outside “interference.” Opting for dialogue over efficiency is an indication that the organization is symmetrically motivated. But again, organizations are not motivated by pure altruism; they want a return on their investment. Organizations may opt for dialogue, thereby sacrificing efficiency, to ultimate gain efficiency.

The members of one department director’s 501c(6) organization were a diverse lot. The same issue might benefit some members but harm others. Before the organization takes an official position on such an issue, the informant and his government relations colleagues mediate among the members. He reported that more often than not, after some give and take, consensus about what to do would be achieved. Informants from other 501c(6) organization organizations described similar situations.

When an organization’s outreach activities are symmetrically motivated, as almost all of my informants indicated was the case, the organization is interested in seeking input from extra-organizational others. I believe I have sufficiently covered this theme already. But what about the willingness and follow-through to bring other internal

perspectives into the organization's decision-making processes? In these next paragraphs, I present the informants' stories, in their words, about the participatory nature of and their role in those processes, as well as the degree of autonomy they enjoyed. These stories are evidence that organizations do understand the concept of giving something up to get something in the end (J.E. Grunig & White 1992). They chose the symmetrical values of decentralized management, responsibility to others, conflict resolution, and autonomy over the efficiency that centralized authority offers.

Organizations typically had at least one formal decision-making body — such as a board of directors, an executive committee, or a legislative committee or council — that was responsible for government relations-related decisions. Informants universally were integral members of these bodies. This was true for in-house and for-contract GRPs. GRPs are organizational liaisons to the outside and for them to be included in organizational decision-making indicates a symmetrically presupposed worldview (J.E. Grunig, 1992).

A president and CEO's description of his 501c(6) organization's decision-making process as "highly consultative" describes the process of nearly all of the other organizations as well. The organizations' decision-making processes followed a basic pattern. The informant was responsible for identifying and analyzing a relevant bill. He or she would then make recommendations about the organization's position and possible action strategies. Once the organizational body decided how to proceed, the informant would execute organizational strategies. The board of directors or executive or legislative committee would leave implementation up to the professionals.

The legislative director of a 501c(6) organization explained his organization's process. He and the legislative committee would meet several times during the legislative session to discuss the bills he deemed relevant, sometimes upwards of 60 bills per meeting. The committee would vote on the organization's positions and then would turn everything over to him: "I tell them about the bill and they vote. I'll admit that I lean on them for the position I think is best for the organization. . . Then I go get the job done."

Members of the legislative council of one 501c(6) organization had more say about what is relevant. Although the senior vice-president described this organization as "staff driven to a large degree," many times the members of the legislative council would put their imprimatur on her government relations work plan: "I'll put a draft proactive work plan in front of them and say, 'We need to focus on these ten things.' And they'll tweak this list usually by adding not subtracting things." The legislative council left it to her and her colleagues to execute the work plan.

A president described his understanding with his 501c(6) organization's legislative committee: "The committee determines our position on a bill. I'll advise them but they'll often ignore me. They make the decisions on issues but they never tell me how to lobby. The members have always honored that." One for-contract GRP's experiences with his clients typified that of other for-contract GRPs: "We'll give them our recommendations and jointly talk through positions and strategy. If they okay it, we go implement it. But they don't say, 'Go talk to Delegate So-and-So about this.'"

One variation of this pattern had the decision-making bodies dictating the strategies. But it was up to the informants to figure out the how, who, what, where, and when of implementing the plan. The legislative director of a 501c(6) organization

described this pattern: “They’ll either follow our recommendation or send us in a different direction. They chart our course and then we carry out their wishes in terms of us delivering testimony, going to hearings, and so forth.”

The 501c(3) organization of one president and CEO said the principle of participatory decision-making guides all aspects of organizational life: “We believe that democracy ought to be part of the workplace. We’ve created very complicated mechanisms to include people in making the decisions that impact their work and our organization.” All of the organization’s employees, not just the members of the board of directors, have a say about the organization’s decisions on government relations (and everything else). This is important, given that another guiding principle of the organization integrates service and advocacy into the work of every employee. Thus employees of this symmetrically presupposed organization have a say in the decisions about the government relations strategies that they are expected to put into action.

I found that the most democratic organization was a 501c(6) organization whose entire membership controls what issues to focus on and what positions to take. The assistant executive director explained: “As our policy-making body, our members can virtually pass any kind of policy they want. And then this association would have to support it.” The members do look to this informant and her colleagues for information about issues, but not recommendations. When I expressed surprise at this, she responded: “This is a very democratic organization, one of the most representative that you’ll find anywhere. We would never go to the members and say, ‘We think this is what you should do.’ Nope!” She explained that the members do not enjoy much professional

autonomy and so they take full advantage of exercising control within their professional association.

Most other organizations seemed to be participatory democracies as well, but to nowhere near the degree of the two organizations just profiled. Informants revealed they sought input from organizational members who were not employees or involved with legislative or executive committees. Some informants said that their organizations would survey members about legislative issues and invite them to submit ideas for the organization's legislative agenda. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization said he regularly meets with members, "to listen to them so we can come up with an agenda that resonates with them."

This 501c(6) organization's sense of democracy filters down into the government relations department. The department director explained how she and a team of in-house GRPs develop and execute the strategies on the positions decided by the organization's membership. She and her team routinely collaborated: "Whenever there's a decision or a strategy to be made, we'll convene even if it's on a stairwell or marching around the State House and off we go with whatever decision we've made." But what she was most proud of was the diversity of her team: "Each one of these people is very, very different and offers a different perspective and different talent. So when we work together and make decisions as a group, frankly we're hard to beat."

Also on the point of including diverse viewpoints in decision-making, several informants noted that their trade associations took great care to ensure that all members are represented fairly on government relations decision-making bodies. A department director said there are two types of members in his trade association. Each controls half

of the seats on the legislative committee so “they have an equal voice.” They have chosen the symmetrical value of equity over the asymmetrical value of efficiency. An executive director admitted that his 501c(6) organization’s board of directors was so large that it was nearly unworkable. But he said that was the inevitable outcome of making sure that all sectors of the industry had input on government relations and other organizational matters. These are examples of Weick’s (1979) concept of requisite variety within the organization. The organizations’ decision-making bodies are designed to be microcosms that reflect the organizations’ general membership. This adds to these bodies’ breadth of perspective.

Two informants’ descriptions of their organizations’ decision-making processes deviated from the basic pattern. One 501c(4) organization’s members were small in number but great in dedication. The co-chair reported that she and the other co-chair were the organizational decision-makers. She said, “We are a top-down organization in most respects,” but she pointed out that they welcomed new ideas. They valued centralized authority over decentralized authority, but they also embraced the symmetrical values of responsibility to others and autonomy. They encouraged people to come up with ideas for the organization but requested that they take responsibility for implementing those ideas. However, she and her co-chair ultimately decided the direction and activities of the organization.

The general decision-making process at a department director’s 501c(3)/ 501c(4) organization has changed in recent years, because of a situation unrelated to Ehrlich’s election. The process was more layered than before, which increased the centralization of the process and impinged on the autonomy of this informant and his immediate

colleagues. However, his organization frequently worked through a formal coalition comprised of sister organizations. He said approval for the organization's participation in the coalition had to be "run pretty high up the flagpole." Because the approval functioned like a "blanket" approval for the coalition's activities, he does not need to seek organizational approval for every coalition activity. The initial approval was sufficient and having secured that has restored some of his autonomy.

It was evident from descriptions of their organization's decision-making processes that all informants enjoyed great, but varying, degrees of autonomy in their jobs. They were wholly responsible for making small yet important decisions related to communication and tactical strategies. For example, if the legislative committee's decision required them to mount a grassroots campaign, the informants had the autonomy to decide if it would be a letter or telephone campaign and which legislators would be targeted. Informants wrote their own testimony and decided how and whom to lobby.

Legislative committees also functioned autonomously, but this depended on the time of year. When the Maryland legislature was out of session and there was some luxury of time, informants worked with their organizations' legislative committees to develop strategic plans for the next legislative session. Another organizational body, such as a board of directors or executive committee, might need to approve this plan. Alternatively, the board of directors and the legislative committee might work together to develop and approve a work plan, as the department director of a 501c(6) organization explained: "The legislative committee sets the legislative agenda. They can either make recommendations to the board or they can take some of the board's recommendations and hammer them into a legislative agenda. Usually a little bit of both happens."

In the fast pace of the 90-day legislative session, there is no luxury of time. Thus during the legislative session, most organizations ceded control to informants and legislative committees to make on-the-spot decisions about, for example, what position to take on a bill dropped in the hopper on the 23rd day of session and what actions to take.

The committee chair of a 501c(4) organization and the committee chair of a 501c(6) organization held organizational positions that allowed them a great deal of autonomy but which also entailed great responsibility. Like all of the informants, both were members of their organizations' dominant coalitions on government relations matters. I am singling out these informants because they were volunteers. They were grassroots members of their organizations who paid organizational employees considered fellow, albeit unpaid, employees. They performed functions for their organizations that other organizations employed in-house or for-contract GRPs to do. Both informants mentioned that the efforts of other unpaid — and equally dedicated — members who function as staff were indispensable to their organizations' smooth operations. Clearly, these two organizations are comfortable in ceding control.

Hiring a for-contract GRP is also indicative of an organization that is comfortable with ceding control. Such an organization realizes that it cannot accomplish its political goals without the benefit of outside counsel. To make progress toward its goals, the organization has to turn itself over to someone who can make and direct progress for it. To gain control, the organization must first cede control. As I have presented here, organizations do so willingly and in a variety of ways.

Evidence of a “Dexterous” Mind

The willingness to cede control to others is evidence of the existence of what I have termed a “dexterous” mind. This was the second theme woven throughout the original data-coding categories. A person (or organization) who possesses a dexterous mind has the mental agility to carefully consider and appreciate multiple perspectives, cultural topoi, and the concept of requisite variety. A dexterous mind is open, flexible, and nimble; and I believe indicates a symmetrically presupposed worldview.

The opposite of dexterous mind is one that is leaden. Its thinking is absolutist and entrenched. “Unsophisticated” is an antonym for dexterous but it does not describe accurately any of my informants or their organizations. An antonym that does accurately describe some of them is “doctrinaire.”

Only a few informants espoused doctrinaire thoughts about people and issues. Their organizations’ engagement with stakeholders in the political environment reflected their doctrinaire thinking. But did the informants and their organizations remain doctrinaire given the jolt of Ehrlich’s election? I will address this in a subsequent section. But first I will discuss my finding that nearly all of the informants possessed high degrees of dexterous thinking, which was reflected in their organizations’ engagement with the political environment. I already have presented much evidence about the appreciation for multiple perspectives of informants and their organizations as related to outreach, participatory decision-making processes, and autonomy. I present here interview data that illuminate the dexterous-mind theme in other ways.

Reaching out, seeking input, collaborating on decisions: All of these indicate an appreciation of multiple perspectives. A dexterous mind perceives and interprets the

world in shades of gray, indicative of the symmetrical value of responsibility to others. A doctrinaire mind perceives and interprets the world in black and white. As the president of a 501c(6) organization (who had a dexterous mind) self-deprecated: “I realized that there’s no one right answer to anything. So the larger issues I recognize as issues about which I only have partial information. I don’t proselytize so much anymore.”

Sometimes shades of gray required informants to detach themselves from their personal cultural topoi so their organizations could optimally engage with stakeholders. A department director said the members of his 501c(6) organization held conflicting personal and professional opinions on some divisive issues: “Deep down most of us feel [the issue] is a good idea but we’re not in a position to support it. So trying to decide what to do about those things is difficult but we work through them.” A president said that his 501c(6) organization helped its members to see the big picture: “Sometimes a member company can’t see beyond itself. It sees the issue vis-à-vis itself and not the industry. So it’s difficult for a member to take a broad look at how things impact everyone. We help them do that.”

The interview data showed that informants gave credit where and when it was due, even to people whom they disliked. The president of a 501c(4) organization admitted that he “was not a fan of Glendening” but complimented Glendening’s skill at hiring “very professional, very substantive, very responsive, very easily engaged, very upfront, very competent” aides. The department director of a 501c(6) organization reported that no love was lost between Ehrlich and her organization. Yet she conceded that Ehrlich had largely done right by her organization’s issues: “I think what’s fair is fair. Knowing what he’s done for [the issue], we have to give him his due and treat him

appropriately.” Her colleague, an assistant executive director, similarly gave Ehrlich his due.

Several informants who identified themselves as Democrats put politics aside when they told me that they appreciated having a two-party government in Maryland. This comment from the state director of a 501c(6) organization typified others’ sentiments: “I think however many years of one-party domination wasn’t good for Maryland. . . Personally, I think it’s good to have some divided government.”

Not surprisingly, many Republican informants liked that two parties now controlled the state government, specifically because the Democrats no longer controlled both the executive and legislative branches. One 501c(6) organization’s executive director elaborated on the problems Democrats caused when they controlled two branches of Maryland’s government. Knowing he was Republican, I could not resist asking what he thought about Republican control of the White House and the U.S. Congress. He asserted that the Republicans’ control of the federal government was categorically different than the Democrats’ formerly complete control of the state government. He explained how he reconciled the incongruity of his two opinions. The mental gymnastics this entailed eventually convinced me that he did indeed possess a dexterous mind.

By contrast, I again highlight the partisan Democrat executive director of a 501c(6) organization. His doctrinaire attitudes about Republicans leached into the thinking and behavior of his organization, as I have discussed. He was absolutely unable to give Ehrlich, a Republican, credit for anything: “I can think of nothing positive that’s come out of the Ehrlich administration. Anything positive I give credit to the legislature

for making it happen.” This informant long ago raised his glass of partisan Kool-Aid to toast the idea of “Democrats good, Republicans bad.” His doctrinaire thinking will not allow him to put his glass down.

Most informants and their organizations demonstrated that they were flexible and could successfully handle jolts (like Ehrlich’s election) and the ensuing turbulence and uncertainty in the political environment. Being able to roll with the punches indicates a dexterous mind at work. Indeed, a for-contract GRP concluded, “A good lobbyist expects and deals with change.” The president of a 501c(6) organization elaborated: “We’re flexible, we’re nimble, we can move around. We have to be because of how things have been changing since Ehrlich’s election. You’ve got to change, adapt, deal with stuff you’ve never ever had to deal with before.” The vice president and senior vice-president explained how their 501c(6) organization handled going from Ehrlich’s good graces to bad. According to the vice president, “It actually made things easier; we didn’t have to work as hard on the Second Floor.” The senior vice-president added: “The sky did not fall in, we got things passed, we got things killed. Nothing really bad happened. We were able to compensate and work around it.” The assistant executive director of a 501c(6) organization thought that Ehrlich needed to “get over” the fact that her organization supported Townsend in the 2002 election. She was incredulous that Ehrlich and his staff were not able to roll with a standard political punch such as an organization endorsing one’s opponent.

An optimistic attitude was one reason why informants, and by association their organizations, were able to roll with the political punches. Their optimism is best exemplified by comments from four informants. A vice president of a 501c(6)

organization chalked up what she saw as the Ehrlich administration's incompetence to a grand planned strategy rather than incompetence. A for-contract GRP attributed his overcoming of professional difficulties to his upbeat outlook on life. The president of a 501c(6) organization told me: "I've been very, very lucky. Whenever I've looked for something, something has opened up and kind of fallen in my lap." The state director of a 501c(4) said, despite having a "bitter taste in my mouth" about some things the Ehrlich administration had done: "Still I'm looking for every opportunity to work together with them. You have to hope for future collaboration."

Pragmatism was another way informants and their organizations rolled with the political punches. Informants expressed realistic attitudes about politics and its machinations. Informants' realistic attitudes conveyed to me a sense of nonchalance, of dispassion, of political savvy. As evidence, I present these comments:

- A for-contract GRP: "It's just a different scene than it used to be."
- The department director of a 501c(6) organization: "Antagonism is just a natural part of the political process."
- The executive director of a 501c(6) organization: "I have to build relationships with legislators and candidates and that takes some money. That's unfortunate but that's the way it is."
- The president and CEO of a 501c(6) organization: "We haven't always gotten the responses we're looking for but that's part of the game."
- A for-contract lobbyist: "Of the 188 legislators, there are about four or five of them who absolutely really, really hate my guts. They wish me dead; they will have no dealings. That's okay. It's hard to have 188 friends in the same place."

The co-chair of a 501c(4) organization was the only informant who exhibited political naïveté; she did not know how exactly how to roll with the punches of politics. She became involved in politics during the first Glendening administration (1995 to

1999). She relayed her excitement to me about being invited to the Glendening inauguration in 1999 and lunching with Maryland's first lady at the Governor's Mansion. Initially idealistic about how politics worked, as soon as Ehrlich was elected — before he was even inaugurated — she said her organization got “our first taste of politics.” She recounted how lawmakers and other stakeholder organizations had used, double-crossed, and blown off her organization since Ehrlich's election. The overused political maxim of “no permanent friends, no permanent enemies” was true, she noted. Her organization had been punched around and finally it learned its lessons about how to roll with them. She declared: “We've matured; we're bolder and more politically savvy. We're on our guard. We know today's friend can be tomorrow's opponent. We'll call things like we see them. We aren't afraid to confront people who've flip-flopped on the issue.”

The majority of informants expressed affinity for resolving conflicts through compromise and satisficing (when necessary). These are symmetrically valued ways for an organization to roll with the punches. The assistant executive director of a 501c(6) organization said that when the winning candidate is not the candidate the organization supported, “You have to reach out and find common ground.” The committee chair of a 501c(4) said that his organization too was constantly looking for common ground. A director of a 501c(6) organization reported: “We had our battles with Glendening on the specifics of [the issue] but overall we supported the concept of it. I would say what we wound up with was a mixed bag; it wasn't all bad.” Compromise sometimes required one president's 501c(6) organization to “dance with the devil, so to speak.” A for-contract GRP's bemoaning of compromise now being equated with capitulation could be

inferred as a preference for compromise, a symmetrically valued conflict resolution strategy.

A vice president and senior vice-president recounted how their 501c(6) organization decided to support a legislative solution that satisfied their problem. The vice president said: “We thought there wasn’t a choice but to accept [the legislative solution]. That was our only chance of anything happening until the next election. This was as good as we could get. We do sometimes try for more but we’re realistic.” The senior vice-president added, “The legislation wasn’t as meaningful as we would have liked; but hey, it was a step in the right direction.”

In Chapter 2, I discussed how organizations should be flexible — but not too flexible — when engaging with environmental stakeholders (Pearce & Robinson, 1982; Weick, 1979). In that discussion I asked: “If an organization is constantly bending to its environment, for what is it willing to stand firm? What does that organization stand for?” The question here becomes if organizations are willing to compromise or accept outcomes that satisfy, do they not risk becoming too flexible? Organizations that are willing to resolve conflicts (and cede control, consider multiple perspectives, and think with dexterous minds) in fact do have ways of standing resolutely. Those ways were revealed in informants’ comments about being tenacious, loyal, and principled.

Informants spoke of their organizations’ tenacity. Some mentioned working on the same bill or issue for years without progress (e.g., securing funds for the environmental clean-up of private property that the organizational owners allowed the public to use). Others spoke of long-term efforts to engage in dialogue with stakeholders

who either did not want to speak to them or would listen with deaf ears. Earlier I presented the stories of informants who continued to attend unproductive executive branch-level meetings of dubious motivations in the hope that something worthwhile might result. The co-chair of a 501c(4) organization, in the face of disappointment, betrayal, and growing political support for the opposition, remained committed to its goals: “We’ve changed our focus from educating the governor and the legislature to the public. But our goal has not and will not change.”

There does come a point when pragmatism has to trump tenacity. When an ROI is no longer worthwhile or potentially forthcoming, organizations must engage with other stakeholders or in other ways. A department director of a 501c(6) organization recounted her organization’s ultimately futile attempts at meaningful dialogue: “We had an unproductive meeting with Ehrlich’s staff in 2003. We did the same in 2004. After that we stopped bothering. They’re not open to listening; they’re not interested. Why bother beating our head into a wall?” When dialogue becomes futile, organizations may be justified in foregoing further futility and employing other means to help realize their self-interests (J.E. Grunig, 2001).

Loyalty was another way informants and their organizations stood resolutely in the midst of the turbulent field of Annapolis. One for-contract GRP is a Democrat but is good friends with Ehrlich. When I asked him if he would hedge his bets in the next gubernatorial election, he bristled at the mere suggestion: “I’ve never ridden two horses, never will. I go up or down with the person. Loyalty is a very scarce and highly respected commodity in this business and when people know you’re a loyal person, they

respect that.” He is famously loyal around Annapolis, which he believes helps people understand why he takes on the clients he does or supports the candidates he does.

A president of a 501c(6) organization explained that loyalty to the organization enables his colleagues and him to stand strong: “The only way to be consistent in this business is if your first loyalty is to your organization. And that’s difficult when you’ve got some very personal relationships.” While we were on this thread, I asked him if he was amenable to hiring someone whose views conflicted with those of the organization. Citing loyalty to the organization, he said: “It wouldn’t make any difference to me as long as they understood they work here now and that their loyalty was to the organization and our goals.”

Being principled in the conduct of their jobs was yet another way that informants stood resolute in the political environment. Several informants, like this president of a 501c(6) organization, spoke of the paramount importance of keeping one’s word: “For any lobbyist, you’re only as good as your word. So you go out and present the facts. . .If you make a promise that you’re going to do something, then you keep that promise.” A for-contract GRP declared: “If you stand up and fight for something, some principle, you’re going to ruffle other people. You’re either a sideliners or you’re in the game.” Other informants, some of whom had conflicts with Glendening and some with Ehrlich, told me of how they and their organizations strived to never publicly disparage the governor. For example, Ehrlich repeatedly has made snide public comments about an assistant executive director’s 501c(6) organization. But on principle her organization does not respond in kind: “We’ve made a calculated decision to not bash Ehrlich. He

won't talk to us at all but he's still the governor. The office is due respect. Our members don't want to see their organization stooping to that level.”

A department director said her 501c(6) organization adheres to a guiding principle: All decisions are based on whether an issue has a “strong nexus” back to the members’ interests. This nexus enabled the organization to rationalize not getting involved in many politically charged issues and to explain to those who wanted them to get involved why they were not. Other informants cited using a guiding principle as a litmus test for involvement and to explain for why their organization would or would not get involved. These informants also pointed to their organizations’ guiding principle as integral to their ability to remain nonpartisan and withstand the pressure to get embroiled in partisan politics.

Theory Question 2b

There is my long answer to Theory Question 2a. For my answer to **Theory Question 2b (How did the jolt affect the worldviews of their organizations?)**, I do not have nearly the scope of interview data to present as for Theory Question 2a. The short answer to Theory Question 2b is:

The jolt generally did not precipitate a sea change in organizations’ worldviews. Organizations’ worldviews were presupposed more symmetrically than asymmetrically both before and after the jolt of Ehrlich’s election. Post-jolt changes of most organizations’ worldviews were negligible enough that if this were a quantitative study the changes probably would fall within the margin of error.

As readers have surmised from the results for Theory Question 2a, most organizations’ worldviews were presupposed more symmetrically than asymmetrically both before and after the jolt of Ehrlich’s election. They seemed to embrace values associated with symmetrically presupposed worldviews over asymmetrical values. But

yet, I found that organizations employed symmetrically presupposed behaviors as a means to further and achieve organizational ends. Symmetry is an auspicious, socially responsible strategy that is more likely to bring success to organizations than is asymmetry (J.E. Grunig, 2001), even though asymmetry comparatively may be more efficient and direct. I come back to this theme in the results for Theory Question 3 about gamesmanship in government relations.

Any post-jolt changes of worldviews were negligible enough that if this were a quantitative study the changes probably would fall within the margin of error. There were, however, three exceptions, which I discuss below.

Examples of Organizations Whose Worldviews Changed

Earlier I presented the experiences of the no-longer politically naïve co-chair whose 501c(4) organization got burned by the jolt of Ehrlich's election. The jolt and its aftershocks changed her organization and its worldview. Its worldview is less symmetrically presupposed than it was when Glendening was governor, although I do not believe its worldview would be considered asymmetrically presupposed. This informant was passionate about its mission and was not willing to compromise. As it looked increasingly likely that the opposition would triumph, she and her organization have become less willing to deal with and appreciate other viewpoints on the issue. They are no longer so amenable to ceding control to external "others" and having a dexterous mind as they once were. This became more of a black-and-white issue for her organization and her than ever before. As Beyer (1981) predicted would happen, her organization's now less-symmetrically (or more-asymmetrically) presupposed worldview was reflected in how she planned to engage with stakeholders in the future. Here is how she said that her

organization would interact with political candidates from now on: “We’ll still be proactive and help educate candidates about our issue. But whereas we used to send them questionnaires to see where they stood on our issue, *now we’re going to tell them where they should stand.*” Her organization has a lot at stake; if and when the other side wins, her organization will lose big. So no longer is her organization Mr. Nice Guy.

Ehrlich’s election has also caused a 501c(6) organization to change its worldview. This executive director’s organization and the industry it represents were constantly under fire from the Glendening administration. He said with Ehrlich’s election, “It was as if that big target on my back had been removed.” He insisted that the Glendening administration wanted to put his organization’s industry out of business in Maryland. He truly believed this: “It was real.” As for the General Assembly, he said, “We didn’t ask for a whole lot, *they didn’t do a whole lot to us.*” His statement is telling; it is as if this informant felt victimized. Glendening was an enemy, as were the “radical” organizations that worked with Glendening, “his crowd.”

The organization behaved as if it were under siege; it did not engage in much outreach and when it did, it was primarily with familiar, friendly stakeholders. But upon Ehrlich winning the governorship, it was as if his organization blossomed. It became more confident because it was not under constant threat. It was willing to let itself be vulnerable, to be more open, vocal, and proactive than it was when Glendening was in office. The informant predicted that this was a permanent change: “If the next governor is not Ehrlich, we would have to do our job and reach out to those folks, introduce ourselves, and make sure they know us. Talk to them.” His organization was becoming more symmetrically presupposed because the jolt turned what he perceived as an

unfriendly political environment into a friendly political environment. He felt more comfortable engaging with the Ehrlich administration because of values-congruency and the administration's demonstrable confidence of higher political legitimacy than the Glendening administration (as I discussed in the results section for Theory Question 5).

According to several informants, the outreach efforts of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization of another informant (an executive director) have become more symmetrically presupposed since the jolt of Ehrlich's election. They attributed these changes to the jolt turning what had been a friendly political environment into an unfriendly one for the organization (which I will refer to as "Organization W" in this discussion). Three informants mentioned that Organization W became their organizations' strange bedfellow as soon as Ehrlich won the 2002 election. Two other informants mentioned that since Ehrlich's election, their organizations have enjoyed much more positive and productive relationships with Organization W. Curiously, Organization W's executive director never mentioned any of this, but that five informants marveled about its post-jolt worldview change compels me to mention it. The executive director of a 501c(4) organization speculated about the change at this organization: "They realize who's governor and that they're not running the show anymore. They're beginning to realize we're not the enemy. You can't be hammering on folks and pointing the finger at them all the time. That's not productive." Organization W evidently had learned that it needed to consider multiple and perhaps contrarian perspectives to continue to effectively engage with stakeholders newly legitimized and powerful in post-jolt Annapolis. It began to embrace (or more closely embrace than pre-jolt) the symmetrical values related to functioning as an open system and responsibility to others.

Effect of the Jolt on Informants' Doctrinaire Thinking

As I noted earlier in this section, some informants also espoused doctrinaire thoughts about people and issues. Their organizations' engagement with the political environment reflected this. But did the informants and their organizations' remain doctrinaire, even given the jolt of Ehrlich's election?

Two informants who otherwise functioned effectively, both personally and professionally, in the political environment were partisan absolutists on the Democrat side. Neither was willing to entertain the possibility that Republicans could do something positive or that their perspective was worthwhile. I have already written about one of these informants. This executive director of a 501c(6) organization is unwilling to work with anybody but a Democrat. What I did not mention earlier were his disparaging characterizations of Republicans. The committee chair of another 501c(6) organization was also an avowed Democrat and his organization is closely associated with the Democrat Party. When I asked him about his organization's involvement in the upcoming 2006 election, he said with a laugh, "I think it goes without saying that my organization will support the Democratic candidate." My analysis of their interview data showed that these informants' political ideologies became more doctrinaire after Ehrlich's election.

These are not situations where the jolt completely changed an organization's worldview. That said, the jolt has changed some of the tangible manifestations of the two organizations' worldviews, such as its outreach efforts, willingness to compromise or satisfice, and appreciation for multiple perspectives. But these changes are not changes in these organizations' basic worldview (i.e., their predisposition toward symmetry or

asymmetry). Worldviews are what makes organizations “tick.” These organizations continued to “tick” in the same way after Ehrlich’s election as before the election. Their ticking now just sounds slightly different.

Theory Question 3: Models of Public Relations Practice

Before presenting my findings for this theory question, I will briefly review the models of public relations practice. The press agency/publicity and public information models are the cornerstones of traditional media relations programs. They describe how media relations practitioners communicate with their stakeholders via the media (also an organizational stakeholder). Communication in both models flows in one direction: outward from the organization, through the media, to stakeholders. The purpose of the one-way communication may be aggrandizement, spin, or positive publicity (press agency/publicity model), or tell truthful, but perhaps incomplete, information (public information model).

The one-way “craft” models function like transmitters for an organization whereas the two-way models function like transmitters and antenna for an organization (e.g., see Klein, 2006, para. 6). The two-way models are more complex and strategic than the one-way models. These “scientific” models involve research, message development, and information exchange .

Communication in the two-way asymmetrical model flows between an organization and its stakeholders. However, influence only flows one way, from the organization to its stakeholders. Although they may not realize it, the purpose of the communication is organizational self-interest. An organization learns of stakeholders’ concerns about its behaviors and then uses this information to alter its messages about its

behaviors so that they positively resonate with stakeholders. The organization seeks to “persuade publics to behave as the organization wants” (Dozier et al., 1995, p. 13).

Two-way asymmetrical communication pays lip service to stakeholders’ concerns; two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive communication pays attention to them. The purposes of communication in the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model are to listen, engage in dialogue, and employ collaborative processes that allow the consideration of interests of the organization and its stakeholders. Organizational messages may evolve, as may organizational behaviors; likewise so may the messages and behaviors of stakeholders. Organizations and stakeholders may exchange influence, which is “the ability to affect the outcome of decisions” (Jemison, 1984, p. 133). As a mixed-motive model, organizations are concerned with advocating their interests but not at the expense of stakeholders’ interests. In this model, symmetrical (cooperative) and asymmetrical (competitive) tactics are employed within a larger symmetrical (cooperative) framework (Dozier et al., 1995).

The cultural interpreter model describes how some organizations hire public relations practitioners who are part of or otherwise familiar with a nation or a culture (and its language, customs, mores, and the like) as organizational “ambassadors” (J.E. Grunig et al., 1995). The personal influence model accounts for public relations practitioners’ network of personal and professional contacts — their social circles (Kadushin, 1968; Weedman, 1992) — in the execution of public relations activities (J.E. Grunig et al., 1995).

Theory Question 3a

TQ3a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their communication practices with their organizations’ political stakeholders?

Informants engaged in a variety of one-way, two-way, symmetrically presupposed, and asymmetrically presupposed communication practices, including grassroots member outreach, media advocacy, grassroots member outreach, coalition involvement, and lobbying. The personal influence model, typically applied in conjunction with the cultural interpreter model, led to dialogue (i.e., the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model) with political stakeholders. This practice best described and explained informants' effectiveness and success as boundary-spanning GRPs.

I found evidence of the six models of public relations practice in informants' descriptions of how they communicated with their organizations' political stakeholders. How could I have found evidence of the press agency/publicity and public information models, which describe media relations practice, in government relations communication practices? The obvious answer is media advocacy (Wallack et al., 1993), which many informants noted their organizations engage in as part of their government relations programs. I found the less obvious but more interesting answer in the informants' organizations' use of one-way communication with political stakeholders for the purposes of aggrandizement, positive spin, education, or awareness: grassroots member activities. Activities such as sending a pre-written "form" or originally authored e-mail, fax, postcard, or letter, or leaving a telephone message for a lawmaker are one-way communication activities, executed for the purposes I have listed. They are government relations' "equivalents" of traditional media relations tactical activities.

Grassroots Outreach as One-Way Communication

Grassroots activities at this level are designed by an organization (the behind-the-scenes sender) to send messages to lawmakers (the receivers) via the organization's grassroots who are the lawmakers' constituents. The grassroots play the role of message conduit, as the media do in the two one-way communication models. That

message, transmitted through the grassroots at the behest of the organization, may serve to register opinions on an issue with a lawmaker or to persuade the lawmaker to support or oppose an issue. In my experience developing and managing grassroots campaigns, I often encouraged grassroots to make clear in their messages that what the lawmaker did vis-à-vis the issue in question would affect what they may or may not do come the next election or campaign fundraiser (e.g., “If you vote against this bill, I will have to reconsider my support for your re-election.”) These one-way government relations communication activities are efforts to change or reinforce a lawmaker’s opinion and to influence his or her decision-making. They are not designed to trigger a meaningful transactional dialogue between the grassroots and lawmaker. Granted, these activities may trigger a thoughtful but standard response from the lawmaker’s office to the grassroots. This is usually in the form of a “Thank you for contacting me about such-and-such issue. I always appreciate hearing from my constituents” letter.

The value of grassroots activities at this level is not reflected in their quality but their quantity. As an executive director of a 501c(6) organization noted: “Grassroots efforts are still measured in inches. Their impact in a legislator’s office is based on how many letters it receives. They’ll compare stacks: ‘This stack supports it. This stack opposes it.’ Whichever stack is taller, there you go.” He called this a “simple truth,” which I agree with up to a point. The truth is that the truth about the value of grassroots efforts is not that simple: A hierarchy of the relative value of grassroots activities exists.

A 2005 study, based on quantitative and qualitative research conducted with more than 350 congressional aides, revealed a direct relationship between the degree of personalization of the grassroots correspondence and the influence of that correspondence

on a lawmaker's decision-making (Fitch & Goldschmidt, 2005). Generally, an in-person visit to a lawmaker from a constituent is more influential than a personalized letter, a personalized e-mail, a personalized fax, a telephone call, a form letter, form e-mail, and a form fax. Grassrooters are rank-and-file members of organizations; they are so-called "average" citizens. They typically use letters, e-mail, phone messages, and faxes to contact their lawmakers. The written correspondence may be personalized, meaning that they took the time to write it themselves. Identical form correspondence, which has the least value, is a giveaway for contrived "Astroturf" grassroots campaigns. In these campaigns, organizations "stimulate" grassrooters to sign their names and mail the pre-written letter or postcard, on which the postage probably is paid. Or they may be asked to send a pre-written message from their e-mail accounts or from the organization's Web site.

The less effort it takes a grassrooter to engage in a grassroots activity, the less value that activity has, and thus the less influence it has on the receiver — the lawmaker. An executive director said his 501c(6) organization cautions its grassrooters against sending e-mails to lawmakers because "e-mails just are not perceived as worth as much" as other methods of contact. E-mail is just too easy; dashing off an e-mail requires little effort. In 2004, members of Congress received more than 182 million e-mail messages from constituents, almost 10 times the amount of letter correspondence (Fitch & Goldschmidt, 2005).⁴ Writing a letter or making a phone call is a more "involved" (i.e., time-consuming, labor-intensive, cognitively burdensome) activity than sending an e-mail. Thus the former two activities count for more with lawmakers and their staffs.

⁴ I have been unable to find statistics about the volume of constituent correspondence received by the Maryland General Assembly.

Grasstops Activities as Two-Way Communication

The informants' organizations also employed grasstops activities, which are examples of two-way communication activities. External members of organizations who are in the same social circle as targeted lawmakers engage in grasstops activities when they interact with lawmakers on behalf of the organizations. Lawmakers are more likely to take or return phone calls from or meet with grasstoppers than grassrootsers. Face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations are highly personal and personalized transactional communication situations (Berko et al., 2001). Dialogue, for the purposes of education or advocacy or both, is occurring between the grasstopper and the lawmaker. These situations are more valued (from an organizational viewpoint) and more influential (from a lawmaker's viewpoint) than many standard grassroots activities.

The Importance of Dialogue

Informants likewise stressed the importance of and their reliance on dialogue between themselves (as agents of their organizations) and lawmakers and other political stakeholders (e.g., cabinet secretaries). Dialogue is evidence of the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model (Dozier et al., 1995; J.E. Grunig, 1992; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). In fact, dialogue and the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model are the same (J.E. Grunig, 2001).

“Prying loose useful information” may be one motivation for dialogue (“The Business of Influence,” 2006, p. 13). Other motivations for engaging in dialogue include the mutual flow of critical information, collaboration, cooperation, and the opportunities to work out differences and foster rapport. As the executive director of a 501c(6) organization put it: “The [state agency] obviously has its own ideas about things.

Sometimes it agrees with us; sometimes it doesn't. But we always sit down together and talk about things." All informants (with the exception of the partisan Democrat executive director of a 501c[6] organization whom I have highlighted repeatedly in this chapter) appreciated the opportunity for dialogue. As the executive director of a 501c(6) organization said, "We were happy to join the conversation."

Informants also appreciated dialogue with stakeholders with differing (even contrarian) cultural topoi and opinions. Deep understanding of one perspective is good; deep understanding of a "breadth of perspective[s]" is better (Culbertson, 1989, p. 3); it prevents tunnel-vision thinking. As this executive director of a 501c(6) organization put it, "There are some people in Annapolis who may not agree with me philosophically but I appreciate at least having a dialogue with them." Informants engaged in dialogue to collect a deep and wide pile of critical information, not to indulge their altruistic motivations or a desire for their organizations to function as Habermasian public spheres.

Uncertainty also motivates dialogue. The desire for engaging with stakeholders using two-way communication (like dialogue) increases when environments are turbulent (J.E. Grunig, 1984; L.A. Grunig, 1992) because these environments are uncertain. Informants perceived the jolted environment of Annapolis to be turbulent and uncertain; my analysis showed that informants desired and appreciated opportunities to engage in dialogue with stakeholders in this environment. Dialogue is a symmetrical tactic used to achieve an organization's asymmetrical ends of self-interest; it is a mixed-motive communication process (J.E. Grunig, 2001).

Similarly, informants were disappointed and frustrated when dialogue with political stakeholders did not occur; they lost opportunities to quell uncertainty. This

parallels a trend I discussed in the results for Theory Question 2: informants' distaste for asymmetry seemed to imply a taste for symmetry. The absence of dialogue means, among other things, that useful information was not flowing between these boundary-spanning GRPs and stakeholders. Such information could have helped to assuage some of the uncertainty that all of the organizations perceived to varying degrees given the turbulence in the Annapolis political environment. According to the executive director of a 501c(6) organization, the Glendening administration ignored her industry during the promulgation of major new industry regulations: They "did not request or receive adequate input from the people they were trying to regulate. . . So that program didn't go over very well. That was kind of Glendening's legacy [on this issue]." She found that Ehrlich's administration, by contrast, was eager for industry input on these regulations: "They invited all [of us] to say what was wrong with it, what was right with it, what would you do different. Several hundred people from across the state participated," including her association. Another informant, a department director of a 501c(6) organization, was mystified that the Ehrlich administration did not attempt a dialogue (or any communication) with her 501c(6) organization on one of the governor's pet initiatives: "I'm not suggesting that had [lawmaker] talked with our president our answer would have changed. But how do you even have a shot at making the answer different if you're not going to pick up the phone and try?"

Dialogue is a symmetrically presupposed process that parties engage in on the assumption they agree to certain normative asymmetrically presupposed expectations: One, the dialogic process entails the mutual exchange of information and influence; two, parties pursue their self-interests through the dialogic process; and three, both parties are

willing to give up something to gain something (Dozier et al., 1995). This explains informants' disappointment and frustration at being involved in the Ehrlich administration's perceived "disingenuous" attempts at dialogue; the administration violated the first and third normative expectations while too tightly embracing the second expectation. A state director questioned the administration's motives for holding meetings with his 501c(4) organization and its sister organizations: "I feel like [the meetings] are as much an attempt for the administration to say we've been meeting and listening to them as they're an attempt to really figure out how we can work together." Other informants bristled when they believed that the Ehrlich administration was using them. When I asked a vice president about whether the Glendening or Ehrlich administrations had sought out her 501c(6) organization's input on issues, she replied: "No, they only ever solicit what they want, like when they want to hold press conferences at our [members' facilities]. I find that they'll only solicit our help when it's something they want to do."

Notwithstanding the disappointment and frustration the communication practices of the Glendening and Ehrlich administration may have caused them, informants and their organizations never gave up on trying to effect dialogue. Their commitment to effecting and engaging in dialogue was motivated less by principle and more by self-interest. Being frozen out or considered *persona non grata* by a critical stakeholders places constraints on an organization. Environmental constraints and organizational communication practices are curvilinearly related (J.E. Grunig, 1984). When constraints are few, organizations communicate and behave as they want, which is often asymmetrically. There are minimal checks and balances on the organization. (This may

explain part of the concern about when one political party controls both the legislative and executive branches of government: Neither branch effectively checks and balances — constrains — the other. It also may explain why the government seeks to break up corporate monopolies.) When constraints are many, organizations may also communicate and behave asymmetrically. They may believe they have nothing to lose and communicate and behave accordingly.

Being frozen out or considered persona non grata by the Ehrlich administration obviously constrained some organizations. They could not engage in dialogue with this critical stakeholder, something they lamented on principle but also on the negative implications this had for their organizations' goals. But the Ehrlich administration was not the only critical stakeholder in the political environment, so even these bane organizations could not consider Annapolis to be a highly constraining environment. (Some boon informants might have considered the pre-Ehrlich era, in which Democrats controlled the two critical stakeholder institutions, highly constraining.) These bane organizations thus were only moderately constrained.

As the curvilinear relationship between constraints and communication had suggested, these bane organizations tried to engage stakeholders in symmetrically presupposed communication. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization reported having to hire a lobbyist to create new avenues for dialogue after the Glendening administration froze out his organization. His organization continued to reap the benefits of this: "Even if Townsend had been elected, I think the progress we have made in nurturing legislative relations still would have paid off." This informant noted that there is no lack of executive dialogue since Ehrlich became governor. Ehrlich has even invited

this informant and his counterparts at other industry groups to working dinners at the governor's mansion. Conversely, the vice president of a 501c(6) organization frozen out by the Ehrlich administration does not expect to receive any dinner invitations to the governor's mansion anytime soon. However, she said: "That's not to say that you don't sometimes try things to at least get something on the table for discussion. But it will be what it will be. You have to try to get beyond it." Again, this was not because organizations were necessarily committed to dialogue on principle. They were of course; but dialogue also is a "sweeter" avenue for pursuing organizational goals than tactics such as media advocacy.

Informants mentioned that upon seeing how the Ehrlich administration has publicly ostracized some organizations, they have tempered — softened — some of their organizational rhetoric and behavior to stay in the administration's good graces. This is not to say that the Glendening administration would not act like this too, as many informants allowed, but the department director of a 501c(6) offered this hypothesis about the differences between Glendening's and Ehrlich's ostracism: "I think Glendening, because he had the luxury of the governor's office, the House, and the Senate in the same party he could be a little less emphatic about it." Informants did not want whatever dialogue and rapport they and their organizations enjoyed with the Ehrlich administration to vanish; they were "scared symmetrical" (Simone [a.k.a. Tuite], 2003). The department director for a 501c(3) organization said: "We don't want to anger the governor. We need to work with them. But we can't be completely silent either. We have to represent our interests. So we have to carefully balance what we say and do." The Maryland governor's tremendous power over the state budget squashes disagreement

as well, as this department director for a 501c(4) organization noted: “You want to maintain good relationships with executive branch because of its budgetary power. This discourages people from saying to Ehrlich, ‘You’re not doing things right.’”

Education was a major purpose of the dialogue so universally valued by informants. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization emphasized to me:

Our message is that the world doesn’t exist without our product. And that’s part of my thrust, not only on the lobbying end but on the educational end. I’ll go out and talk to anybody, anywhere at anytime about the importance of our product and the men and women who go into making it.

Another executive director said that education is his 501c(4) organization’s “first effort”: “The first challenge we face with lobbying generally on behalf of the [industry] sector is to make sure that legislators understand what the sector is. They aren’t born with that familiarity, so we need to get them familiar.”

A strong theme emerged from the interview data as to the context of dialogue. Dialogue — and the collaboration, cooperation, listening information sharing, and influence exchange that it fostered — seemed to occur within the context of advocating organizational interests. It was a symmetrically presupposed tactic in an asymmetrically presupposed framework.

More than anything else, the goal of dialogue in government relations for informants was to obtain the result their organization wanted (Wolf, 1976). That result could be to craft, pass, or kill a bill, or to “modify a bill in a way so it’s more palatable,” as a department director of a 501c(6) organization explained. Dialogue included the presentation of facts and the making of arguments: the art of persuasion. Such dialogue is an exercise in mutual advocacy, or collaborative advocacy (Spicer, 1997), or cooperative antagonism (Raiffa, 1982, as cited in Dozier et al., 1995).

Parties involved in dialogue are likely to have their own desired results in mind, something they implicitly agree is the case when engaging in dialogue. No parties are so naïve as to believe that altruism motivates the dialogue or that parties are anything but primarily concerned with their own interests. But the process of dialogue is symmetrically presupposed even though the parties are asymmetrically motivated or desire an asymmetrical outcome.

Part of what makes the dialogic process symmetrical is that it is an exercise in listening. The process required Party A and Party B to listen to the other's facts and arguments. By "listen," I do not mean that A just "heard" B's perspective and continued on with the dialogue process without skipping a beat. I mean "listen" in the sense that A learned from and appreciated B's perspective and was amenable to rethinking its own perspective in light of its understanding of B's perspective.

Advocacy is not necessarily an asymmetrical, zero-sum game endeavor. Heath (1992) argued vigorously that engaging in advocacy and persuasion are ethical endeavors. Lobbying, also known as direct advocacy, is an ethical asymmetrical activity (J.E. Grunig, 2001). Advocacy can be part of a dialogue, out of which conflict resolution and mutual understanding may emerge (Plowman et al., 2001). The use of advocacy when dialogue fails is "ethically reasonable" (J.E. Grunig, 2001, p. 16).

However, a semantic pattern glared at me from the interview data: Informants consistently used war metaphors and militaristic terminology when talking about politics and their work. Below are some examples of this verbiage from different informants:

- "To the victor go the spoils."
- "That battle is still going on."

- “So that was probably the most significant opening shot.”
- “I think it was the shot heard round the world.”
- “It was like 10 of us got dropped behind enemy lines with a couple of guns and a tank and were told, ‘Here, go do it.’”
- “It’s good to have the Ehrlich administration out there beating the drum.”
- “You have to marshal your armies and employ these logistical maneuvers.”
- “One of the battles has raged on our front.”
- “You want to save your bullets — your grasstop guys — for the really important stuff.”
- “Our members are our secret weapon and our best possible defense and offense. I will shamelessly use them whenever I need to.”
- “The line was drawn in the sand and then the gauntlet dropped.”

Because I am not a semiotician, I cannot with confidence say what the exact implications are of my informants’ semantic choices. But I believe these words support my contention that the underlying context for dialogue in government relations is advocacy, which, like war, is a competitive endeavor. I expound on this in the next section.

Gamesmanship in Government Relations

Many informants also spoke of, even seemed to relish, the gamesmanship of politics and government relations. Some informants, such as a department director of a 501c(6) organization, used a chess metaphor: “It’s a huge chess game and the stakes are very, very high. . . Now they’re all players, so you’ve got to analyze so many more pieces of the chess game.” Other informants, such as a for-contract GRP, dispensed with metaphors altogether: “I mean the whole thing is a big political game.”

Informants were players in the game as well and strategically played the contention between Democrats and Republicans to their advantage. Dialogue was the most symmetrically presupposed tactic in their arsenal (to adopt the informants' semantic predilections). One for-contract GRP admitted to trying to stir up fights between members of the two parties because "it's easier to kill a bill that way." Another for-contact GRP said he played the political angles on an issue because "we needed to change the dynamics to make it a political issue that Ehrlich couldn't afford to ignore." As the executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization owned up: "We've used the fact that there's a two-party system to our advantage. Each party wants to outdo the other on [the issue]. We try to capitalize on that." She then provided an example: "I told Ehrlich's people: 'This is politics. Let the Democrats put their fingerprints on this bill; otherwise they'll kill it.' They agreed and then the Democrats added some good stuff to it. So we got what we wanted."

For some informants, playing the game meant manipulating messages. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization said: "We can structure the appearance of the issue to fit our audience. We're not impervious to left or right politics." The committee chair of a 501c(6) organization noted: "I censored, for lack of a better word, our publications with respect to our legislative issues because they're sensitive issues. I wanted to make sure all of our public messages were on the same page to the extent they could be."

Hope for Symmetry Yet

Yet in the midst of this asymmetry, this "cult of winning" (Gellman, 2006), symmetrical values abound. Informants placed premiums on ethics and honesty for

themselves and those with whom they interacted. They placed great importance on meaningful dialogue with stakeholders. The department director of a 501c(6) organization, a former committee staffer in the General Assembly, offered another perspective: “I learned rapidly which lobbyists would lie or were no good and those I should make time for. They’d argue from their slant but would tell the truth. And whenever I needed information, I went to those guys.” A for-contract GRP said he is careful to “tell everybody up front what you’re doing. You’re honest with them.” An executive director of a 501c(6) organization said that providing background information to elected officials “helps them out and it helps instill some level of trust.”

Many informants spoke at length about efforts that supported the truisms of “Politics make for strange bedfellows” and that in politics, “there are no permanent friends, no permanent enemies.” I have written at length about these efforts in earlier sections of this chapter. The president and CEO of a 501c(3) organization declared: “We always try to establish relationships with the members of the General Assembly and the administration. It doesn’t matter who they are.”

When I was analyzing the data on this point, one story stood out. It was a long story in which the president of a 501c(6) organization detailed assembling a coalition comprising the spectrum of players on an issue to develop recommendations and outline their collective thoughts for the incoming governor (Ehrlich). I thought his anecdote ended with this line in the interview transcript: “And if we can work together on that, then everybody’s better off.” I thought to myself, “What an excellent example of symmetrical values.” Then I turned the page and laughed; the anecdote had not ended with that line. The next few lines snapped me back to the reality of politics and

government relations. The informant finished his anecdote with this punch line: “We’ve now got the other side of [the issue] telling our side of the story. How much better does it get than that? From a political perspective, it doesn’t.” No matter how symmetrical one’s motivations appear, in politics and government relations the asymmetrical ulterior motive of self-interest is there, too.

Normatively, parties engage in dialogue in good faith, by agreeing to disagree, listening and thoughtfully considering other views, being amenable to giving and taking. But parties do so in pursuit of their interests; for instance, an organization engages in dialogue to compete for resources (e.g., funding) those stakeholders have the authority and power to allocate. I believe that politics is an asymmetrically presupposed game played using the symmetrically presupposed strategy of dialogue as a strategy of first resort. I explore and dissect this thought in Chapter 5.

The Two Other Models of Public Relations Practice

There was an abundance of evidence for the four models of public relations (or activities and values evocative of the models) exhibited in informants’ communication practices with their organizations’ political stakeholders. However, I had to infer this evidence from their interviews. I did not have to infer the evidence that leads me to write this: Based on the raw interview data, by what informants plainly told me, informants function as boundary-spanning GRPs more than anything else because they tap into their network of contacts and their knowledge bases of politics both general and Annapolitan. The personal influence and cultural interpreter models better described informants’ communication practices with their political stakeholders than anything else such as the four models. Informants’ networks of contacts and knowledge bases accounted for their

effectiveness and success as GRPs. But as personal influencers and cultural interpreters, their preferred way to communicate with stakeholders was through dialogue (i.e., the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model).

Personal Influence Model

Earlier in this chapter (“Theory Question 2a”), I detailed the extensive and intensive outreach efforts of one for-contract GRP. To avoid redundancy, I will refrain from discussing his efforts again, but readers should understand that he has been rewarded with a social circle that is as deep as it wide. Forgive the datedness of this phrase, but his Rolodex runneth over. . .and that is why clients hire him: “They hire me because of my relationships, my access, my knowledge. My primary service to clients is access, knowing people.” As the executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization concluded about relationships: “You know I think that’s the name of the game.”

The department director for a 501c(6) organization observed that her relationships “translate back to my organization,” evidence again of implied third-party endorsement. Figuring out who knows whom is “just part of the planning activities for an issue,” according to the member of the board of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization. She continued, “We always work our own relationships on behalf of the organization.”

Informants work their relationships through the process of dialogue. Relationships and dialogue work in tandem. In politics, one does not have relationships purely for purposes of friendship (although that may be a collateral benefit). One has relationships because they offer something useful to that person and reciprocally to the other person in the relationship. These relationships should not be “user” relationships, as one for-contract GRP noted. They should be *useful* relationships, for all persons

involved. The usefulness of relationships is realized through the dialogue that relationships necessitate and opportune.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of the connections informants had or to where they traced their contacts:

- Worked for a former New York senator in the 1960s,
- Worked for Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley,
- Worked for former Maryland governor and current Comptroller William Schaefer,
- Worked for a former Maryland senator in the 1970s,
- Worked in Democrat presidential fundraising,
- Former colleague with current members of the Ehrlich administration,
- Former president of organization was a member of the Glendening cabinet,
- A close relative of the organization's former president works in the Ehrlich administration,
- A personal friend from church is an appointee in the Ehrlich administration,
- The former attorney for an organizational member's law firm was in the Glendening cabinet,
- Long-time personal friend and campaign manager for a former Maryland Senate committee chair,
- The wife of the organization's former president worked for Annapolis lawmakers,
- Long-time personal friends with legislative leaders (from both political parties),
- The organization's for-contract GRP is personal friends with Ehrlich,
- Father was good friends with father of current lawmaker,
- Came from a political family,
- Well-known operative in state Democrat politics,

- Went to law school with a current lawmaker,
- Active in community groups that some well-connected political people in Annapolis are also active in, and
- Founder of the organization was a former Maryland legislator.

Several informants were former legislators. Membership in this esteemed club is a major advantage as a GRP. As one former legislator, now a for-contract GRP, said of his transition, “There is a carry-over as I say from the good old boy network.” Another member of this club said: “You don’t have a lot of breaking in to do. You already know most of the players.” There is a reason why so many former members of Congress — half of them in fact (Kurtz, 2006b) — find lucrative post-Congress careers in lobbying in Washington, DC: They know people and people know them; they have the “right” relationships. But more to the point, they have *useful* relationships.⁵ Former members of the General Assembly, former House of Delegates’ committee staffers, and people who are personal friends with those in high places in Annapolis: They all have useful relationships and those relationships are key to their effectiveness and success as boundary-spanning GRPs. It is easier to pry loose useful (and better quality and more voluminous) information while engaging in dialogue with members of one’s social circle than from non-members (Burt, 2000).

Some have speculated that the social circles of Haley Barbour, the governor of Mississippi, are partly why Mississippi has dealt better with the devastation of Hurricane Katrina than has Louisiana (Leibovich, 2005). Barbour’s Republican credentials date to the Reagan administration. While chair of the Republican National Committee, he

⁵ I have been unable to find statistics about how many Maryland lawmakers enter the lobbying profession in Maryland after leaving public office.

oversaw the party's 1994 ascendancy to the majority in Congress. He then enjoyed a lucrative career as a corporate GRP in Washington, DC. As governor when Katrina made landfall in his home state of Mississippi, he immediately tapped into his social circle of Republican Washington, DC, and industry connections — his “drinking buddies” (para. 5) — to help the state's recovery and rebuilding efforts. In many ways, his useful relationships enabled the state to bypass FEMA and federal red tape. Kathleen Blanco, a Democrat who rose through Louisiana state politics to that state's governorship, has no comparable connections.

Cultural Interpreter Model

If the personal influence model is about knowing people, the cultural interpreter model is about knowing process. J.E. Grunig et al. (1995) presented culture in terms of national culture. Following Mack (1997), I have argued that Washington, DC, is its own microculture and that former insiders-turned-lobbyists are cultural interpreters: They know “the legislative process, political nuances, the right people to talk to, and how to get from the Cannon House Office Building to the Hart Senate Office Building. They understand. . .the ‘customs and folkways’ of the Hill” (Simone [a.k.a. Tuite], 1999, p. 40).

Like Washington, DC, Annapolis (or Richmond or any other state capital) is its own microculture. Many of my informants were former Annapolis insiders: ex-lawmakers, ex-committee staffers, ex-administrative aides, ex-state agency officials, and the like. Current government insiders still consider these informants to be insiders even though they are no longer officially “inside” the government. Why? Because these informants continued to be social-circle insiders. Their membership in social circles

transcended their tenure as government insiders. One informant, a department director of a 501c(6) organization who is a former committee staffer in the General Assembly, explained why former insiders are so coveted as GRPs:

Everybody goes to civics class or watched Schoolhouse Rock and learned how a bill becomes a law. So everyone understands the basic idea that somebody has an idea, they write it down, it's a bill, it's heard, it's passed. There's many more levels to the political process than that. Some of them deal with partisanship, a lot of them are about simple process. But there's also all sorts of personality issues and other stuff. I can't think of a better background for the kind of work that I do. I got a good sense of how committees work, of how individual legislators tick, how votes would fall, what moves people to vote for or against something. Beyond just understanding the process of how bill hearings work, I learned a lot about what motivates bills to pass and bills to fail. Hopefully I use all that knowledge to our benefit here.

Another former General Assembly committee staffer, now the associate director of a 501c(6) organization, concurred. He noted: "Having the inside knowledge of how people think, act, and what they do, and then also knowing the more academic nuts and bolts of how the process works, both kinds of knowledge are a big help." Being a cultural interpreter is not just about interpreting that culture; it is also about knowing and understanding the people who belong to that culture. Such knowledge makes cultural interpreters more effective participants in dialogue than people who lack such knowledge.

Former government insiders are much more politically savvy about Annapolitan culture than other organizational members whose knowledge of the political process comes from textbooks or the 1970s Schoolhouse Rock educational animation series. GRPs with less political savvy (that is, less cultural fluency about Annapolis) might not know at first that the pecking order among legislators can be gamed. The senior vice-president of a 501c(6) organization and former General Assembly committee staffer explained: "Some legislators are more important than others. So you can get away with

not talking to every member of the committee on every single issue and still have things work out.” They would learn this through on-the-job acculturation. The more politically savvy — culturally fluent former insiders — would realize that. According to a former lawmaker who is now a for-contract GRP; those who are politically savvy know that, “To pass or kill bills, you don’t need that many votes.” This informant explained that full committees almost always support subcommittees’ reports and that the House of Delegates and Senate almost always support the committees’ reports. He continued, “So if you know that this is how it works, you can get bills passed or killed with a relatively small amount of people.” This informant summed up the necessary skill set for negotiating the political process: “Getting legislation passed whether you’re a lobbyist or a legislator is an art! You’ve got to know where to go, when to compromise, how to get the votes you need.”

I said earlier in the chapter that informants criticized some Ehrlich aides who came from his congressional office for their cultural naïveté about Annapolis politics and its “customs and folkways” (Mack, 1997, p. 84). Informants believed that these aides understood politics and political games from the perspective of Capitol Hill’s culture. Things got lost in the translation from that culture to Annapolis. Moreover, several informants — of right, left, and neutral political persuasions — attributed the introduction of the worst of Capitol Hill’s culture — cutthroat partisan politics — to Annapolis to these aides.

Regardless of the veracity of this observation (accusation?), it is commonly voiced. Ehrlich himself railed against Capitol Hill-style politics in his 2006 State of State address, to which Democrats retorted that he brought that style of politics to Annapolis

with him from Capitol Hill (Mosk, 2006c). Perhaps this is what really jolted Annapolis after all: going from a rather collegial to a charged partisan atmosphere, rather than the event of the governorship going Republican after being Democrat for so long.

My analysis is that partisanship generally seems to violate normative expectations of dialogue, that both parties will talk, listen, and advocate their own interests while keeping an open mind about others' interests. Further, the polarizing partisanship in Annapolis went beyond this, also seeming to violate presuppositions of the symmetrical framework of mixed-motive communication. These presuppositions include that parties do not have malevolent intent; they are willing to entertain compromise; and they expect that all parties will use their power gracefully (Dozier et al., 1995). As I have detailed elsewhere, parties — in the sense here of the Republican and Democrat parties — did have malevolent intent toward the other party and individuals and organizations actually or implicitly associated with that party; they often were unwilling to entertain compromise; and neither side used their political power gracefully.

Gravitation Toward Politics and Government Relations

A theme related to the cultural interpreter model emerged from the interview data. This theme centered on informants' gravitation toward the government relations profession. Were they somehow predisposed toward fluency in politics and this made them effective cultural interpreters? Academics consider government relations to be a specialized form of public relations, which is a communication management function (J.E. Grunig et al., 1992; Dozier et al., 1995; L.A. Grunig et al, 2002). My entire dissertation is predicated on this consideration; the definition of public relations I have adopted for this study posits that public relations is a “communication function of

management” (Long & Hazleton, 1987, p. 6). Yet in my conversations with informants, they either blatantly told me or implied that they gravitated toward the government relations profession because of their love of politics (“Politics is my hobby”) or desire to be an agent of change (“Politics is necessary to effect change for my clients”), not because of an affinity for communication.

Several informants told me that they were self-avowed political “junkies.” As the executive director of one 501c(6) organization declared: “I just enjoy the political process; I enjoy following and talking about it. I enjoy what’s going on at the national, state, and local levels.” Others offered their daily cover-to-cover readings of newspapers like the *Washington Post* and the *Baltimore Sun* and weekly viewings of Sunday morning political talk shows such as *Meet the Press* as proof they were political junkies. Many informants reported they were political science majors as undergraduates. Several had participated in the Washington Semester Program at American University; got bit by the political bug; and returned to Washington, DC, after graduation.

Going to law school provided entrée to the political world for yet other informants. Over half of the members of the U.S. Senate are lawyers, as are 36 percent of the members of the U.S. House (YourCongress.com, 2006).⁶ One for-contract GRP said his government relations practice evolved out of his law practice: “I could almost always find legislative remedies to clients’ problems. So I started lobbying sort of by happenstance. I didn’t set out to become a lobbyist. It evolved out of the way I was practicing law at the time.”

⁶ I have been unable to find statistics about the career backgrounds of members of the Maryland General Assembly.

Other informants also traced their government relations career paths to a combination of happenstance and having a knack for politics. A managing director of a 501c(6) organization recounted that around the time her last child headed off to school (and she found herself with a lot of spare time), she became friends with a candidate running for county office. Her experiences “working for a guy who was a nobody from nowhere but who was an exciting, energetic candidate” helped her acquire the taste for politics that she still has today.

Some others attributed their interest in politics to the 1960s. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization explained: “I am a relic of the 1960s. I was a campus radical at that time, quite involved in the civil rights movement, anti-Vietnam War activities, those sort of global issues.” When I asked the executive director of another 501c(6) organization about how he got into government relations work, he replied simply, “Well, I grew up in the ‘60s.”

Not one informant was an avowed communication junkie (if there is such a thing), although the president and CEO of a 501c(6) organization did point out to me that she held a master’s degree in public relations. I got the impression that this was a source of pride for her, in that she understood that government relations (and its sibling programs such as member and board relations) are all ultimately grounded in communication. Only one other informant, the department director of a 501c(6) organization, verbalized to me any sort of non-atheoretical understanding of the relationship of communication with government relations and politics. He said,

If you think that you can understand the political process by being a political science major really belies the fact that this is more than anything a human interaction. It strikes me that things like communication and psychology play

every bit as much of a role in the political process as do what you might strictly think of as social sciences like political science. There's no question that people, human frailties, and human communication play a sizeable role in this process as do the simple policy matters and so forth.

He alludes in his last sentence to why the personal influence model seems to “rule” the practice of government relations: human communication. But I believe he also raises another issue about communication: Communication is everywhere; you cannot *not* communicate. Communication is easily forgotten because it is everywhere; it is easy to take for granted. Because communication pervades every human endeavor, it is difficult to think about (and study) it as a discrete phenomenon (L.W. Porter & Roberts, 1976). Communication is the background for government relations whereas politics is in the foreground. Politics functions as a salient tangible whereas communication functions as an overlooked intangible in government relations. And that might explain why most of my informants consider themselves political, and not communication, junkies.

However, as any teacher of an introductory public relations course knows, there is always the student who inevitably attributes interest in public relations to being a “people person.” Being a “people person” (that is someone who is extroverted, personable, and enjoys communicating) is a personality attribute that many informants mentioned as helpful, and indeed necessary, in their lines of work (I have discussed this earlier in the chapter). Schwartzberg (1983) was not able to make a scholarly determination (from her anecdotal data) that extroversion was a causal factor of success in public relations. She suspected that it was, however.

One informant, who attributed her gravitation toward politics to being a people person, elaborated on this:

I've learned that beyond whether or not you like politics you have to have a basic ability to be a people person and I am. You have to have an ability to convey your message. You have to be persuasive, but you also have to be polite. You've got to be respectful and have enormous amounts of patience. You have to be able to grin and bear it. If you have those particular personality traits I think that you kind of evolve into a government relations professional like I did.

Perhaps avowing oneself as a “people person” is simply another way of saying that one is a (human) communication junkie.

Theory Question 3b

Part b of Theory Question 3 asked, “How did the jolt affect their [informants’] communication practices with their organizations’ political stakeholders?” Put another way, did informants and their organizations communicate with stakeholders before Ehrlich’s election using different models than after his election?

The short answer is:

With a couple of exceptions, the jolt seemed not to fundamentally affect informants’ communication practices with their organizations’ political stakeholders. Informants did tweak strategies and tactics. For example, some reported slight increases in the use of media advocacy, a one-way communication practice. Informants continued to want to engage in dialogue with political stakeholders and applied the personal influence model to effect opportunities for such. This required informants and other organizational members to inventory and reconfigure their social circles for Republican contacts.

It is important to remember that an executive administration — whether the governor is Schaefer, Glendening, Ehrlich, a Democrat, or a Republican — is a critical stakeholder in the political environment for my informants’ organizations. But it is not the only critical political stakeholder. Organizations have many stakeholders in Annapolis. Smart organizations tailor their engagement strategies for their individual stakeholders, rather than impose a one-size-fits-all communication strategy on those stakeholders just because they populate the same turbulent political environment (J.E.

Grunig & L.A. Grunig, 1989; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). It is also important to remember that organizations may find themselves in a conundrum when critical stakeholders are engaged in conflict (i.e., Democrat and Republican lawmakers); engaging with one may be seen by the other as taking sides and may cost the organization opportunities to engage with the other (J.E. Grunig, 2001).

The “Exceptional” Informant

I found that Ehrlich’s election fundamentally affected the communication practices of only one informant, the co-chair of a 501c(4) organization. By “fundamentally affected” I mean that the jolt completely affected the ways in which her organization communicated and engaged with all of its political stakeholders. The changes entailed more than realigning contacts here or hiring a lobbyist there. The jolt shifted asymmetrically the symmetrical presuppositions of her organization’s communication.

Before Ehrlich’s election, this co-chair and her organization enjoyed both positive interactions, which were characterized by open and honest dialogue, and high political status with political stakeholders such as the Glendening administration and several key legislators (of both political parties). This was logical because they were all on the same page on the issue that was her organization’s reason for being. It was a facilitating (low-constraint) environment. After Ehrlich’s election, positive interactions with the governor’s office ended, her organization lost political status, and the environment became highly constraining. Again, this was logical now that she and her organization and these stakeholders were on different pages about the issue.

This informant believed she and the organization were on the receiving end of brush-offs from political stakeholders such as the Ehrlich administration and several of those same key (and previously supportive) lawmakers. She told me how soon after Ehrlich's election, representatives of his administration offered her and her co-chair jobs in the administration: "We were told that we were 'just the kind of people they needed in a regulatory capacity' . . . The catch was that all we needed to do was stop fighting against [issue]." She characterized the job offers as "bribes."

After that, the co-chair and her organization quickly and drastically changed their communication practices, to reciprocate these stakeholders' asymmetrical communication and to best engage with this now high-constraint, threatening environment. They emphasized media advocacy over dialogue. Holding lawmakers feet to the fire was emphasized over educating them. Their reliance on symmetrically presupposed communication practices with political stakeholders before Ehrlich's election gave way to asymmetrically presupposed and one-way communication practices after his election. When dialogue is no longer feasible, it is prudent to engage in asymmetrical (yet ethical) activities such as lobbying and media advocacy (J.E. Grunig, 2001).

This informant was nonplussed by the jolt and its aftershocks. She did not roll with political punches as well as other bane informants did. This may be attributable to her lack of academic training and professional experience in government relations and politics before her involvement with this organization. At the time of Ehrlich's election in 2002, she was still in the throes of the acculturation process. She was neither a political science major nor a law school graduate nor a lifelong political junkie. She did not know the right people or have useful relationships with this critical stakeholder (thus

impeding her ability to implement the personal influence model). She was not fully fluent in the culture of Annapolis, such as knowing how committees in the House of Delegates worked as compared with the Senate. She was an “average” citizen whose passionate opposition to an issue motivated her to jump into the political fray. For all these reasons, she was not able to engage in dialogue with the Ehrlich administration, not that it was interested in engaging in dialogue with her organization anyway. But like the Ehrlich administration, her organization was neither interested in listening to the merits of the other sides of issue nor entertaining compromise. This had not been a problem for her organization during the Glendening administration because it was on the organization’s side.

By the time I spoke to her, she had earned her credentials as a boundary-spanning GRP. Before the jolt, she was a novice GRP. The jolt threw her acculturation process into hyperdrive, “burning” her along the way. As a seasoned GRP, she was confident in her abilities to roll the next time politics punches her organization.

Bane Informants’ Organizations

As I expected, informants who considered Ehrlich’s election to be a bane reported that their organizations’ communication practices with this stakeholder were less symmetrically presupposed post-jolt than pre-jolt. They had fewer opportunities to engage in the dialogue they desired. The jolt also affected their abilities to employ the personal influence model. They still wanted to employ dialogue as a first resort but opportunities for dialogue, meaningful or not, diminished for these organizations with Ehrlich as governor. Some were altogether excluded from the Ehrlich administration’s policy-making decision forums, as other informants had been under the Glendening

administration. Whereas they enjoyed sincere dialogue and meaningful inclusion under the Glendening administration, they now question the sincerity and motivations of executive-branch meetings in which they participate. The committee chair of a 501c(4) organization even joked about the “non-dialogue” dialogue that occurs at some such meetings: “Governor Ehrlich has his mind made up, so that’s it.” Pre-jolt: Proactive, inclusion, dialogue. Post-jolt: Reactive, exclusion, no dialogue.

Boon Informants’ Organizations

Also as I had expected, several informants who considered Ehrlich’s election to be a boon thought the opposite. With Annapolis now a less-constraining environment for them, symmetrically presupposed communication, such as dialogue, was an auspicious communication strategy. With Ehrlich in office, there were more opportunities for dialogue with this critical stakeholder. They proactively engaged with the new administration, which circularly sought them out for meaningful inclusion in policy discussions.

Boon organizations were able to do this for two reasons: One, the organizations’ greater political legitimacy under a Republican governor; and two, the overlapping social circles of informants and members of the Ehrlich administration. The jolt decreased constraints in the political environment for boon organizations.

The changes in boon organizations’ communication practices reflected all these factors as well as how the Ehrlich administration communicated with them. For example, under the Glendening administration, these informants reported that their organizations were excluded from policy-making decision forums and used as scapegoats. The executive director of a 501c(6) organization said: “We had absolutely no contact with the

departments that develop policy for my industry. They and Glendening weren't interested in doing anything to work cooperatively. They were always attacking us." Almost immediately after Ehrlich won the election, the informant saw a sea change in these departments' communication practices with his industry: "That attitude has now changed. There's communication with the executive branch." Pre-jolt: Reactive, exclusion, no dialogue. Post-jolt: Proactive, inclusion, dialogue.

Organizations' Tweaking of Communication Practices

As for the remaining informants, the jolt seemed not to fundamentally affect their communication practices with their organizations' political stakeholders. Strategies and tactics were tweaked, yes. But drastic change in the symmetrical presuppositions of their communication practices? No. Several reported increasing media advocacy and grassroots efforts, reflecting an expansion of their existing pre-jolt one-way communication practices. No one reported that his or her organization hired new personnel with Republican ties in an effort to create or solidify connections to the new Republican administration. Based on Aldrich's (1979) thoughts about organizational hiring practices and Weick's (1979) concept of requisite variety, I expected to find at least a few instances of organizations' hiring Republican personal influencers. But that was not the case. One for-contract GRP did note that he advised some of his clients that: "Hey, there are some other guys in town who are strictly in line with the Ehrlich folks and have set up their shop that way. You might want to bring them in on this project." They did follow his advice but continued to retain his GRP services.

However, several boon, bane, and neutral informants did re-inventory the Republican connections of their organizations' members of their boards of directors,

officers, grasstoppers, grassrootsers, for-contract GRPs, and employees. They tweaked their existing pre-jolt application of the personal influence model. The hope there was to create opportunities for dialogue that diminished under the Ehrlich administration. The executive director of a 501c(3)/501c(4) organization said: “We looked at what board members had what connections, where our relationships were. We were pretty well postured but we still had a lot of relationship building to do.” Another informant, an executive director, reported that both he and his 501c(6) organization’s for-contract lobbyist had to tweak their networks of contacts after Ehrlich’s election: “I had to realign some of my contacts and he had to realign some of his contacts so that we had ‘faster’ relations if you will with the Republican leadership.”

The Influence of the Personal Influence Model

Informants, with the exception of the “exceptional” co-chair of a 501c(4) organization I wrote about earlier, handled the Ehrlich election with aplomb. They rolled with the punches of the jolt so that it did not effect fundamental change in how they engaged with different critical political stakeholders. For the most part, the jolt affected informants’ on-going application of the personal influence model. Again, based on my analysis, I believe this model, which is often applied in tandem with the cultural interpreter model, best explains these informants’ practice of government relations communication than do any of the four models. Explanations for why government relations is the exception to the “rules” of the Excellence theory typically circle back to the dependence of GRPs on their network of contacts in the political environment (Dozier et al., 1995).

That most informants discussed their communication practices (pre- and post-jolt) within the context of whom they know and whom they need to get to know is further evidence of this. The overriding concern for a boundary-spanning GRP in a jolted political environment, one for-contract GRP said, is to “know the new people that have the power.” Useful relationships facilitate opportunities for the useful dialogue necessary for organizations to effectively pursue their goals and self-interests. Useful relationships and useful dialogue are of paramount importance in a charged partisan political environment, a department director of a 501c(6) organization advised: “In an atmosphere like this, you have to have a relationship with the governor’s office.” And for informants who were unable to effectively implement the personal influence model, to find and make those connections, to exploit useful relationships, for reasons such as being ostracized by an administration, life must go on. A vice president explained her 501c(6) organization’s Plan B for communicating with the Ehrlich administration: “We’re doing what we have to do; we’re making attempts we need to make to have solid working relationships. But it will be what it will be and we’ll work with it.”

Tweaking aside, the communication practices of most informants — boon, bane, and neutral alike — with political stakeholders were not fundamentally affected by Ehrlich’s election. As one for-contract GRP said, much of his job continued to involve “constant networking within the framework of the legislature and the gubernatorial administration and all their departments.” And this would continue to be much of his job regardless of which political party controlled which branch of government and the personalities and management styles of political stakeholders. To reiterate, boundary-spanning GRPs do not have necessarily have relationships with critical stakeholders for

relationships' sake. Relationships are for dialogue's sake. Regardless of what initially sparked the relationship, dialogue nurtures relationships, which turns them into useful relationships, which turns dialogue into useful dialogue. But it is also more than that, as another for-contract GRP summed it up: "A lobbyist must expect and anticipate change as a regular factor. . . You know and expect change and don't get thrown off kilter by it. You prepare for it."

Theory Question 4: Boundary Spanning

Boundary spanning is one of the most important functions for organizational survival and success. It facilitates engagement with the environment so the organization can make strategic, smart decisions (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1989) and establish or maintain rapport with critical stakeholders and further organizational goals. Boundary spanning is an integral component of public relations, which I have defined as "a communication function of management through which organizations adapt, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organizational goals" (Long & Hazleton, 1987, p. 6). Ergo, the success or failure of an organization may pivot on its boundary-spanning public relations personnel. In this section, I specifically explore the work activities and responsibilities of 501c organizations' boundary-spanning GRPs.

Much of the data related to Theory Question 4 also informs the results for the other four theory questions. So rather than repeat anecdotes and utterances, in this section I frequently refer readers back to findings that have been presented earlier in the chapter.

Theory Question 4a

TQ4a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their work activities and responsibilities?

Informants were both jacks and masters of all trades. They enacted the role of manager through their central involvement in their organizations' dominant coalition on government relations matters. They educated other members of the dominant coalition about these matters and offered counsel and recommendations. They directly participated in government relations decision-making. But they did not enact the manager and technician roles discretely. Being an effective manager entailed concurrent and skillful enactment of the technician role. They enacted the technician role through advocacy, environmental-scanning, and information-procurement activities; cultivation and nurturance of social circles; application of the personal influence and cultural interpreter models; and tactical implementation of government relations strategies.

My analysis of the interview data leads me to conclude that informants' work activities and responsibilities illustrate the two modes of boundary spanning, the external-representation and information-processing modes. This was exactly as the literature suggested (i.e., Aldrich, 1979; Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Jemison, 1984; Springston & Leichty, 1994).

External-Representation Mode

I discussed many of informants' external-representation activities in the Theory Question 3 results about grassroots and grasstops outreach, the use of dialogue, direct advocacy, and social circles, and in the Theory Question 5 results about organizational legitimacy. The optimization of organizational legitimacy is one of the main responsibilities of boundary spanners in this mode.

Information-Processing Mode

I have also dealt with work activities and responsibilities associated with the information-processing mode throughout this chapter. Informants massaged their social circles to pry loose useful information. Information from stakeholders needs to flow into the organization but stakeholders need information to flow reciprocally from the

organization. Boundary spanners broker this exchange from their “unique perch at the boundaries of their organization” (Lauzen, 1995b, p. 188). They are information brokers. Informants brokered information in a formal sense by, for instance, providing stakeholders with information subsidies such as polling data. As I discussed in the results section for Theory Question 5, this helps engender stakeholders’ good will and approval, thus enhancing organizational legitimacy. Less formally, informants brokered information through their routine social and casual interactions with stakeholders, as may occur in social circles, for instance. One-sided conversations are not going to cultivate or nurture social circles and other useful relationships with critical stakeholders. Information must flow both ways; to do otherwise is to risk the evaporation of the flow of information into the organization. Dialogue is predicated on the mutual exchange of information among parties. This symmetrically presupposed communication process also facilitates parties’ abilities to influence each other, which in turn facilitates their healthy, balanced interdependence.

Environmental Scanning

Boundary spanners engage with stakeholders, which facilitates environmental scanning. Circularly, the results of environmental scanning efforts may prompt organizational engagement with stakeholders or may reveal newly relevant stakeholders. Put another way, boundary-spanning GRPs are specialists in “interpreting the [political] environment and its various [stakeholders]” for the organization (Hazleton & Long, 1988, p. 79).

It does not matter if engagement occurs during a regularly scheduled executive-branch meeting or in the hallway of the downtown Annapolis hotel many lawmakers and

boundary-spanning GRPs call home during the legislative session. The result is the same: two-way information and influence exchange. In the interest of eliminating redundant findings, I will not rehash informants' engagement activities here.

Simply put, environmental-scanning activities are efforts to collect information and learn about everything in an organization's environment that is relevant to it (Lauzen, 1995b). This reduces the perception of environmental uncertainty (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992; Stoffels, 1994). Environment scanning and information procurement activities took on renewed urgency and importance in the highly uncertain (and turbulent) environment of Annapolis (Hazleton & Long, 1988; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992).

Scanning of the political environment fall to boundary-spanning GRPs, who are also responsible for deciding what is relevant. This is an exercise in agenda-setting and framing, two media-effects theories (for a review, see McCombs and Estrada, 1997) that have application wherever an individual makes choices to select, emphasize, privilege, slant, or contextualize information. Boundary spanners may not even be aware that they are scanning and learning from the environment. Humans pick up and process information about their environment even when they are not actively seeking information. Such "automatic scanning" (Kiesler & Sproull, 1982) leads to unintentional learning.

Implicit associations are an example of unintentional learning. Implicit associations, as I have demonstrated, are heuristic devices humans use to make inferences about — and make sense of — people, traits, events, and the like. Humans may not even realize they are using implicit associations, but they do use them: That is why readers likely linked unions and environmental groups with Democrats and Christian groups and

tort reform with Republicans in my implicit association test in Chapter 2. Readers have unintentionally learned from their automatic scanning efforts to instantaneously make these associations. These links, or implicit associations, help readers and boundary-spanning GRPs make sense of the information they collect.

I found that informants relied on implicit associations in much of their information-processing activities. Implicit associations were the dominant factor in informants' perceptions about whether Ehrlich's election was a boon or bane for their organizations. This was discussed in the results for Theory Question 1.

Environmental-scanning activities can also be intentional and goal-directed. Informants spoke at length about their successful and failed attempts to engage in dialogue with stakeholders and collaborate with like-minded and strange-bedfellow coalition partners (see "The Importance of Dialogue" in the results for Theory Question 3). These intentionally undertaken dialogue activities are symmetrically presupposed, but their goal was organizational self-interest: to scan the environment for as much varied and high-quality information as possible for organizations' strategic decision-making purposes. Thus boundary spanners undertake environmental scanning activities with mixed motivations.

The information collected during environmental-scanning activities, this raw data, needs to be processed into organizational intelligence. Informants discussed how they had to cull and contextualize the raw data and transform it into user-friendly packages for organizational decision-makers. This dovetails with Cutlip et al.'s (2000) observation that boundary spanners, such as my informants, "work with management to develop strategic plans of organizational change and responsiveness" (p. 220). I presented these

data as part of “Theory Question 2: Worldviews.” Informants reported that members of organizational decision-making bodies (e.g., a legislative committee) accepted their information packages (as suggested by Aldrich and Herker, 1977) and used them to make decisions, develop strategies, and take action. Further, informants’ wielding of influence within their organizations could be directly traced to their environmental-scanning efforts, which in large part could be traced to their social circles.

In “Theory Question 2: Worldviews,” I also found that informants were integral players in organizational decision-making; this is where they wielded influence within their organizations. Their involvement in organizational decision-making, indicating that their organizations value decentralized management, supported my assertion that the worldviews of informants’ organizations defaulted toward symmetry. I found that informants were either members of or had direct access to organizational decision-making bodies. (They were close to the corridors of power within their organizations, meaning that other organizational members likely conferred high degrees of legitimacy on them.) Further, informants functioned with a high degree of autonomy, testament to other organizational members’ trust in them and their work. This was so even though many informants engaged closely — perhaps too closely, as members of the board of directors for the president of a 501c(6) organization wondered — with stakeholders and coalition members that held cultural topoi different from or even contrary to their organizations. Having a dexterous mind that led them to appreciate and seek such “breadth of perspective” did not cause members of organizations to question informants’ loyalty, as Aldrich and Herker (1977) and White and Dozier (1992) had suggested.

In fact, I believe the opposite was true. I think having a dexterous mind and seeking out different viewpoints garnered informants the respect of organizational members and further cemented their positions as influential leaders within their organizations. Lawrence B. Wilkerson, a former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell from 2002 to 2005, although he was speaking of the Bush administration, offered his views on the characteristics of good leaders (Wilkerson, 2005). I quote Wilkerson here because he illuminates (and tidily concludes) this discussion: Good leaders are people who have “a willingness to listen to dissenting opinions. . . [and] who can analyze, synthesize, ponder, and decide” (para. 14). Using his definition, only one conclusion can be drawn from the data about informants’ execution of their work activities and responsibilities as boundary-spanning GRPs: that they were good leaders and this served their organizations well.

Boundary Spanners as Technicians or Managers?

Research has affirmed a two-role typology of practitioner role-enactment in public relations (Dozier & Broom, 1995). Technicians engage in the craft of public relations, implementing the strategies decided by others. Managers are involved in making those decisions, either because they are part of or have direct access to the organization’s dominant coalition (Dozier & Broom, 1995). Given my findings related to informants’ participation in organizational decision-making (as discussed in Theory Question 2), I was reasonably sure of which role informants would predominantly enact before I analyzed the interview data. Further, informants’ job titles telegraphed to me that in all likelihood the informants enacted the manager role. The job titles for in-house GRPs included committee chair, member of the board of directors, program director,

department director, vice president, senior vice-president, executive director, CEO, and president. For-contract GRPs had job titles such as government relations consultant, esquire, legislative consultant, managing partner, senior partner, administrative partner, principal, and president. All of these job titles practically shouted that the informants were of high organizational status and involved in strategic decision-making processes; they were managers.

I did of course analyze the interview data. My analysis supported what the earlier findings and job titles had hinted at: Informants, as they described their work activities and responsibilities to me, enact the manager role. They routinely engage in strategic planning and, as I discussed in the earlier results section on worldviews (Theory Question 1), are either directly or indirectly involved in decision-making as related to organizations' government relations efforts.

Roles researchers (e.g., Broom & G.D. Smith, 1979; Broom, 1982) initially conceived the manager role as three "conceptually distinct" roles (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 199): the expert prescriber, problem-solving process facilitator, and communication facilitator. These three roles, or what I call "subroles," were collapsed into the one overarching manager role because one person typically engaged in the three subroles' strongly intercorrelated activities (Broom 1982; Dozier, 1983). As I had expected, my informants' descriptions of their work activities and responsibilities reflected this. However, I teased out evidence of the three subroles, which I surmised (correctly) would be useful in my analysis because of their associations with communication practices and worldviews.

The expert prescriber is the boundary-spanning professional an organization depends on for advice and leadership on government relations matters (for example). The organization looks so intently to the expert prescriber on government relations matters that it may cede decision-making responsibility for those matters to him or her, thus diminishing the organization's active involvement in them (Dozier, 1992). As Dozier (1992) explained, "The expert prescribes and management obeys" (p. 329). This subrole is associated with asymmetrical communication practices (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and thus in turn an asymmetrically presupposed worldview.

Informants related how other organizational members regarded them as experts in government relations and the political environment in Annapolis. An executive director said of his 501c(6) organization's members: "They rely on me to know about what's going on. When you dig around into the origins and motivations for an innocent-looking bill, you might find that it's not so innocent. They expect that leadership and information from me." An in-house lobbyist for another 501c(6) organization said: "My board respects me and the advice I give them. They know I've been around Annapolis for a long time and know that I know what it is that they really should do." Some, such as one for-contract GRP, said being experts was the reason they were hired: "That's why they hire me. I make it my business to get to know everybody from the governor on down who has anything to do with government." Another for-contract GRP stated: "My stature, presence, visibility, political clout, influence, and relationships with governmental officials, that's not for me. That's for my clients. That's why they hire me." Yet another for-contract GRP assessed his role as "to sort of educate the clients and

tell then what is doable and what was not and to keep their expectations in line with what could realistically be delivered, regardless of the administration.”

The “expert” part of expert prescriber accurately fit the informants, but not so the “prescriber” part. Being a “prescriber” presumes passive organizational decision-making bodies, bodies that accept the solution the expert has prescribed. The informants’ organizational decision-making bodies, whether they were boards of directors, committees, or entire memberships, viewed government relations as the informants’ purview, or area of expertise. The bodies depended on, but did not blindly follow or rubberstamp, the informants’ advice. The bodies all were actively involved in government relations decisions, with one exception that I discuss in the next paragraph.

The one exception, a president, remarked that several legislators have joked to him that his 501c(6) organization should be renamed after him. Their implication was that he was the de facto organization; in fact his organization has a healthy membership roster. Although he seemed to enjoy the joke, I also found him to be ambivalent about the fact that many of his organization’s members were unwilling to become involved in government relations and organizational governance matters: “The fun part for me is that basically what happens is whatever I make happen. The difficult part is that unless I do something, nothing happens.” The members have re-elected him president several times, an indication that they approve of their hands-off dynamic with this hands-on president: “People are happy to be members but lack the time and commitment to do anything beyond that. I think I’m quite widely supported but leadership is very time consuming so members are not prepared to make that time commitment.”

Clearly opportunity — temptation? — exists for this informant to use the organization for his own purposes given that the membership is largely absent on legislative and other matters. This is a situation ripe for the expert prescriber to run amok. Yet this informant strives to involve the rank-and file membership and organizational officers in government relations matters, as he assured me: “I will absolutely not commit [the organization] to anything, certainly not public, without clearing it through the membership, and for the most part that means the other four officers.” However, beyond assembling the officers for quarterly dinner and occasional technology-mediated meetings and sending newsletters and e-mails to the membership, his attempts to encourage participation, or “create excitement” as he put it, have fallen flat.

That a practitioner is regarded as knowledgeable and experienced is also implicit in the other two managerial subroles, the problem-solving process facilitator (PSPF) and communication facilitator (Dozier & Broom, 1995). The PSPF engages in many of the same activities that an expert prescriber does. However, the PSPF counsels organizational decision-makers about engaging in government relations matters. Unlike the passive decision-makers in the expert prescriber scenario, the decision-makers in the PSPF scenario are actively involved in government relations matters. An executive director of a 501c(6) organization remarked: “Our board is very actively involved. Frankly, I’m disappointed when they slack off.” The exceptional informant I just mentioned was a frustrated PSPF, saddled with passive decision-makers all too content to let him single-handedly handle government relations matters.

My analysis revealed that informants, when enacting the PSPF subrole, interact with organizational decision-makers by recommending, advising, guiding, consulting, and collaborating with them, as they should as boundary spanners (Cutlip et al., 2000). I provide a sampling of quotes from informants to illustrate their enactment of the PSPF subrole and the active involvement of their organizational decision-makers:

- A department director for a 501c(6) organization: “I make a lot of presentations to our members to help guide them in what positions to take on issues and legislation. Then they’ll have their discussions and they’ll either follow my recommendations or not. They’re ultimately the ones that chart the course.”
- A department director for a 501c(6) organization: “It’s a member association so I make recommendations and have a lot of influence. But it’s the two member committees and association officers that make the decisions about what we’re doing.”
- The president of a 501c(6) organization: “This organization delegates a lot to me but ultimately the members determine our positions on a bill. I’ll advise them but a lot of time they’ll ignore me. They make decisions based on the issue, not on me or the other lobbyists. They’re pretty savvy.”
- The executive director of a 501c(6) organization: “I’ll circulate the issue or bill and feedback I’ve gotten from our experts, provide my recommendations, and ask the committee members to take a look and get back to me. And then based on what that feedback is, and consulting with our board and our paid lobbyist, we’ll make a decision.”
- A department director for a 501c(6) organization: “The members look to us basically for guidance and what we give them is the benefit of the probability of passage, what are the impediments, what are we likely to encounter, chances for amendments, strategies we should consider, those type of things. But they take it from there.”
- A vice president for a 501c(6) organization: “When we develop our agenda or have to decide how to react to legislation, we have a process and structure here for that. We seek input from our members before we take positions on things. Everything gets discussed.”
- The executive director of a 501c(3) organization: “I guide our policy positions as they’re being developed and then help shepherd them through board approval.”

Like the names of the other two manager roles, the name of third subrole, communication facilitator, doubles as its definition. The communication facilitator facilitates communication between an organization and its stakeholders. Ergo, the communication facilitator is a boundary spanner. Ergo, my informants, conceptualized and realized as boundary-spanning GRPs, are communication facilitators. As one for-contract GRP described his typical day: “I’m busy communicating between my clients and government people. This morning we met for two hours with [a cabinet secretary] and some of his aides. That’s what I do every day, all year.” A department director for a 501c(6) organization declared, “I am the liaison for the organization, the political, legislative, and governmental professional who interacts with my old office.” This subrole is associated with symmetrically presupposed communication practices (J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and thus a symmetrically presupposed worldview.

As quantitative studies of role enactment have suggested (e.g., Broom & Dozier, 1986), practitioners often may enact the manager and technician roles concurrently. Although practitioners may progress from being technicians to managers, they necessarily may not cease engaging in technician activities. All of my informants, who were managers and high-level ones at that, concurrently enacted the technician role.

Managers decide how to, for example, advocate organizational positions to political stakeholders, such as through direct advocacy, grassroots mobilization, or media advocacy. Technicians make that direct advocacy, grassroots mobilization, or media advocacy happen; they implement the strategies decided by others, namely managers and other organizational decision-makers (Dozier & Broom, 1995). My informants universally were responsible for not only making these strategic decisions (through

enacting the manager role) but also implementing them, particularly the direct advocacy activities. Direct advocacy, or lobbying, is a primary tactical activity in government relations efforts (Mack, 1997). Lobbying is an intensely personal form of advocative communication, as a for-contract GRP explained: “Lobbying tends to be very personal; you almost have to do it yourself.”

Lobbying is not an activity that a GRP can (or should) delegate to, for example, either a subordinate who has not yet progressed beyond the technician role or even a lateral colleague. Another for-contract GRP concurred: “The relationships I’ve developed and maintained are not convertible. They’re very personal. The nature and depth of my relationship with a public official is really just based on me and my experiences with that person. Not someone else.”

Informants have been able to enact their managerial roles and ascend to their elite positions because of their technical expertise in lobbying, both from a procedural perspective and a social circle perspective (which as I addressed in the results subsection for Theory Question 3). The care and feeding of these social circles, which happen through dialogue and also facilitate lobbying, cannot be abandoned or bequeathed to another as a result of the GRP’s enactment of the manager role. An informant’s continued enactment of the managerial role — to be experts, problem solvers, and facilitators for all things government relations related — requires the continued enactment of a primary technician activity in government relations: lobbying.

I provide the following quotes to show how informants enacted the technician role:

- The executive director of a 501c(4) organization: “I do a lot of the lobbying and fundraising myself. I’m one of the main advocates that work on our policy initiatives. I also help develop the materials we use in our citizen outreach and media outreach.”
- A committee chair for a 501c(6) organization: “It was up to me to run the media advocacy campaign for the organization.”
- A for-contract GRP: “I write testimony, I give testimony before committees, I meet with them. I meet with legislators and advocate a position on behalf of my clients.”
- A for-contract GRP: “Virtually all the lobbying for my clients is done by me.”
- An associate director for a 501c(6) organization: “I do a lot of advocacy and lobbying work when session is in. I’ll either file written testimony or offer testimony at a hearing. I might draft amendments. I might do some research for legislators. I’ll prepare reports and papers and attend task force or work group meetings.”
- A department director for a 501c(6) organization: “The committee and board chart the course. Then we carry out their wishes in terms of us delivering testimony, being there at hearings, meeting with the right people.”
- An assistant executive director of a 501c(6) organization: “Of course management is the primary thing, but I also do some hands-on work. I’ll draft op-ed pieces, write speeches, and work on publications.”

Boundary Spanners as Buffers

The organizational literature on buffers (and its near-twin concept, organizational slack) explained buffers as “cushions” and stores of reserve resources that protect organizations when there are “relatively bad times” (Cyert & March, 1963, p. 138). Cash on hand, machine capacity, and people (in terms of the number of bodies in the labor force) are examples of buffers that absorb environmental fluctuations. Buffers help to facilitate organizational “business as usual” in jolted environments. In addition to absorbing jolts, buffers may also provide the latitude for an organization to be entrepreneurial (regardless of the state of the environment). They act as safety nets,

emboldening organizations like a shot of courage to take risks. As such, buffers affect how organizations — and their boundary spanners — engage with their environments.

The public relations literature suggests that organizational legitimacy, stores of political capital, and positive relationships with stakeholders could also act as organizational buffers to the environment (i.e., Bruning, 2002; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; Coombs, 2001; Heath, 1997; Ledingham, 2003). Hatch (1997) asserted that boundary spanners function as organizational buffers because they run interference between the organization and stakeholders in the environment. Information can also serve as a buffer; information (and influence) is one of boundary spanners' spheres of responsibility (Adams, 1980, as cited in Finet, 1993). The data were thick with examples of legitimacy, capital, information, and relationships functioning as organizational buffers. . .and boundary-spanning GRPs' fingerprints were all over the data.

Some of the results for Theory Question 5 (“Organizational Legitimacy”) inform this discussion. Coalitions can cushion organizations from political punches or even jolts in the environment. Their many members make a coalition strong; members of a coalition derive protection from being one of many. Big-player organizations, which presumably have political legitimacy and stores of political capital to spare, provide buffers to not-so-big player organization in coalitions.

Nonpartisanship also buffers organizations because it helps them transcend politics (to an extent). Politics is laden with values, so nonpartisanship helps organizations stay out of values-laden political conflicts. Nonpartisan organizations, through their boundary spanners and other organizational members, can claim that they work with lawmakers based on records and positions on issues, not political party

affiliations. However, an assistant executive director noted that although her 501c(6) organization was officially nonpartisan, it almost always worked out that it worked with Democrats. This was not because these lawmakers were Democrats, but because these lawmakers' natural positions on issues dovetailed with her organization's positions.

I also found that the personal legitimacy of boundary-spanning GRPs, which affected the legitimacy of their organizations, did indeed act to "buffer the organizations from external threats" (Adams, 1980, as quoted in Finet, 1993, p. 42). External threats here would be the jolt or decreased (even withheld) organizational legitimacy.

Informants derived much of their personal legitimacy from their social circles, which leads to my findings about social circles and the personal influence model (as discussed in Theory Question 3). Informants reported having social circles that overlapped and intertwined with the social circles of lawmakers and other critical stakeholders in Annapolis. From the laundry list of informants' connections I presented in that results section, readers could see that some of these connections were circuitous. Some even had "my aunt's neighbor's daughter is married to Senator So-and-So" flavor to them. Implied third-party endorsements help to strengthen the connections among members of social circles who are not directly connected.

Research has found that mock juries are more likely to acquit physically attractive defendants of crimes than ugly defendants and to impose more lenient sentences on those good-looking defendants they find guilty (Mazzella & Feingold, 1994). Physical attractiveness buffers defendants from guilty verdicts and harsh punishments. This research also illuminates how social circles act as organizational buffers. Think about this question: Who are people more likely to be forgiving of: a good personal friend, a

work acquaintance, or a stranger? Arguably, people would be more forgiving of the good friend than the acquaintance; they perhaps might not be at all forgiving of the stranger. Following that logic, lawmakers would be more likely to cut problem-causing organizations some slack if the organizations' boundary-spanning GRPs are in the lawmakers' own social circles. The relationships between members of social circles function as organizational buffers.

The senior vice-president and vice president of a 501c(6) organization both mentioned that their social circles included members of the Ehrlich administration. They had long-time personal and professional connections with these stakeholders. Because of informants' personal legitimacy and social circles (and numerous other factors as well), the Ehrlich administration conferred a high degree of political legitimacy on their organization. But when their organization publicly dissented with the administration on a policy issue, neither their social circles, nor their personal legitimacy, nor the organization's political legitimacy could act as a buffer against the Ehrlich administration's swift reaction to the dissension. It no longer conferred legitimacy on the organization; it conferred *persona non grata* status on it instead.

This raises an important distinction: Organizations only have legitimacy to the extent that a stakeholder confers or withholds legitimacy. Organizations can control and manage the activities and relationships that would cause a stakeholder to confer legitimacy; but organizations cannot directly control and manage their organizational legitimacy.

This is similar to the point L.A. Grunig et al. (2002) made about Aldrich and Pfeffer's (1976) assertion that organizations and environments both must be managed.

They disagreed with the notion that an organization could manage its environment. Like the legitimacy conferred by a stakeholder, the organization's environment lies beyond the organization's managerial reach. Fombrun and Shanley (1990) agreed: Managers may internally control "ingredients" in an organization's reputation (which is computed into organizational legitimacy), an external perception created and held by the public. But the reputation itself cannot be managed internally by the organization. Reputations are created and held by the public, just like an organization's legitimacy is perceived and conferred or withheld by stakeholders. L.A. Grunig et al. suggested that what is in the organization's managerial reach is the management of organizational responses to its legitimacy or its environment. Thus the only way that an organization could "manage" its legitimacy is through its management of its responses to its legitimacy and its engagement with the stakeholders that confer legitimacy.

I offer one last finding about organizational buffers before turning to the second part of this theory question. Bourgeois (1981) asserted that too much slack (to use his semantic alternative to "buffer") makes organizations complacent and lazy. One for-contract GRP intimated such a sentiment as related to relationships in a boundary spanner's social circles: "If a lobbyist becomes sedentary and overly comfortable in existing relationships, they can quickly become stale and ineffective."

Informants' boundary-spanning efforts, in both the external-representation and information-processing modes, were perpetual. They never stopped trying to cultivate new relationships and nurture existing relationships; their interindividual networks, their social circles, were the linchpins to their effective and successful execution of their work activities and responsibilities as boundary-spanning GRPs. In turn, the informants were

the linchpins in their organizations' effective and successful efforts to engage with political stakeholders so to establish or maintain rapport with them.

Theory Question 4b

Theory Question 4b asked, “**How did the jolt affect the informants’ work activities and responsibilities?**” The answer is:

The jolt did not seem to have any discernible macrolevel effect on informants’ work activities and responsibilities. Informants engaged in the same work activities (e.g., environmental scanning and lobbying), had the same responsibilities (e.g., organizational decision-making), and continued to dually enact the manager and technicians roles pre- and post-jolt. However, at the microlevel, the jolt may have affected the exact form of informants’ work activities. For example, most informants added Republicans to their “lawmakers to care and feed” lists since Ehrlich’s election.

I was surprised when my analysis determined that the jolt did not have any discernible macrolevel effect on informants’ work activities and responsibilities. By “macrolevel effect,” I mean that informants engaged in the same general work activities (e.g., environmental scanning), had the same general responsibilities (e.g., participate in organizational decision-making), and continued to dually enact the manager and technicians roles pre- and post-jolt. Witness this exchange with a president and CEO of a 501c(6) organization, which typified my conversations with informants on this matter:

Interviewer: Has Ehrlich’s election affected the way you do your job, your day-to-day or week-to-week activities?

Informant: *The way I actually do my job?*

Interviewer: Yes.

Informant: *No.*

Interviewer: What about your responsibilities in the organization, have they changed?

Informant: *No, that hasn’t changed either.*

There was the one informant who served as the exception to my determination. A committee chair told me how his 501c(6) organization viewed Ehrlich's election as a bane because it long had worked closely with Democrat public officials. Before Ehrlich's election, his position entailed occasional grassroots activities and fielding media inquiries. He enacted the technician role. After his election, Ehrlich catapulted what had been a non-issue under Glendening to the top of his political agenda, an issue that this organization strongly opposes. Nearly overnight, this informant's work activities and responsibilities changed; he was thrust into a campaign "war room" whose goal was the defeat of this Ehrlich priority initiative. Turbulent, uncertain environments like Annapolis increase boundary spanners' participation and influence in organizational decision-making (Emery & Trist, 1965; Kiesler & Sproull, 1982; Leblebici & Salancik, 1981; White & Dozier, 1992). So as this informant's technician activities (which now entailed member outreach, coalition work, and media advocacy) increased in frequency and intensity, his status within the organization grew. He began to engage with important people outside the organization, such as the heads of coalition partners and journalists. His initial enactment of the communication facilitator subrole led to his enactment of the PSPF subrole.

Oak-Reed Hybrids

Based on my analysis, I believe that jolt did not have macrolevel effects on most informants' work activities and responsibilities because their organizations, with one exception, were oak-reed hybrids. I have asserted that organizations should be flexible when engaging with the environment, but not too flexible. They also should maintain a modicum of resoluteness. I called this an oak-reed hybrid, having used Aesop's fable

about disparate fates of the mighty oak and the thin reed during a gale. The organizations were flexible (i.e., reedy) enough to contend with the jolt, but not so flexible that they abandoned their core principles and missions. They stood by them but not so rigidly as to be uprooted like the mighty oak in Aesop's fable. No one reported their organizations hurriedly hired Republican GRPs or fired Democrat GRPs in the wake of Ehrlich's election. No organization underwent an extreme makeover.

However, at the microlevel effect, the jolt may have affected the exact form of informants' work activities. Any jolt-induced actions were necessarily cautious and deliberate. Through their boundary-spanning GRPs, organization modified their government relations communication strategies and activities, social circles, and operational goals so that they could maintain a beneficial level of rapport with the stakeholders in the jolted political environment. For example, most informants have added Republicans to their "lawmakers to care and feed" lists since Ehrlich's election.

The "Oak" Exception

That said, there was one informant who was an exception. (Is there not always an "exceptional" informant to themes that emerge in qualitative research?) I have consistently highlighted this informant, the executive director of a 501c(6) who is strong partisan Democrat, throughout this chapter. Try though he does at being the oak, his organization has managed to not be uprooted by the jolt. He has steadfastly refused, even in his capacity as a boundary-spanning GRP, to engage with Republicans in the General Assembly or on the Second Floor. He refused to give Ehrlich credit on policy matters that other informants involved in his industry did without qualification. He made disparaging comments about Republicans (individually and as a group) in his interview.

In his view, Ehrlich's election was an aberration. So this informant bides his time, waiting for a Democrat to recapture the governorship in the 2006 election. He admitted that his organization was never a big player in Annapolis, so not abiding by — being the oak — the two-party situation has neither significantly nor irreparably harmed — uprooted — his organization. He has traditionally let his sister big-player organizations engage with political stakeholders that lie outside his own social circle and comfort zone. I cannot help but wonder if in a strange way his anti-Republican “oakness” endeared him to the Democrat lawmakers with whom he continues to closely engage.

Boundary Spanners as Entrepreneurs

I framed entrepreneurship in Chapter 2 within the context of how increased environmental turbulence might encourage it. This assumes there is a “before” and an “after”; I present my findings about entrepreneurship under Theory Question 4b since it is framed with the same assumption.

The literature suggested that organizations, through their boundary spanners, might engage with jolted environments using innovative and creative strategies (Young, 1987). Dynamic-complex environments and turbulent fields (like Annapolis) spur organizations to be entrepreneurial because “business as usual” does not exist. A jolt is an unprecedented and noncomparable event, thus leaving boundary spanners to engage with the jolted, turbulent environment without the benefit of the experience of having done so before. They lack blueprints or case studies to follow. As the saying goes, “Desperate times call for desperate measures,” and so boundary spanners may opt for entrepreneurship over what is tried and true.

I had thought that the jolted political environment would require informants to also wear the hat of entrepreneur, someone who is a creative innovator and bold risk-taker. The data did not bear this out in terms of conspicuous entrepreneurship, which fits with my finding that the jolt had microlevel, not macrolevel, effects on informants' work activities and responsibilities. The jolt did not stimulate informants' innovative thinking or creativity in terms of their inventing new grassroots mobilization techniques or implementing new technologies. It did stimulate subtle manifestations of entrepreneurial thinking that made them able to deftly dispatch the challenges of a newly partisan and polarized political environment and parlay them into opportunities that furthered organizational self-interest.

The innovation and creativity of my boundary-spanning GRP informants lay in their mental dexterity (as discussed elsewhere in this chapter) and political savvy: their abilities to understand and account for the jolted chessboard of Annapolis, new players, and a new set of rules for the game. They may frame an issue in a new or different way; collaborate with new or even strange-bedfellow organizations; use the media, grassroots, and grasstoppers; and strategically distribute PAC and other campaign donations. According to several informants whose careers date to the 1970s, the latter two activities at one time were considered entrepreneurial, even new-fangled, political maneuvers in Annapolis. Now they're *de rigueur*.

A dexterous mind, which I have found most informants possessed (see "Theory Question 2: Worldviews"), is open to innovation and entrepreneurship. Informants indicated that they and their organizations would consider new and risky strategies, and in fact had done so. Organizations with symmetrically presupposed worldviews value

innovation (J.E. Grunig, 1989; J.E. Grunig & Repper, 1992), so they arguably value entrepreneurship. Thus entrepreneurship is indicative of a symmetrically presupposed worldview. The committee chair of a 501c(4) organization reported that when deciding on candidate endorsements: “Sometimes we will go ahead and take a gamble on somebody. We’ll toss the dice and see how it turns out.” A for-contract GRP reported that one of his clients tried a new approach to effecting political change on an issue. The client, under his guidance, “tried to do something that [this industry] had never actually done before.” Rather than relying on a lobbying-intensive strategy, the client pursued a strategy that emphasized member outreach and coalition efforts.

The department director of a 501c(6) organization recounted the “risky” story of her hiring: “I didn’t know anybody, not a soul. But I knew the process. I’d been lobbying for 15 years, but only I worked in Maryland for four years and hadn’t done any upfront work with the General Assembly or the governor’s office.” Moreover, her pre-lobbying background was in business and marketing, not the typical informant’s background in law or legislative committee work. Yet her boss decided to take a “leap of faith,” as she characterized it, and hired her anyway.

A managing director was one of two informants who suggested a government relations strategy that was innovative and unprecedented enough to qualify as entrepreneurial. For her 501c(6) organization, if implemented, this strategy would be a radical departure from tradition. The Ehrlich administration has treated her organization (and its boundary-spanning GRPs) as *persona non grata* ever since it endorsed his opponent in the 2002 race. She clued me in that, short of the Ehrlich administration doing “something dreadful” related to her organization’s interests in the months leading

up to the 2006 election, she planned to recommend to the leadership that it not officially endorse any gubernatorial candidate in the 2006 Democrat primary and general elections. She will recommend that her organization instead publicize comparisons of the candidates' positions on relevant issues.

Traditionally this woman's organization, its siblings in other states, and the national parent organization officially endorse gubernatorial candidates, based on votes of their memberships. She believes that even the suggestion to not endorse a candidate will cause a stir. But she believes non-endorsement is a smart strategy: "It'll anger the candidates but if we endorse one and the other wins, we'll have the same problem we've got now with Ehrlich. We don't want to back the wrong horse again."

To recommend a non-endorsement strategy, which if implemented would be unprecedented in her organization's history, suggests an entrepreneurial thought and a symmetrically presupposed worldview. She was doubtful that her organization's leadership would follow her recommendation but was hopeful that it would at least sincerely consider it. She believed she would be remiss if she did not present non-endorsement as an option, especially because the 2002 endorsement of Townsend has condemned the organization to nearly four years of persona non grata status with the state's chief executive.

The other informant, the president of a 501c(6) organization, recounted that members of his organization's board were skeptical about the organization's involvement with a coalition of strange bedfellows. To boot, he was the one who brought the groups together: "It was uniquely my idea. The board thought it was risky business, risky behavior. They suggested maybe I ought to rethink it." Did he? No, he did not: "I

definitely stuck my neck out on this but went ahead with it. And so far, so good!” This anecdote is telling on another level: His organization’s board members, who technically function as his boss, despite their trepidation about his “sleeping with the enemy” strategy, deferred to this informant. I infer from this that the board members either trust his judgment, their symmetrically presupposed worldview trumped their misgivings, they too have an entrepreneurial streak, or some combination of these.

Outside of these two examples, I did not find other evidence of entrepreneurship that even began to approach the level of, for example, 2004 Democrat presidential candidate Howard Dean’s unprecedented use of the Internet to recruit volunteers and low-dollar donors. There was no entrepreneurship even slightly reminiscent of the introduction of patch-through phone calls in the early 1990s. At the time, these were heralded as an innovative (albeit disingenuous) component of grassroots campaigns (Silverstein, 1997).⁷ Overuse and phoniness have tarnished patch-throughs’ innovative luster. Currently innovative is Internet patch-through phone technology that “allows grassroots supporters to type their phone number into a Web page, be called back on their phone, and then patched through to the targeted political decision-maker” (Reilly, 2003, para. 1). This innovation even won the 2003 National Conference for Political Involvement Innovation Award.

I believe my informants were entrepreneurs in the sense that they were creative; creativity seems to be a hallmark trait in the personalities of successful public relations practitioners (Schwartzberg, 1983). Political savvy also made them entrepreneurs. For example, as I have detailed elsewhere in this chapter, informants were entrepreneurial

⁷ Patch-through phone calls involve telemarketers calling lawmakers’ constituents, “ril[ing them] up on an issue,” asking them to voice their opinions (as just manipulated by the telemarketer) to their lawmakers, and then immediately connecting them to their lawmakers’ offices (Silverstein, 1997, para. 9).

when they used the two-party dynamic to their organizations' advantage. That two-party dynamic was born in late 2002 and informants were quick to seize the opportunities that dynamic afforded them. Politics is a chess game, a metaphor many informants used. A masterful (i.e., savvy) chess player may rely less on making bold moves conspicuous to the opponent. Instead, the masterful player analyzes the board, perhaps dozens of potential moves, and the opponent's potential responses; finally opting for a subtle yet strategic move that perplexes the opponent. It is that one seemingly innocuous move that may prove brilliantly fatal to the opponent five turns later.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The outcome of any serious research can only be to make two questions grow where only one grew before.

— *Thorstein Veblen (1919), American economist and thinker*

Research is never completed . . . Around the corner lurks another possibility of interview, another book to read, a courthouse to explore, a document to verify.

— *Catherine Drinker Bowen (1959), American biographer*

In academic research, learning “what” has value, as my description and analysis in Chapter 4 demonstrated. But that type of learning lacks the theoretical value of learning “why,” value doctoral dissertations must have. In this chapter I further analyze and interpret the study’s results in search of answers to the theoretically valuable questions of “Why,” “But what does it all mean,” and “So what?”

The interpretation process addresses these questions, as well as “explain[s] the findings. . .attach[es] significance to particular results, and put[s] patterns into an analytic framework” (Patton, 1990, p. 375). Additionally, interpretation requires “transcend[ing] factual data and cautious data and begin[ning] to probe into what is to be made of them” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 36). It is a tall yet imperative order for any doctoral dissertation to rise beyond descriptive research to these heights.

Review of Results

The purpose of this study is to learn of — and from — the experiences of boundary-spanning GRPs, those organizational members who manage organizational interdependence with political stakeholders, in organizations enduring a major “jolt” (A.D. Meyer, 1982) in their political environment. The study focused on in-house and

for-contract GRPs affiliated with 501c organizations operating in Maryland. The jolt is the election of Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., in November 2002, as Maryland's first Republican governor in nearly four decades. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, my working assumption, that boundary spanners were of crucial significance to organizations throughout and after the jolt, regardless of whether their organizations welcomed the jolt or not, was supported.

Chapter 4 provided answers to five sets of theory questions derived from the study's first central research question (which was derived from the overall research purpose): In what ways have the jolt and subsequent changes in the political environment in Maryland affected boundary-spanning GRPs and the work they do? Below is a summary of those answers:

TQ1a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their organizations' perceptions of the jolt?

There was a balance between informants who perceived Ehrlich's election as a boon for their organizations and those who perceived it as a bane. Their perceptions predominantly were based on implicit associations about the relative "friendliness" of political parties toward their organizations' interests and issues.

TQ1b: How did the jolt affect organizations' perceptions of their political environment?

The jolt ratcheted up the existing dynamism and complexity in the relatively stable Annapolitan political environment so that Annapolis became a turbulent field rife with uncertainty. Informants perceived politics as an asymmetrical game of competition.

TQ2a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe the worldviews of their organizations?

Organizations held symmetrically presupposed worldviews. That is, the organizations' worldviews were more symmetrical than asymmetrical. Further, the organizations' two most critical stakeholders in the political environment (viz., the Democrats who controlled the General Assembly and the Republicans

who controlled the Office of the Governor) held asymmetrically presupposed worldviews.

TQ2b: How did the jolt affect the worldviews of their organizations?

The jolt generally did not precipitate a sea change in organizations' worldviews. Organizations' worldviews were presupposed more symmetrically than asymmetrically both before and after the jolt of Ehrlich's election. Post-jolt changes of most organizations' worldviews were negligible enough that if this were a quantitative study the changes probably would fall within the margin of error.

TQ3a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their communication practices with their organizations' political stakeholders?

Informants engaged in a variety of one-way, two-way, symmetrically presupposed, and asymmetrically presupposed communication practices, including grassroots member outreach, media advocacy, grassroots member outreach, coalition involvement, and lobbying. The personal influence model, typically applied in conjunction with the cultural interpreter model, led to dialogue (i.e., the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model) with political stakeholders. This practice best described and explained informants' effectiveness and success as boundary-spanning GRPs.

TQ3b: How did the jolt affect their communication practices with their organizations' political stakeholders?

With a couple of exceptions, the jolt seemed not to fundamentally affect informants' communication practices with their organizations' political stakeholders. Informants did tweak strategies and tactics. For example, some reported slight increases in the use of media advocacy, a one-way communication practice. Informants continued to want to engage in dialogue with political stakeholders and applied the personal influence model to effect opportunities for such. This required informants and other organizational members to inventory and reconfigure their social circles for Republican contacts.

TQ4a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their work activities and responsibilities?

Informants were both jacks and masters of all trades. They enacted the role of manager through their central involvement in their organizations' dominant coalition on government relations matters. They educated other members of the dominant coalition about these matters and offered counsel and recommendations. They directly participated in government relations decision-making. But they did not enact the manager and technician roles discretely. Being an effective manager entailed concurrent and skillful enactment of the

technician role. They enacted the technician role through advocacy, environmental-scanning, and information-procurement activities; cultivation and nurturance of social circles; application of the personal influence and cultural interpreter models; and tactical implementation of government relations strategies.

TQ4b: How did the jolt affect their work activities and responsibilities?

The jolt did not seem to have any discernible macrolevel effect on informants' work activities and responsibilities. Informants engaged in the same work activities (e.g., environmental scanning and lobbying), had the same responsibilities (e.g., organizational decision-making), and continued to dually enact the manager and technicians roles pre- and post-jolt. However, at the microlevel, the jolt may have affected the exact form of informants' work activities. For example, most informants added Republicans to their "lawmakers to care and feed" lists since Ehrlich's election.

TQ5a: How do boundary-spanning GRPs describe their political stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of their organizations?

Informants operationalized organizational legitimacy as political status. I found that congruency of values between an organization and a political stakeholder was the major determinant of the organization's political status. Congruency of values translated to high political status, which translated to inclusion and meaningful participation in unofficial and official dialogic and decision-making opportunities with the political stakeholder. The converse was true for values-incongruent, and thus low political status, organizations.

TQ5b: How did the jolt affect the political stakeholders' perceptions of the legitimacy of the boundary-spanning GRPs' organizations?

The jolt negligibly affected the political legitimacy of neutral organizations; this was unsurprising given that these organizations were strictly nonpartisan in reality and perception. The jolt significantly affected the political legitimacy of boon and bane organizations, organizations that were partisan either in reality or perception. Ehrlich and his predecessor, Glendening, held opposite stances on many issues; they did not have congruent values. What was a values-congruent organization for Glendening was a values-incongruent organization for Ehrlich and vice versa. Many organizations saw their political status invert because of the transition from the Democrat Glendening to the Republican Ehrlich. Further, expectations about potential changes to an organization's political legitimacy factored into informant's assessment of whether the jolt portended good or ill for the organization.

Major Results for Central Research Questions 2 and 3

In this section, I summarize the major results related to the second and third central research questions. In the next section, I present nuanced interpretations of these findings.

The second central research question asked, “Why did the jolt affect boundary-spanning GRPs as it did?” The three main reasons are:

- The level of partisanship in Annapolis:

The jolt touched off polarizing partisanship that changed the tenor of politics in Annapolis. This partisanship quickly pervaded the political environment of Annapolis and the professional lives of its denizens — lawmakers, staffers, and GRPs alike.

- Organizations’ political legitimacy:

The jolt inverted the political legitimacy, conferred by the holder of the Office of the Governor, of nearly all of the informants’ organizations. This affected informants’ access to political decision-makers and opportunities for dialogue and advocacy of organizational interests.

- Informants’ social circles:

Many informants did not know many of the aides in positions of high authority in the Ehrlich administration. Further, these aides did not appear motivated to familiarize themselves with informants, other GRPs, or the culture of Annapolis. The social circles of many informants thus lacked useful relationships with members of the Ehrlich administration. This affected their access to political decision-makers and opportunities for dialogue and advocacy of organizational interests.

The biggest surprise to me in the transformed data was that the jolt, which informants universally agreed strongly jarred the political environment of Annapolis, the tenor of its politics, and organizations’ political legitimacy, did not jar them commensurately on an individual level. I had expected the jolt to have effected stronger and more numerous changes in informants’ work-lives than they reported. There were no

significant changes in informants' status within their organizations, conduct of their routine activities, fulfillment of their responsibilities, and communication and engagement practices with political stakeholders. They dealt with the myriad challenges and opportunities of the jolt by modifying — not overhauling — strategies, tactics, messages, social circles, alignments, and the like to reflect the new, polarized two-party reality of Annapolis. I believe that this “surprise” finding is explained by one, informants' more-than-capable professional expertise in government relations; two, their political savvy; and three, their positive practice of government relations closely approximated the normative practice of government relations.

The third central research question asked, “What can be learned from their experiences that informs the theory and practice of the specialized form of public relations, government relations?” My three major results that inform theory are:

- Social circles, as the all-important cohesive element holding all aspects of GRPs' work-lives together, necessitated that informants practice government relations according to the personal influence model of public relations.
- Dialogue (*viz.*, two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive communication) was the informants' communication strategy of first resort.
- Political stakeholders (*i.e.*, Democrats and Republicans) seemed to hold asymmetrically presupposed worldviews whereas informants' organizations seemed to hold symmetrically presupposed worldviews.

Based on these three major results, I have developed a theory of government relations that describes informants' positive practice of government relations as well as how GRPs should practice government relations. This theory relates back to my third explanation, namely that informants' positive practice of government relations closely approximated the normative practice of government relations, for the surprise finding. Thus, I posit the following positive-normative theory of government relations:

Government relations should be practiced by employing dialogue within the symmetrically presupposed context of the personal influence model of public relations. Such practice should enable organizations to effectively engage and maintain rapport with asymmetrically presupposed political stakeholders, even in increasingly partisan and polarized political environments.

I believe useful concepts for developing this theory of government relations beyond this embryonic form and for researching government relations and public relations include organizational justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), interpersonal communication, and interpersonal relationships. I discuss these points in detail later in the chapter.

To summarize my major findings for the practice, they are:

- Political change, no matter how “jolting,” affects, both positively and negatively, the work-lives of boundary-spanning GRPs. However, factors such as partisan conflict between political parties, organizational nonpartisanship, and GRPs’ social circles may minimize those impacts.
- Polarized partisan political environments are fraught with peril for organizations that are partisan in reality or in perception and their boundary-spanning GRPs. Adopting nonpartisanship, minimizing partisanship, or increasing bipartisanship are potential strategies for effectively negotiating such political environments.

Further, I achieved the goals related to the study’s potential theoretical significance outlined in Chapter 1. These were to:

- Contextualize and triangulate the established quantitatively developed body of knowledge on boundary spanning with data yielded through qualitative methods.
- Cast a scholarly light on government relations, an academically underexplored specialized public relations program.
- Understand, from an individual-level perspective, the work-lives of boundary-spanning GRPs as they and their organizations contend with a jolted political environment.
- Address four voids in the existing literature:
 - Springston and Leichty’s (1994) call for a “fuller understanding of how public relations practitioners interact with publics, and collect and use information

about publics,” (p. 687), as well as a better understanding of routine boundary-spanning activities.

- Jemison’s (1984) call for more research on factors that affect boundary spanners’ influence.
- Werder’s (2002) urging for additional positive theories in public relations.
- Baum and Rowley’s (2002) identification of the interactions between organizations and their political environment as “an important conceptual question” (p. 9).

Central Research Question 2

The best starting point for a nuanced interpretation of the major findings related to the second central research question (Why did the jolt affect boundary-spanning GRPs as it did?) is informants’ perceptions of the political environment of Annapolis and of politics generally. Informants perceived Ehrlich’s election as making an already dynamic-complex political environment even more so, to the point that Annapolis became a turbulent field rife with uncertainty.

Initial Perceptions of the Jolt’s Implications

Depending on an organization’s political status in Annapolis, the jolt of Ehrlich’s election had either positive or negative implications. This is why Ehrlich’s election qualified as a jolt: It had the potential to turn “losers” and “winners” during Glendening’s administration into “winners” and “losers,” respectively, during Ehrlich’s administration.

Informants perceived the jolt through the prism of the degree of political legitimacy they expected the Ehrlich administration would confer on their organizations. If Ehrlich shared (or were assumed to share) political interests with an organization, that organization’s informant assumed a high degree of friendliness and welcomed his

election as a boon. Boon organizations tended to gain political legitimacy going from Glendening to Ehrlich, whereas bane organizations tended to lose political legitimacy. Political interests reflect values and thus congruent values were a major determinant of how much political legitimacy, if any, Ehrlich conferred on organizations (this was true for Glendening and other political stakeholders as well).

At the root of informants' jolt perceptions were implicit associations about congruency of values between their organizations and the new governor. Informants calculated these implicit associations into the expected loss, gain, or maintenance of their organizations' political legitimacy. Humans rely on implicit associations as a heuristic framework, making instantaneous sub- or unconscious links among people, personality traits, and phenomena. They simplify a confusing and complex world. Political legitimacy is important because with its conference comes opportunities for inclusion, dialogue, true voice, influence, and goal realization. These opportunities were diminished or disappeared for organizations with low legitimacy. The more competitive a political environment is, the more important political legitimacy becomes for organizations. With Ehrlich's election, Annapolis became an extremely competitive two-party political environment.

Because Glendening and Ehrlich held such different, even contrary, values, the jolt of Ehrlich's election affected the political legitimacy of nearly all informants' organizations. This was a good thing for some informants and organizations. As A.D. Meyer (1982), who inspired me to conceptualize Ehrlich's election as a jolt, reminded, jolts do not have to be negative events. They can be immediately positive events. Alternately, their impacts, positive or negative, may be delayed (e.g., a jolt initially may

be considered as a negative event, but once the lessons learned are incorporated into organizational thinking and planning, it may be reconsidered as a positive event for the organization).

Ehrlich, for instance, conferred less personal political legitimacy on some informants on whom Glendening had conferred high personal political legitimacy, making the jolt a negative event for them. The greater an organization's political legitimacy is (i.e., it enjoys high political status), the "closer" it is to those who wield political power and conferred that legitimacy. As compared with organizations with lower legitimacy (i.e., bane organizations under Ehrlich), high-status organizations (i.e., boon organizations under Ehrlich for which the jolt was a positive event) have better access to and opportunities for the exchange of information and influence with certain political stakeholders. An organization with influence has "the ability to affect the outcome of decisions" (Jemison, 1984, p. 133) that favor the organization and further its self-interests. An organization's political fortunes with political stakeholders thus rises and falls apace with the degree of political legitimacy conferred on it.

I compare here the experiences of two informants' organizations, one a boon, the other a bane, to illustrate the implications of jolt-induced changes in organizational legitimacy. Glendening, as all political stakeholders do, bestowed greater political legitimacy on organizations with values congruent with his (e.g., environmental organizations) and lower legitimacy to those with incongruent values (e.g., animal husbandry organizations). The greater the congruency, the more legitimacy he conferred and vice versa. One informant, a co-chair, reported that Glendening conferred high political legitimacy on her 501c(6) organization (for the purposes of this immediate

discussion, I will refer to her organization as Organization S). Organization S's informants engaged in informal and formal dialogue with Glendening, his senior administration staff, and many other organizations. Organizations favored education, awareness, and subtle advocacy over overt forms of asymmetrically presupposed communication.

The executive director of another 501c(6) organization (which I will refer to as Organization P) reported Glendening barely conferred any political legitimacy on it. Organization P's informant told me he worried throughout the Glendening administration about engaging with certain political stakeholders. He feared making Organization P itself and its industry vulnerable to being burned by Glendening and "his crowd." He tended to engage only with friendly lawmakers and sister organizations, although he eventually did hire a for-contract GRP to engage with stakeholders he felt uncomfortable doing so himself. Organization P's communication practices tended to be reactive and defensive.

Ehrlich happened to hold values opposite of Glendening on these organizations' parochial interests. When Ehrlich became governor, the organizations' legitimacy situations flip-flopped: Organization S was given the cold shoulder and Organization P basked in the warmth of its newly conferred political legitimacy. The co-chair for Organization S, a bane organization, initially attempted to engage in dialogue with the Ehrlich administration. It rebuffed her, telling her it would not cede any ground to her side on the issue over which they were at odds. It would neither entertain nor accommodate her organization's concerns at all; further, it was publicly dismissive of them. Given the futility of this communication situation, Organization S decided to cease

trying to engage dialogically with the Ehrlich administration. She since has focused organizational engagement efforts on friendly lawmakers and non-political stakeholders. Organization S has not, however, abandoned or lowered its goals as outlined in its mission statement; although the informant was concerned about the implications of Ehrlich's governorship on her organization's ability to ever realize them, even beyond his tenure as governor.

Organization P, a boon organization, bloomed under Ehrlich, engaging with critical stakeholders and organizations it had not previously. Without reason to fear a Democrat-occupied Office of the Governor, this executive director indicated that Ehrlich's election immediately empowered him and his organization. He was hopeful about his organization's abilities to achieve its "mission" goals. The organization did not necessarily re-evaluate or expand its legislative agenda, but the informant believed that they were more "in reach" with Ehrlich in office than Glendening.

The Role of Social Circles in Political Legitimacy

Besides being a function of congruent values between conferrers and conferees, political legitimacy was also a function of the personal political legitimacy of an organization's GRPs. GRPs' political legitimacy is a function of whom they knew: their personal and professional contacts in their social circles.

Informants with high personal political status, again that stemmed from their social circles, were able to open doors more easily to critical political stakeholders than lower-status informants were. Once that door was opened, informants were able to take seats at the table where dialogue and decision-making occur. Further, informants shared

or transferred some of their high political status (i.e. personal legitimacy) to their organizations, an example of the implied third-party endorsement effect.

Political stakeholders confer high political legitimacy on GRPs who share their values or whose social circles overlap with theirs or both. If a GRP shares a social circle with a top Senate committee counsel or a senior administration staffer, arguably they confer greater legitimacy on this GRP than another GRP who lies outside this social circle. That “insider” GRP’s personal legitimacy transfers to the organization. This could help organizations overcome some of the delegitimization arising from not sharing the values of political stakeholders or otherwise not engendering the stakeholders’ “good will and approval” (Boyd, 2000, p. 344).

That informants’ personal legitimacy might help organizations overcome organizational delegitimization is related to my finding that informants increasingly began to function as organizational buffers upon Ehrlich’s election. Whether they consciously realized it, informants began to wear the hat of organizational buffer after Ehrlich’s election and the ensuing partisanship. They were already wearing hats labeled advocate, boundary spanner, communicator, cultural interpreter, decision maker, environmental scanner, external representer, information procurer, lobbyist, perceiver, personal influencer, and political expert. They either functioned as buffers themselves or they oversaw activities (e.g., coalition work) and reinforced organizational attributes (nonpartisanship and organizational legitimacy) that did.

Social circles figure prominently into my interpretation. Legitimacy (personal and organizational) functions as a buffer and social circles factor into both types of legitimacy. Further, the relationships among members of social circles function as

buffers as well: Those relationships may buy a social circle member (e.g., an organizational boundary spanner) latitude, empathy, time, and forgiveness. . .to an extent. Buffers may cushion an organization from environmental jolts and “relatively bad times” (Cyert & March, 1963, p. 138), but buffers are not Kevlar vests. As several informants described, even positive relationships with critical stakeholders and high degrees of personal and organizational legitimacy could not buffer organizations against retribution for running afoul of the Ehrlich administration.

Persona Non Grata

Running afoul of the Ehrlich administration resulted in its complete withdrawal of political legitimacy from some organizations, rendering them illegitimate “personae non grata” in the eyes of this critical stakeholder. A persona non grata does not get a seat at the decision-makers’ table. These situations impeded informants’ efforts to engage in dialogue with the administration and have true voice in the state’s unofficial and official policy-making processes. Many expressed frustration and dismay when this happened, a point I will expound upon in the next subsection. They believed it hinted at the Ehrlich administration’s penchant for asymmetrically presupposed communication. The Glendening administration also delegitimized some values-incongruent organizations, thus preventing their inclusion in state governmental processes. Informants noted that that administration did this with much less frequency and less vociferousness than the Ehrlich administration.

Partisanship as Spoiler or Savior

Informants, politically savvy Annapolitan “insiders,” generally viewed Ehrlich’s election as unsurprising (given political trends in the state and his opponent’s lackluster

campaign). What did surprise them was the jolt's triggering of the rapid escalation of partisan, ideological, and interpersonal conflicts that were unprecedented in Annapolis. I even wondered if this in fact was the jolt rather than the isolated event of Ehrlich's election.

This partisanship acted as a spoiler for boon organizations and as a savior for bane organizations. Notwithstanding the two straightforward examples of Organizations S and P, partisanship tempered informants' initial perceptions of his election as a boon or bane. The partisanship did not cause informants to consider Ehrlich's election categorically different. No informants at boon organizations wished for a different outcome of the 2002 gubernatorial election, although as expected bane informants did. But all of the informants did wish for the post-jolt levels of full-scale partisan polarization in Annapolis to recede to pre-jolt levels of relatively good-natured partisan bickering.

The Ehrlich administration might have smiled upon a boon organization, as expected, engaging it in policy promulgation processes. This organization may have had more positive, "true" involvement in these processes under the Ehrlich administration than under the Glendening administration. That is why such an organization considered Ehrlich's election a boon. But positive experiences in these processes did not necessarily mean that his election effected positive outcomes for the organization.

It was not that informants' implicit associations were incorrect; Ehrlich did not turn out to be a pro-labor union Republican, for instance. His administration aligned, as implicitly associated and anticipated, with business rather than unions. But rampant partisanship intervened between his affect toward organizations with business interests (with whom he was implicitly associated) and his ability to effect positive outcomes for

them. This is why modifiers are often used with political labels, to pre-emptively correct incorrect implicit associations. Christine Todd Whitman, a former governor of New Jersey who headed the U.S Environmental Protection during the George W. Bush presidential administration, is often referred to as a “pro-choice Republican.” Republican and anti-choice are implicitly associated; the modifier “pro-choice” before Republican disabuses the implicit association. That same logic explains why the late former governor of Pennsylvania, Robert P. Casey, was referred to as “pro-life Democrat.”

However, informants’ implicit associations could not have predicted the desires of Democrats and Republicans to “stick it” to each other in post-jolt Annapolis, the rapid escalation of partisanship, and the degree of polarization. For instance, informants whose organizations had retail and business interests told me that they initially believed that the election of a Republican governor would effect a friendlier business environment than under Glendening and previous Democrat governors. They anticipated that fewer burdensome regulations would be enacted on Ehrlich’s watch than on a Democrat’s. These boon organizations had their expectations quickly dashed once partisanship spoiled the political environment for them.

Democrats, as the majority party in the House of Delegates and the Senate, could pass bills they knew Ehrlich would veto (or would make him look bad if he did not enact them). Their majorities in both houses were so large they could override his vetoes without major problems. Some informants at bane organizations reported that the General Assembly moved positively on issues that it would not have under a Democrat governor.

Partisanship intervened as a savior for bane organizations. It prevented many of their worst fears they implicitly associated with a Republican governor from being realized. As the anecdote below illustrates, partisanship even acted to pleasantly surprise bane organizations.

In 2006, the Democrat General Assembly overrode Ehrlich's veto of the so-called "Wal-Mart bill" that requires corporations employing more than 10,000 people in the state to contribute to the employees' health care plans. It essentially levies a payroll tax on corporations that fit this profile. Coincidentally, Wal-Mart is the only corporation in Maryland that does. I collected the data right after the 2005 session, during which the General Assembly passed this bill and Ehrlich had indicated his veto intentions. Working on the assumption that the General Assembly would override his eventual veto, bane informants with stakes in this issue hailed the Wal-Mart bill as a victory. Boon informants viewed it negatively. However, these boon and bane informants wondered how much of the General Assembly's motivation to enact this law (and others like a minimum wage bill) had to do with political posturing and the desire to make Ehrlich look bad (i.e., a veto of the Wal-Mart bill would put him on the side of a Goliath against a legion of Davids). Would this controversial bill have seen the light of day under a Democrat? Both boon and bane informants thought not.

The Game of Politics

The Wal-Mart veto override situation is but one of many examples informants cited (and media have reported on) as evidence of the partisan conflict in Annapolis. I discussed in Chapter 4 my analysis that informants seemed to understand politics as an

asymmetrically presupposed game. They perceived politics as a game of conflict and competition.

As I have noted, politics is a competition of values. Political analyst Mark Shields (2006) has phrased it more elegantly: “Politics is basically the peaceable resolution of conflict among legitimate competing interests” (para. 1). Politics is also a competition to determine the allocation of finite resources — such as power, moral primacy, and funding — and to whom. If Organization A wins funding for its program, funding for Organization B’s program may be cut. If Organization C advocates tax cuts and they are enacted, its win may cause A to lose the funding it won at B’s expense. Even the general notion of politics as a marketplace of ideas connotes competition; there are many ideas — which reflect values — to choose from. But not all get chosen; some win, some lose. That is why Heath (1992) wrote of the “*wrangle* in the marketplace” (emphasis added). Wrangling after all does mean to win or obtain by argument.

I believe that slippery-slope arguments frequently employed in the wrangling over social and moral issues (e.g., abortion, gay marriage, and gun ownership) reinforce the conceptualization of politics as competition, a zero-sum competition in fact. For example, according to direct-mail literature I receive from pro-choice organizations, outlawing partial-birth abortion is a first step toward the eventual undoing of *Roe v. Wade*. Even slight compromise is fear-mongered as the fast-track to complete capitulation.

Game theorists refer to these sorts of games as games of pure asymmetry (Murphy, 1991; Van Dyke, 2005). Informants widely employed militaristic, war, and game metaphors to describe political situations and their activities. The jolt, which

precipitated severe and overt partisan conflict between Democrat and Republican lawmakers, reinforced informants' thoughts about politics as an asymmetrically presupposed game.

Raiffa (1982, as cited in Dozier et al., 1995) outlined the symmetrical and asymmetrical characteristics of mixed-motive games (i.e., games where parties try to further their own interests but not at the expense of others' interests). Symmetrically presupposed games are characterized by a lack of malevolent intent, a willingness to compromise, and the expectation that power will be wielded gracefully. I believe that upon Ehrlich's election, organizations' critical stakeholders — the Democrats and Republicans in the executive and legislative branches — significantly loosened their embrace of these symmetrical characteristics. As I have touched upon throughout chapters 2 and 4 and through informants' utterances and my background research, the Democrat and Republican parties did act toward each other with malevolent intent, in the sense the parties wanted to do political harm to the other party and individuals and organizations aligned with it. The parties became less interested in compromise; they desired absolute wins, meaning that a zero-sum game was being played. And finally, neither party was using its power gracefully. Ehrlich routinely used the bully pulpit of the governorship to publicly deride individual Democrats and organizations (both values-congruent and values-incongruent). The Democrat leadership in the General Assembly was no better, exploiting parliamentary processes to impede the Ehrlich administration's ability to realize its major initiatives. To wit, in the 2006 legislative session, the General Assembly tried to pass legislation requiring cabinet secretaries from Ehrlich's first term who wanted to continue in their posts (should Ehrlich win a second term) to go through

the full confirmation process again (Wagner, 2006). This is unheard of at any level of government anywhere in the United States. (As an aside, this does demonstrate my contention that turbulence and uncertainty will spur entrepreneurial thinking [but not in the positive way that I thought].)

The two critical stakeholders for informants' organizations were so consumed by partisanship after Ehrlich's election that they no longer had any rapport. Having rapport means that two parties understand and respect each other, but that they also have an understanding (e.g., persons A and B agree to disagree; A will excuse B's actions as "B is just doing B's job). For instance, after months of testy interactions between NBC White House correspondent David Gregory and White House press secretary Scott McClellan, the tension erupted at an off-camera briefing on February 13, 2006 (Kurtz, 2006a). Gregory offered an apology, which McClellan accepted, explaining: "We both have a job to do and both have respect for one another" (para. 12). Despite the professional tension inherent in their relationship, Gregory and McClellan can understand and appreciate the other's motivations. They have "an understanding" that allows them to separate the personal and the professional so they can both continue to effectively do their jobs. They have rapport.

Robinson's (2006) op-ed about his ambivalence toward the chumminess between journalists and politicians at the 2006 Gridiron Club dinner also illustrates this point. The purpose of this "Washington ritual" is for "the nation's leading journalists to get together with the people they are supposed to hold accountableReporters wouldn't be doing their jobs if they didn't get to know the people they cover" (paras. 6 & 10). The lesson Robinson took away from the dinner, and that

informs this study, is that “[A]dversaries don’t have to be enemies” (para. 10).

Adversaries are able to work together, even in pursuit of their self-interests (even if they are conflicting) because they to some degree share understanding, respect, and “an understanding.” Adversaries have rapport; enemies do not.

The relevant question for Annapolis; for Washington, DC; and other states and localities then raised is: “Does partisanship turn adversaries into enemies, and if so, at what point?” This is not a rhetorical question; it is an extremely valid question particularly in light of recent research on partisan polarization in the political science literature (e.g., Hetherington, 2001; Layman & Carsey, 2002). Americans’ positive feelings for one political party (and negative feelings for the other) are stronger than in nearly a generation. Americans have become more loyal partisans; they “hold their partisan ties more intensely” (Hetherington, 2001, p. 629). This affects their voting choices (e.g., increased tendency to vote along straight-party lines [Hetherington, 2001]). The trend is that the candidates who win elections tend to appeal to these likely voters, the ones who reliably turn out for primary and general elections — the “base.” Thus many of the lawmakers who populate legislative and administrative bodies likely are themselves strong, loyal partisans. This causes interparty partisan conflict, which leads to polarization in government, politics, and the electorate (Layman & Carsey, 2002). Lawmakers in Maryland — who likely are strong, loyal partisans — happen to be the critical stakeholders who granted or withheld political legitimacy from informants’ organizations.

Stakeholders' Conference of Political Legitimacy

The Glendening and Ehrlich administrations' conference of political legitimacy on organizations was demonstrated by the degree of their GRPs' involvement, if any, in administrative-level decision-making processes. High political legitimacy was evidenced by an administration seeking outside input and opinions, listening and giving thoughtful consideration to them, demonstrating empathy, and giving the informants (on behalf of their organizations) "true" voice in those processes. Low legitimacy was evidenced by an administration not seeking input and opinions, outright dismissing or paying lip service to them when offered, demonstrating disdain, and providing "false" voice opportunities where the administration seemed to be listening to informants' opinions (making informants feel positively about the process) but only to benefit its own ends. I have interpreted an administration's conference of low legitimacy on an organization as an indication that the administration likely engaged with it using asymmetrically presupposed communication. Conversely, administrations likely engaged with high-legitimacy organizations using symmetrically presupposed communication.

The Implications of Worldview Presuppositions

Congressional scholar Norman Ornstein might diagnose the Ehrlich administration's vociferousness in dealing with those "afoul" organizations as symptomatic of a Maryland-specific form of "battered Congress syndrome" (Marcus, 2006). This syndrome may explain why a group suddenly vents its frustration and anger after years of disenfranchisement, powerlessness, or suppression (externally or self-imposed [VandeHei, 2006]). Ornstein diagnosed congressional Republicans as afflicted with the syndrome (as evidenced by their public defiance of President Bush on issues

such as Social Security reform and the Dubai ports deal midway through his second term). Their self-suppression is traceable to Republican loyalty to this Republican president and to wanting to present to the public a united front (façade?) with a Republican president renowned for his dislike of disloyalty and dissent. The Republican governor of Maryland's penchant for excommunicating otherwise politically (and publicly) legitimate organizations may have reflected Maryland Republicans' palpably explosive frustration at having been without any significant power or true voice in the state's governmental process for nearly 40 years. Once Republicans got power and voice, via the 2002 election, the Ehrlich administration was going to use them. They were not particularly interested in extending political graces toward those who perhaps had not extended such graces toward Republicans before the jolt.

What I have discussed in the preceding paragraphs are informants' perceptions about their two most critical stakeholders in the political environment: Democrats (who controlled the legislative branch) and Republicans (who controlled the executive branch). I did not conduct interviews with members of these stakeholder organizations and so my contentions are based on informants' perceptions and my interpretations of their perceptions. But informants' perceptions were their and their organizations' reality. The reality was that informants had to negotiate their organizations through a competitive political environment explosive with partisan conflict between Democrats, who were used to having near absolute political power in Maryland, and Republicans, whose glee at finally having some power led them to do things their way and turn a deaf ear to constructive criticism and advice.

The presuppositions of an organization's communication practices reflect the

presuppositions of its worldview. The Glendening and Ehrlich administrations reserved one communication strategy for engaging with values-congruent organizations and a starkly different strategy for values-incongruent organizations. It was almost like each administration held two different, or situational, worldviews. That they would employ different communication strategies depending on the stakeholder is logical because smart organizations tailor their communication strategies (and messages) to their stakeholders (J.E. Grunig & L.A. Grunig, 1989; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992). Universal, one-size-fits-all-stakeholders communication strategies are ineffective. The Glendening and Ehrlich administrations both tailored their communication strategies for 501c organizations based on many factors, a primary one of which was the degree of conferred political legitimacy.

The Mixed-Motive Worldviews of Political Stakeholders

The Glendening and Ehrlich administrations did not each hold two opposite worldviews; each possessed one mixed-motive worldview. A symmetrically presupposed worldview is characterized by open-mindedness; respect for others and their viewpoints, even those that are different or contrary to the organization's; functioning as a open system in the environment; an appreciation for interdependency; dialogue and collaboration as engagement strategies of first resort; and participatory decision-making processes. Much like how J.E. Grunig (2001) and L.A. Grunig et al. (2002) clarified that the two-way symmetrical model is in fact a mixed-motive model (and had been all along), a symmetrically presupposed worldview realistically is a mixed-motive worldview. The notion of mixed motives comes from this: In the course of pursuing self-interest — always of paramount consideration — symmetrically worldviewed organizations also consider and help others pursue their interests. On the surface, this

seems generous and altruistic of these organizations; but dig a bit deeper and the organization's mixed motivations are unearthed. Symmetrical presuppositions offer a better, albeit less direct, route to achieving organizational self-interest than asymmetrical presuppositions (J.E. Grunig, 2001).

A mixed-motive worldview is characterized by symmetrical and asymmetrical values, with the symmetrical values predominating. I have inferred that symmetry predominates over asymmetry in mixed-motive schemas from how J.E. Grunig (2001) and L.A. Grunig et al. (2002) have explained that it is the two-way symmetrical model — not the two-way asymmetrical model — that is a mixed-motive model. Additionally, Dozier et al. (1995) explained that organizations with mixed motives use asymmetrical and symmetrical tactics within a larger symmetrical framework. A mixed-motive worldview allowed the Glendening and Ehrlich administrations to engage with some 501c organizations in one manner and others in an opposite manner. My analysis of the data causes me to question whether a symmetrically predominant mixed-motive worldview would “allow” the administrations to engage so asymmetrically as to shun, ostracize, or marginalize 501c organizations based on an incongruity of values. I also began to wonder if an asymmetrically predominant mixed-motive worldview would have allowed them to engage like this.

A Reverse Mixed-Motive Worldview?

This relates to what I proposed in my first graduate school paper (Simone [a.k.a. Tuite], 1999) to explain why government relations did not jibe with the Excellence theory as well as other specialized public relations programs did (Dozier et al., 1995; J.E. Grunig, 1992). I asserted that in government relations, organizations engaged with

political stakeholders using symmetrical communication strategies within an asymmetrical framework, to obtain the results they want (Wolf, 1976). This reverse mixed-motive model (as I called it) I believed best described the excellent practice of government relations and could explain the government relations anomaly, whereas the regular mixed-motive (i.e., two-way symmetrical) model explained the excellence of other specialized public relations programs (Dozier et al., 1995).

Although I now cringe at how I could have possibly made such a bold assertion in my first paper in the master's program, in retrospect perhaps I was onto something. I do not think that organizations, like 501c organizations, that engage in government relations have asymmetrically predominant mixed-motive worldviews (I discuss these organizations' worldviews shortly). Rather, I think the political entities (e.g., Democrats and Republicans) that function as these organizations' critical political stakeholders have asymmetrically predominant mixed-motive worldviews. The larger framework of this worldview is rooted in competition (asymmetry) instead of cooperation (symmetry); mixed-motive worldviews and communication are conceptualized with a larger cooperative framework (Dozier et al., 1995; J.E. Grunig, 2001). I believe the reason these stakeholders hold asymmetrically predominant mixed-motive worldviews is because of the asymmetrical presuppositions of the political environment.

Politics is an asymmetrical game, as I have discussed, that practically mandates that it be played asymmetrically. This seems to be even more of the case in political environments polarized by partisanship, such as Annapolis and the ultimate exemplar, Washington, DC. Given the presuppositions, realities, and constraints of these environments, political entities do use symmetrical and asymmetrical communication and

strategies but they must do so within an asymmetrically presupposed framework that reflects the nature of the game that is modern-day politics.

Mixed-Motive Worldviews of Informants' Organizations

Informants' descriptions of the ways they engaged with their critical stakeholders in this environment led me to conclude that their organizations' worldviews had mixed motives but defaulted toward symmetry. They had symmetrically presupposed mixed-motive worldviews, as Dozier et al. (2005) and others conceptualized the mixed-motive worldview.

I found that organization's worldviews were manifested in many ways. These manifestations could be described by two themes: the organization's willingness to cede some control to others and dexterity of organizational thought and action as realized through the informants and other organizational members. These two themes reflected the symmetrical values woven throughout the data. However, informants were also committed to furthering their organizations' interests, which reflects their embracing of asymmetrical values. Informants also agreed that their organizations' two most important critical stakeholders "ticked" according to asymmetrically presupposed mixed-motive worldviews. Further, informants agreed that these stakeholders were embroiled in partisan conflict, which exacerbated the competition inherent in the asymmetrical game of politics.

An Auspicious Communication Strategy

When the two critical stakeholders in the political environment are polarized and an organization must engage with both them, their conflict will affect organizational engagement. Think of this as a circle of three friends: If two of them have a falling out,

that will indubitably affect how the third friend interacts with them. One even may become angry with the third friend for continuing to be friends with the other. Sensitivities are heightened and the “neutral” friend (e.g., a 501c organization) must learn how to negotiate this charged environment. As J.E. Grunig (2001) noted, conflict situations such as dueling stakeholders or soured relationships require “more sophisticated means of symmetrical communication and conflict resolution” (p. 16). This then raises another question: Is there a more sophisticated means of symmetrical communication than dialogue, which is an auspicious communication strategy for contending with multiparty conflict?

Dialogue is a sophisticated means of symmetrical communication and an auspicious strategy for contending with multiparty conflict. However, I think that GRPs have developed a more auspicious and sophisticated communication strategy for contending with political stakeholders who are adversarial or hostile toward each other. This strategy is to employ dialogue in the course of employing the personal influence model in conjunction with the cultural interpreter model. I believe this strategy ups the sophistication quotient of dialogue enough so GRPs can engage auspiciously with these stakeholders, which have asymmetrically presupposed mixed-motive worldviews. I determined from the data that this strategy best described and explained the effectiveness and success of GRPs. Further, many researchers have speculated the Excellence theory did not explain the practice of government relations as well as other public relations because of GRPs’ reliance on their network of contacts (Dozier et al., 1995). This strategy would support that speculation while explaining how organizations with symmetrically presupposed worldviews, which drive their desire and use of dialogue, are

able to negotiate with asymmetrically presupposed stakeholders in an increasingly asymmetrical game of politics.

The prevalence of the personal influence model in government relations likely comes as no surprise to readers even without my pointing it out. It is widely assumed by laypeople and scholars (e.g., Dozier et al. 1995) that government relations, and specifically lobbying, is done through one's network of contacts. Anecdotal support for this assumption is found in Simone's ([a.k.a. Tuite] 1999) analysis of Eisler's (1998) article revealing that 47 of Washington, DC's, (then) top-50 lobbyists had worked for or were related (biologically or by marriage) to critical political stakeholders for their organizations (and clients) or were former critical political stakeholders themselves. More support comes from Birnbaum (2005), who reported on the revolving door between government and the lobbying industry in Washington, DC, and the large salaries that await on the lobbying side of the revolving door. More support also is seen in the *Washington Post's* quarter-page-sized feature column, "Special Interests," located in the "A" section of the paper — valuable real estate in newspapers. This regular column details Washington insiders' job-hopping between the White House and Congress, lobbying firms, corporate government relations offices, and special interest groups (e.g., see Sarasohn, 2006b). Haug and Koppang (1997), Johnson (1992), and Simone (a.k.a. Tuite, 1999) provided theoretical support for this assumption.

The personal influence model, applied in conjunction with the cultural interpreter model, explained informants' effectiveness and success as boundary-spanning GRPs. So much about informants' work lives could be explained (e.g., their roles in organizational decision-making; their personal legitimacy; organizations' political legitimacy; and their

and their organizations' ability to effectively engage with a jolted and perhaps unfriendly political environment) because they implemented these models.

Social circles, central to the model, explained why the jolt affected informants as it did and how their organizations coped with the abundant asymmetry that defined the political environment and their political stakeholders. Organizations whose GRPs shared social circles with Republicans or the Ehrlich administration did seem to enjoy higher political legitimacy than those organizations whose GRPs were not members of those social circles. GRPs in the former category functioned as implied third-party endorsers and organizational buffers for their organizations. This is part of the reason why Annapolitan organizations (and clients) hired GRPs who are “big names” or well connected, such as former lawmakers.

I had fully expected to find that organizations that perceived that the Ehrlich administration conferred low political legitimacy (even illegitimacy) on them would have hired GRPs with Republican connections. If their own GRPs did not have the “useful relationships” to “pry loose useful information” — meaning they could not implement the personal influence model — I assumed that organizations would hire people who did. Republican-valued (and -connected) personal influencers would calm the turbulence and quell the uncertainty that low and no political legitimacy exacerbates.

I assumed incorrectly. I found that organizations without Republican GRPs on hand (typically bane organizations) mined the connections of internal and external members of the organization for Republicans rather than immediately hired some. They also signaled their willingness to establish connections to and a dialogue with the new administration. That Democrats still controlled the Maryland General Assembly allowed

these organizations to take a considered approach and not rush out and hire new GRPs. This may also be a function of the presence of available Republican GRPs in Annapolis.

However, my original assumption may yet prove accurate. Mosk (2006a) noted the influx of unabashedly Republican lobbyists into Annapolis since Ehrlich's election: "The seeds have been planted for a local version of Capitol Hill's 'K Street Project,' in which GOP lawmakers insisted on dealing with GOP lobbyists" (p. B8). If those seeds take root and if Ehrlich wins a second term or if Republicans build more red inroads into the blue General Assembly (or both), organizations may have no choice but to hire Republican GRPs if they want to engage with Republican stakeholders.

To reiterate, my findings have led me to conclude, successful government relations is accomplished through the application of the personal influence and cultural interpreter models. These models facilitate dialogue and the mutual exchange of information and influence despite the vagaries of asymmetrically presupposed stakeholders that operate in an asymmetrical framework.

Implications of Social Circles

In Annapolis, the introduction of so many new people — who were unknown "outsiders" to many in the Annapolis GRP community — into powerful positions in the Ehrlich administration was a major source of uncertainty. These positions were boundary-spanning positions that liaised the Office of the Governor to the General Assembly and other stakeholders like 501c organizations.

Their recent arrival to and unfamiliarity with Annapolis severely limited some Ehrlich aides' abilities to implement either the personal influence or cultural interpreter models, and informants' abilities in turn. Aides' Annapolitan social circles, if they had

them, in many instances did not overlap with the informants' social circles (or other established Annapolitan social circles). Not knowing the people who wield influence in a political environment means missing out on the dialogue and exchange of information and influence that social circles would otherwise opportune. Social circles theoretically provide stable, unofficial channels for exchanging valuable resources and furthering organizational interests when jolts in the political environment upend official exchange channels. Members share privileged "inside" information because they know and trust each other; they do not just pass around widely known "talking point" information that is gained from official communication channels. But this jolt was such that it upended everything, formal channels and social circles alike.

Many informants were dismayed that some members of the Ehrlich administration who were new to Annapolis did not, would not, or could not employ the personal influence and cultural interpreter models in engaging with their critical stakeholders (i.e., these informants and their organizations and Democrat lawmakers and General Assembly staffers). To make matters worse, informants believed that some Ehrlich administration aides did not make significant efforts to get to know them (and other members of the Annapolitan GRP community), to become part of established social circles in Annapolis, or at least develop rapport with members of these circles. As one informant said: "You have to get to know [the new people who have the power]; they have to get to know you. So we have to get to know each other. That's what we do." But that is not what some of Ehrlich's aides seemed to be doing.

That many Ehrlich aides did not attempt to "court" people and acculturate to Annapolis also revealed them to be ineffective interpreters of that cliquish culture of

Annapolis. They either did not know or did not want to abide by the traditional process of politics in Annapolis; and their closed-off “introverted” process was alternately viewed as ineffective, unfair, or indecipherable. Informants were not miffed because they were not being properly courted; they were miffed because this interfered with the proper functioning of social circles. Boundary-spanning GRPs could not do their jobs to the best of their abilities if boundary spanners for their critical stakeholders were not effectively doing their jobs. These failures in relationships and communication at the interpersonal level began to poison them at the organizational level. The Ehrlich administration’s lashing out at supportive boon organizations, even turning some of them into personae non grata, was evidence of this.

This was more than about not breaking into “Maryland’s cliquish political culture” (Mosk & Rich, 2006, para. 5). The new people, for reasons not readily clear to informants (although they had their theories), were either ignoring or abdicating their interpersonal relationship responsibilities. It is stating the obvious to say relationships take work, but they do; a laissez-faire approach to useful relationships is not smart. As one for-contract GRP observed, if a GRP is lazy, relationships “can quickly become stale and ineffective.” One party may perceive that the “lazy” party either holds it in low regard or feels a low level of commitment to it or both. In turn, the “spurned” party will feel a low level of satisfaction with the relationship. (Commitment and satisfaction are two dimensions of interpersonal and organization-public relationships [J.E. Grunig, 2001].) Without healthy information and influence exchange and dialogue, none of the other positive implications of social circles for any members — Ehrlich aides and boundary-spanning GRPs alike — will be realized. Ehrlich aides’ not cultivating or

nurturing social circles or other useful relations disrupted the traditional Annapolitan political process.

Membership in a social circle, which facilitates implementation of the personal influence model, does lead to access to other well-positioned, in-the-know members. Although access is a “highly perishable commodity, it is no guarantor of success” (Gray, 1989, p. 143) in government relations. This is not to diminish its importance though. Access is a prelude to dialogue.

Informants had multiple reasons for wanting to engage in dialogue (i.e., the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model) with stakeholders: to make stakeholders aware of their organizations’ stances; educate stakeholders about issues of interest; learn about stakeholders’ stances and issues of interest; and learn information that would help the organization make smart, politically prudent decisions and maintain (or heighten) its political legitimacy in a volatile, partisan political environment.

Of course, informants’ greatest motivations for dialogue were advocacy and the opportunity to influence stakeholders’ thought and decision-making processes. Other motivations included the desire to constructively engage with an administration that did not suffer dissenters gladly and the turbulent, uncertain, polarized political environment. Dialogue, which is opportuned through implementing the personal influence and cultural interpreter models, was the most auspicious communication strategy given the situation.

Dialogue is a symmetrically presupposed communication strategy that is motivated by symmetrical and asymmetrical values. The process of dialogue evinces symmetry although parties may hope that their participation in this process leads to an asymmetrical outcome (i.e., one that satisfies organizational self-interest). But the value

of dialogue lies in its process, not necessarily its outcomes. Having seats at the table is always a priority for GRPs and their organizations because with those seats come the opportunity for dialogue. And the GRPs who have seats at the table are personal influencers and cultural interpreters.

GRPs in Annapolis faced a major challenge in post-jolt Annapolis: Opportunities for access, information flow, meaningful dialogic communication, and to be of consequence were not occurring as they had historically under other administrations, even for informants at big-player boon organizations. The jolt of Ehrlich's election undermined the social circle system of famously cliquish and collegial Annapolis, which snowballed into the undermining of the long-standing usual process of politics.

Social circles represent opportunities for information exchange (Aldrich, 1979; Terreberry, 1968), a symmetrically presupposed dialogic activity. In a sense, symmetrically presupposed communication depends on opportunity. An organization may want to engage in dialogue with a stakeholder, but its follow-through will be stymied if that stakeholder does not want to engage in that dialogue. This can be an acute problem for organizations when their political stakeholders are governmental entities. They are interdependent and are of mutual consequence; but the government, as the organizations' "ultimate legislative authority" (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 44), is probably of greater consequence to organizations than organizations are to it. The government (e.g., the Office of the Governor) calls the shots: The dialogue a 501c organization desires with the government occurs only if the government desires it too. If not, no dialogue. Ergo, symmetry depends on, or rather is constrained by, opportunity.

Opportunities for symmetry — in other words, dialogue — under the Ehrlich administration were limited compared with expectations based on opportunities under other administrations. The Ehrlich administration functioned as a less open (or more closed) system in the political environment of Annapolis. This constrained GRPs' abilities to implement the personal influence model with the critical stakeholder of the Ehrlich administration. Diminished access, compounded by the weakened power of social circles, diminished GRPs' opportunities for dialogue. Informants were concerned about the implications of the new process of Annapolitan politics ushered in by Ehrlich's elections on their organizations. Some bane informants wondered if they would continue to get a "fair shake." Some boon informants wondered if they would at last be able to get a fair shake. Informants were concerned about process first and outcomes second.

A New Framework for Understanding Government Relations?

This directly relates to a particularly noteworthy finding: Informants communicated an affinity for symmetrical values. However, their words and deeds likewise communicated a disdain for attitudes and behaviors that were disingenuous, uncommunicative, secretive, purposely unproductive, biased, closed minded, strident, dogmatic, partisan, and even mean. In other words, they decried attitudes and behaviors that evinced asymmetrical values. This theme emerged repeatedly in the data, such as with regard to the worldviews and communication practices of the Ehrlich and Glendening administrations and of informants' organizations.

I believe that this comes down to dialogic processes. Informants were specifically concerned that one, opportunities for dialogic processes had diminished under the Ehrlich

administration; and two, its perceived and demonstrable asymmetrical presuppositions seemed to supersede the inherent symmetrical presuppositions of those processes.

I recently contributed to a research article that explored procedural justice in public meetings (McComas, Tuite, Waks, & Sherman, in press). In fact, I regret not being familiar with procedural justice when I conceptualized this public relations study.⁸ From what I since have learned about this concept, I believe that it (along with the other component of organizational justice, distributive justice) provides a useful framework for interpreting many of this study's findings. Indeed, I believe this framework is so useful that public relations scholars should consider it for conceptualizing and understanding government relations and its "parent" function, public relations.

To those ends, I provide this overview, albeit cursory, of the literature on procedural justice and its potential implications for and application to government relations and public relations. I situate some of the study's results throughout.

Making the Case for Justice as a Framework for Public Relations

Organizational justice is a concept that social psychologists and organizational theorists have used for years to explain individuals' perceptions of fairness and satisfaction in situations that involve decision-making, resource allocation, and uncertainty. Much of this initial research was conducted in legal settings like courtrooms (e.g., Leventhal, 1980; Leventhal et al., 1980) but researchers have explored the concept in workplaces (e.g., McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997) and in medical settings (e.g., Kulik & Holbrook, 2002). It has been applied using a systems-

⁸ I would like to acknowledge the role of Dr. Katherine A. McComas in introducing me to the concept of organizational justice. It is unlikely that I would have stumbled across the concept without her. I am indebted to her for this as well as her insights and encouragement to pursue this concept as a framework for public relations.

theory approach (e.g., Bussman, 1997). Lauber and Knuth (1999) explored it in public-policy processes. They noted that research on justice in policy making was lacking, even though more than a decade earlier Lind and Tyler (1988) pointed out the obvious fact that the concept of justice could lend insight to decisions made by political authorities.

Arguably, justice would be useful in exploring organizations' government relations efforts because these efforts are usually motivated by their self-interested desires to participate and wield influence in governmental decision-making processes. Additionally, justice may be a useful framework for exploring organizational publics' (e.g., employees or community members) participation and influence in organizational decision-making processes.

Some justice scholars have come close to exploring justice within contexts that certainly smack of public relations. Saxby, Tat, and Johansen (2000) explored justice in consumer relations, using it as a framework for understanding consumers' perceptions of fair treatment in organizations' resolution of their complaints. Elsbach (2001) studied justice in crisis and reputation management, using it to explore organizations' explanations and apologia related to internal decision-making processes that led to legitimacy-threatening events.

The entire notion of "voice" in decision-making processes — which affects the perceived fairness or justness of those processes — de facto is about communication (Bies & Moag, 1986). This further hints at the nexus of justice and public relations, because public relations is a communication function of management (as per Long and Hazleton's [1987] definition). Justice scholars have teased out the communication implicit in many aspects of procedural justice. For instance, communication figures

largely in the informational component of procedural justice. One of Leventhal's (1980) widely accepted criteria of procedural justice is that decision-making authorities make available accurate, transparent, truthful, candid, and timely information about the decisional process (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt et al., 2001; McComas et al., in press). Such information effects informational justice.

Communication scholars are just starting to study communication as a discrete aspect of justice, realizing it is a fruitful framework for studying communication and vice versa. McComas, whose research focuses on communication procedures and participant satisfaction in public participation processes (e.g., the U.S. Food and Drug Administration advisory committees), believed that communication scholars, until now, largely have ignored the concept of procedural justice (McComas, personal communication, March 3, 2006). Besley and McComas (2005) and McComas et al. (in press) signal that this is changing.

As much as public relations scholars are public relations scholars, they are also communication scholars. Kim's (2005) dissertation quantitatively explored the role of organizational justice in employee-organization relationships. This was the first major effort to integrate the concept of organizational justice into the public relations body of knowledge. My review of several major theoretical works in public relations (e.g., J.E. Grunig 1992; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002; Heath, 2001), scholarly public relations journals, and repositories of scholarly papers (e.g., the conference papers database of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication [AEJMC]) for instances of public relations scholars' using justice research came up empty. I am following Kim's (2005) lead to bring the "outside" concept of organizational justice —

whose subtexts of communication and participatory decision-making are the two essences of public relations — into public relations.

Justice's parallels with many public relations theories and concepts are nearly uncanny.⁹ Example 1: I found at least three justice scholars who described concepts equivalent to J.E. Grunig and Hunt's (1984) two-way asymmetrical model, which organizations employ to influence, even manipulate, stakeholders, giving them "false" voice. Sampson's (1993) "accommodative justice" is exemplified by organizational participatory mechanisms that accommodate participants' voices but not their influence. The organization is neither influenced by those voiced concerns, nor was that their motivation for letting participants voice concerns. Cohen (1985) described "pseudoparticipation" efforts wherein an authority intentionally misleads people into believing they wield influence a decision while using those efforts to persuade people to accept a decision that the authority already made. (Public relations scholars Hung [2005] and Kim [2005] used the term "pseudo-symmetrical" to describe such efforts.) Pateman (1970) wrote of participatory mechanisms whose goal is persuasion of participants rather than consensual decisions: The organization "has a particular goal in mind and uses the group discussion as a means of inducing acceptance of the goal" (p. 69).

Example 2: I found much in the justice literature that is reminiscent of more affirming public relations concepts than the two-way asymmetrical model. Folger (1986) said that justice "stems from recognition of a principle that decision-makers should allow people who will be affected by a decision to have some voice in the decision-making

⁹ Simone (a.k.a. Tuite) and McComas (2001) found that many public participation concepts parallel public relations concepts, yet the two bodies of literature rarely, if ever, draw from each other. That justice would inform both these literatures and is used by public participation scholars but not public relations scholars is not surprising.

process” (p. 152). Folger’s statement embodies the rationale for the two-way symmetrical model, whose use is a major determinant of public relations excellence, excellence as explained by the dominant metatheory of public relations, the Excellence theory (Dozier et al., 1995; J.E. Grunig, 1992; L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). This model fosters excellence because its dialogic, deliberative, consultative process brings outside voices into organizations’ internal decision-making. It gives stakeholders “true” voice by offering opportunities for organizations and stakeholders to influence each other to affect the outcome of organizational decisions (Jemison, 1984).

J.E. Grunig, the main architect of the two-way symmetrical model, has emphasized that what makes this model an ideal, ethical, and effective model of public relations practice is its process, not its outcomes (L.A. Grunig et al., 2002). Process is why J.E. Grunig (2001) stated that it is ethical to talk with “morally repugnant groups” (p. 15) — giving them procedural justice — but it is unethical to accommodate their desired outcomes — giving them distributive justice. Spicer (1997), a public relations scholar whose collaborative advocacy model is essentially the two-way symmetrical model, noted that symmetry is less about achieving consensual outcomes than it is about the dialogic, collaborative process that brings parties to that outcome. The essence of procedural justice is symmetry and the essence of symmetry is procedural justice.

What Is Justice?

Justice, as an academic concept, is rooted in ethical philosopher John Rawls’ conceptions of fairness and justice in the allocation of societal resources (e.g., see Beauchamp, 1980; Hillier, 1998; Rawls, 1958).¹⁰ Humans have an innate sense of

¹⁰ I believe future exploration of a philosophy of public relations based on Rawlsian ethics would be worthwhile. Although I did not realize at the time, I inadvertently asserted a Rawlsian philosophy of public

fairness and justice; even young children will engage in games such as “Rock, Paper, Scissors” to arrive at decisions fairly. Justice results from the fairness of authorities, procedures, and structures in a society (e.g., the legal system, political system, organizations, and even families.)¹¹ Their fairness provides opportunities for people to get what they are due or owed, or what they deserve or “can legitimately claim” (Beauchamp, 1980, p. 133).

Justice is socially constructed. It is constructed from a sense of how things ought to be, or “oughtness” (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, C.O.L.H. Porter, & Ng, 2001). It is constructed from subjective perceptions that may be rooted in cultural topoi and religious and philosophical systems (e.g., An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; Hiller [1998] suggested justice was based in part on the “golden rule” of “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” [p. 16]). It is constructed from counterfactual thinking, those “what might have beens” (Colquitt, 2004; Folger, 1986) and “if onlys” (Folger, 1986, 1993; van den Bos, 2001) that allow people to distinguish the normative from the positive. Counterfactuals are based on social comparisons about, for example, how much justice one person gets compared with another, speculations, experiences, and norms (Colquitt, 2004). Informants used counterfactual thinking in their judgments of various aspects of the Ehrlich administration and their and other organizations’ legitimacy and

relations in a paper written for a graduate course in public relations ethics in 2001. My philosophy was that public relations should strive to ensure that those who are affected by another’s decisions are given true “voice” — voice that is not just heard but listened to — in decision-making processes. Unfortunately, I lost all copies of this paper in Hurricane Katrina.

¹¹ I have explained the concept of symmetry within a familial context to undergraduate students in public relations. First, I asked them how their high-school curfews were decided. They typically answered that their parents had set curfews without any before-the-fact input from them. Second, I then asked them what they thought of their curfews. Again, the refrain was familiar: They felt their curfews were about one hour earlier than they would have preferred. Finally, I asked, “Would you have felt better about your curfew if your parents had asked for and listened to your opinion and even haggled with you over the time?” Even if their curfew time had been the same, students generally said they would have felt better about their curfews if parents had included them in the decisional process.

inclusion. They compared the contemporary reality to the past (i.e., the Glendening administration) and the imaginable (e.g., how things would have been if not for all of the post-jolt partisan polarization).

Organizational justice has two primary dimensions (Colquitt, 2001). Distributive justice relates to the fairness of the outcome of an interactional decision-making process. Procedural justice relates to the fairness of that process (Bies & Moag, 1986). Most justice researchers focus on this latter dimension because it is the predominant predictor of organizational justice. A participant's perceived fairness of a process is causally related to the perceived fairness of the outcome and his or her acceptance of and satisfaction with that outcome (Barrett-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler, 1994; Weiner, J.A. Alexander, & Shortell, 2002).

Procedural justice determines the commitment a participant feels toward the group of which he or she is a part (e.g., a political system or an organization; Fuller & Hester, 2001; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). Procedural justice also determines a participant's voluntary behaviors on the group's behalf (e.g., voting or buying products; Colquitt, 2001). Further, a participant will be more accepting of outcomes, even if they are unfavorable, if he or she perceives that the decision-making procedures and authorities were fair. These last two points would explain why customers who engaged with human customer-service agents (as compared to automated call systems) were more likely to volunteer constructive advice and accept unsatisfactory outcomes (W.C. Taylor, 2006). Dealing with humans gives customers a higher sense of procedural justice than automated systems. It also explains many informants' feelings about decisions rendered

by the Glendening and Ehrlich administration without their organizations' true voices. A higher sense of procedural justice compensates for a lowered sense of distributive justice.

People seek procedural justice because it provides them process control, which is the ability to voice their views and arguments, and decision control, which is the ability to influence the outcome of allocation decisions that affect them (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Thus there is an implicit element of self-interest in procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992). The general scenario of procedural justice — a decision-making authority allocating resources for which “selfish” participants compete — echoes my general scenario of politics as an asymmetrically presupposed game in which organizations compete, through dialogic processes, for resources political stakeholders may allocate to it. My general scenario of politics, I have asserted, may lend insight into why government relations is an anomaly to the Excellence theory. Given the similarity of the scenarios, procedural justice may offer new insights from which to explore the government relations anomaly.

Tyler and colleagues (Tyler, 1989; Tyler, 1994; Tyler & Bies, 1990; Tyler, DeGoeij, & Smith, 1996) have developed a group-value, or relational, model of procedural justice. This model has particular relevance for my findings, as I will illustrate. Fair procedures symbolize that the decision-making authority respects and values participants (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Tyler, 1994). This may explain why informants assessed their organizations' political status based on their inclusion (and the quality thereof) in official dialogic opportunities with political stakeholders. It may also explain why informants were frustrated by Ehrlich administration aides' perceived non-interest in social circles. Social circles represent unofficial dialogic opportunities.

Participation in fair procedures validates participants' status vis-à-vis the authority and within the larger group. Tyler (1994) noted that people want this information because they want to know their status, which provides them clues about their legitimacy and their interdependence with others in the group. This information is telegraphed by whether decision-makers treated them with respect, propriety, dignity, sensitivity, honesty, and objectivity during the procedures (Bies & Moag, 1986; Lind, MacCoun, Ebener, Felstiner, Hensler, Resnik, & Tyler, 1990; Tyler, 1989, 1994; Tyler et al., 1996; van den Bos, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997). Decision-makers' "morally appropriate conduct" in these processes means that they care about participants' interests, not just their own (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, p. 49). Their motives are mixed, a characteristic that the group-value model of procedural justice shares with the two-way symmetrical model and symmetrically presupposed worldviews. Finally, morally appropriate interpersonal treatment effects interpersonal justice. A necessary component of interpersonal justice, another dimension of procedural justice, is communication (Colquitt et al., 2001; Greenberg, 1993).

The group-value model of procedural justice is useful for exploring the justice in procedures involving interdependent members of a group (Tyler, 1989; Tyler et al. 1996). A group could be comprised of the entities in a political environment or the members of an organization. Thus, this model may be useful for exploring phenomena — like public relations — studied using systems-based organizational theory because interdependence is central in systems theory. The model's "robustness" varies with the degree of interdependence (and frequency of interaction) between group members (Tyler et al., 1996): The greater the interdependence or the more frequent the interaction, the more

robust the model. It is also a particularly useful model when uncertainty abounds (Besley & McComas, 2005; van den Bos et al., 1997; van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998; van den Bos et al., 2001) — as it did in the Annapolitan political environment. This uncertainty could stem from a group member's status; its relationship with the decision-making authority; and the trustworthiness, objectivity, and motivations of the authority. These were all sources of uncertainty perceived by informants. Fair processes provide information that quells these uncertainties, which ameliorates concerns that a decision-making authority will use the procedures to exploit participants (van den Bos et al., 1997). Again, this reflects my findings about the importance informants placed on social circles and participation in official dialogic processes.

Tyler's (1989; Tyler et al., 1996; Tyler & Folger, 1980) research on the group-value model of procedural justice in the political and legal systems is particularly illustrative given the political context of this study. People have expectations about their relationships with and treatment received from public officials (e.g., politicians and police officers). Expectations are based on normative ideals, implicit associations, and experiences. Tyler and his colleagues found that interpersonal treatment and relationships mattered more than anything else, including control in the process or outcome favorability, in a person's judgment of his or her experiences in the political and legal systems. This may also explain why social circles figured so prominently throughout my findings. The interpersonal treatment GRPs did or did not receive from political stakeholders, as opportuned through social circles, were salient aspects of their work lives.

Tyler and his colleagues (1989; Tyler et al., 1996; Tyler & Folger, 1980) have repeatedly interpreted this as people care about procedural justice because they care about having voice and respect even when those do not translate to process or decision control. Participants evidently want something more valuable than the opportunity and ability to influence outcomes (Tyler, 1994); they want interpersonal justice. This is a departure from Thibaut and Walker's (1975) original instrumental conceptualization of procedural justice. This all echoes themes that emerged in my findings: Informants desired constructive relationships with decision-makers and opportunities to participate in dialogic processes (e.g., as would occur in social circles); they would worry about the outcomes later. This is also why lobbying ethics laws tend to target social circles and "good old boy" networks. These unofficial dialogic opportunities are not opportuned for everyone; they effect interpersonal and procedural justice only for members. Conversely, they may also undermine the procedural justice potential of the official dialogic processes that non-members are "limited" to participating in.

Perceptions of procedural justice in the political system affect participants' perceptions of decision-making authorities in that system (e.g., the Maryland General Assembly or the U.S. Congress [Tyler, 1994]). Again, this was the case with my informants, regardless of their ideological leanings or affects toward the Glendening or Ehrlich administrations. Stronger perceived fairness of political decision-making procedures translates to greater satisfaction with and stronger support for decision-making authorities (Colquitt, 2001; Lauber & Knuth, 1999; Phillips, 2002; Tyler & Caine, 1981; Tyler, Rasinski, & McGraw, 1985). This would apply to organizations, enacting the participant role, that interact with the government, as the decision-making

authority. This insight also informs situations where stakeholders (e.g., employees) enact the role of participant and organizations enact the role of decision-making authority.

Fuller and Hester (2001) wrote about how the “appearance of justice” in politics is important. Political authorities may engage in appearances to mitigate citizens’ dissatisfaction, or even “hostility” (p. 282), with decisional outcomes (Tyler & Folger, 1980). But this raises the question of whether political authorities — or really any decision-making authority such as an organization — are concerned with the appearance of justice (as accommodative justice, pseudoparticipation, or the two-way asymmetrical model would accomplish) or with truly doing what is fair by people in terms of interpersonal, information, and procedural and distributional justice (as the two-way symmetrical/mixed-motive model would accomplish).

Participants’ anger, resentment, discontent, and frustration with perceived unfairness and injustice — being dealt with asymmetrically — may fuel their desire to seek retributive justice against decision-making authorities (Folger, Rosenfield, Grove, & Corkran, 1979; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). They want to reply in kind. They have nothing to gain; thus they have nothing to lose, as the curvilinear constraint-symmetry relationship predicts (J.E. Grunig, 1984). In fact, research has shown that people who unwittingly participate under falsely pretended decision-making processes (e.g., pseudoparticipation mechanisms) often see outcomes as less fair than people who did not participate at all in the processes. “False” voice heightens procedural and distributive injustice more than “no” voice — being a *persona non grata*. Their frustrations at having their time and effort wasted, being exploited and disrespected, and having their raised expectations dashed may lead to a primitive desire to punish those who are the sources of

frustration (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). Folger et al. (1979) called this the “frustration effect” (p. 2254).

Frustration caused by procedural and distributional injustice (and arguably interpersonal injustice) may even lead to antisocial behaviors such as rioting (Tyler & Caine, 1981). More mildly, the frustration effect may lead to (and may lend social scientific support to) Ornstein’s battered Congress syndrome (Marcus, 2006) or activism such as strikes, boycotts, and the punitive exploitation of legal loopholes to punish organizations (Simone [a.k.a. Tuite], 2003). The frustration effect may also have some interplay with J.E. Grunig’s (1997a) situational theory of publics, specifically regarding the evolution of active publics into activist publics and the constraint recognition variable. S. Alexander, Sinclair, and Tetrick (1995) called for more research on this visceral form of justice within the justice body of knowledge. I agree, but with the caveat that both justice and public relations scholars should conduct such research because retributive justice appears to be a useful framework for exploring activism against organizations.

To conclude, I realize I have not done justice to the concept of justice here, but that was not my intent. My intent was to share my epiphany — that eureka moment — about the concept of justice’s applicability to another specialized form of public relations, namely government relations, and to public relations generally. I hope, one, to further explore this nexus in my academic career and, two, that other public relations researchers’ curiosity will be sufficiently piqued to explore the same.

Central Research Question 3

In this section, I present a nuanced interpretation of the major findings related to the final central research question: What can be learned from this study that informs the theory and practice of the specialized form of public relations, government relations? My one-word answer: Plenty. My multiple-word answer began in the preceding subsection about organizational justice as a framework for understanding government relations. I continue here within the context of the significance of the study I outlined in Chapter 1.

Significance of the Study

Studying, from an individual-level perspective, the impact of major political change on the work “lives” of boundary-spanning GRPs has applied and theoretical significance. In terms of the former, I believe that this study provides insight into what boundary-spanning GRPs and other organizational members could reasonably expect to happen to them, their organizations, and the political environment when major political change occurs. This is another potential benefit of using organizational justice as a framework for public relations, because it helps inform their expectations. People innately understand the notion of fairness, both in terms of process and outcomes. In fact, many informants’ concerns about how Ehrlich’s election would affect their organizations’ political status were expressed to me in terms of gaining or giving up a seat at the governor’s table or getting (or not) a fair shake from the governor. Both of these evoke the notion of fairness.

The rift between Democrats and Republicans in the United States is narrow, meaning that only a small percentage of votes determines which party controls an elected office or entire governmental body. The rift between Democrats and Republicans in

Maryland and around the country is also deep; political parties and the electorate are more intensely partisan, ideological, adversarial, divisive, and antagonistic than ever. One informant likened the partisan shenanigans in Annapolis to being back in seventh grade. That may be a generous characterization if this anecdote is any indication of the emotional quotient of Annapolitan lawmakers: In a recent debate over the Democrats' latest legislative attempt to antagonize a potential second-term Ehrlich administration, a Republican lawmaker asked, "Why?" A Democrat retorted, "Why not?" (as quoted in Wagner, 2006). So when an election wrests control over an elected office from one party and hands it to the other, that deep rift practically ensures the transition will jolt the political environment with partisan resentment; with newly powerful stakeholders who may or may not be effective boundary spanners, personal influencers, or cultural interpreters; and with other challenges and opportunities for GRPs and their organizations.

Given the current state of narrowly but deeply rifted politics at the state and federal levels, major political change, either in the form of a jolt like Ehrlich's election or increasing partisan polarization, will occur. This dovetails with Finet's (1993) more-relevant-than-ever observation that more research is needed to help organizations deal with a "far more complex and turbulent sociopolitical environment" (p. 58). Finet's observation was one of the four voids in the theoretical literature I asserted in Chapter 1 that my study would help fill.

In Chapter 1, I contended that government relations, a specialized form of public relations, was academically underexplored, and further, that my study would be a

springboard for remedying that. In this section, I demonstrate how this study has indeed functioned as such a springboard.

Implications of the Academic Underexploration of Government Relations

Lobbying is an oft-maligned and suspect activity, spurring the president of the American League of Lobbyists (ALL) to defend it before a U.S. Senate committee in 2006: “Effective lobbying is *not* about access. . . It’s about forthright, ethical communications on issues” (P.A. Miller, 2006, para. 34). Others have asserted that lobbying, when conducted normatively, “plays an essential role in the functions of Congress, representation, lawmaking, deliberation, oversight, and education of the American public” (Thurber, 2006, para. 5; see also McGrath, 1979; P.A. Miller, 2006). Sometimes the positive practice of lobbying is perceived as subverting the normative processes of democratic government.

In the language of organizational justice, lobbying may undermine average citizens’ procedural and distributive justice in the political system. Lobbying’s “visible trappings of special pleading” (Birnbaum, 2006a, para. 2) are viewed as means of buying votes or bribing lawmakers. As French philosopher Michel de Montaigne once said, “There is no more expensive thing than a free gift” (as quoted in “Talking Points,” 2006, p. 19). Lawmakers pay for those free gifts with their integrity, lobbyists pay with their profession’s reputation, and citizens pay with their tax dollars and confidence in governmental institutions.

Concerns about lobbying activities will periodically reach a tipping point and legislation designed to reform or regulate these activities will be enacted. This tipping point was reached in Maryland in the early 2000s and in Washington, DC, in the mid-

1990s. The federal Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (LDA), which was amended in 1998, restricts lawmakers, other officials, and staff from accepting gifts and meals from registered lobbyists.

Unfortunately, the LDA is lousy with loopholes, is largely unenforced, and lacks much-needed transparency and sunshine (Baran, 2006; Sarasohn, 2006; Thurber, 2006). Here is how organizations can get around restrictions on accepting meals from registered lobbyists: An organizational executive can pick up the tab for an expensive dinner with the organization's registered lobbyist and a member of Congress without any worries about violating the LDA. Why? Because the executive is not a registered lobbyist (Birnbaum, 2006a). The LDA also restricts privately sponsored travel except for education purposes. In reality, this frequently — and infamously — has resulted in “boondoggle” junkets, heavy on socializing and recreation and light on education (i.e., a one-hour “fact-finding” tour during a week-long golf outing). Disingenuous skirting of the LDA's rules happen with alarming frequency (Graham, 2006; Thurber, 2006).

The LDA also targeted the revolving door between the federal government and the private sector by imposing a one-year moratorium on lobbying one's former workplace after leaving the federal government. This restriction is often skirted as well. For example: The former U.S. attorney general during the George W. Bush administration, John Ashcroft, opened his own lobbying consulting firm in 2005. Under the LDA, he is barred from lobbying employees of the Department of Justice for one year (Sarasohn, 2006). However, Ashcroft is free to lobby members of the U.S. Senate, to which Ashcroft belonged until losing his re-election bid in 2000.

These fatal flaws of the LDA enabled a powerful lobbyist named Jack Abramoff to flourish nearly unchecked until his activities began to receive media attention in early 2004. As of spring 2006, the Abramoff lobbying corruption scandal has besmirched powerful members of Congress; congressional staffers; and appointed officials, aides, and elected officials in the George W. Bush administration. Abramoff accepted a plea bargain and was sentenced to nearly six years in jail (Whoriskey & Branigin, 2006). This scandal has engulfed innocent-bystanders GRPs, some of whom follow the spirit (not just the exact letter) of the LDA and perhaps even abide by the ethics code of the ALL. Some of them are corporate K Street-“Gucci Gulch” lobbyists whereas others are “cause-based lobbyists” (Copple, 2006).

The Abramoff scandal “could become the biggest congressional corruption scandal in generations” (Schmidt & Grimaldi, 2006, para. 3; see this article for an “inside account” [para. 4] of it). Members of Congress were shocked — *just shocked* (sarcasm intended) — and immediately began efforts to enact reform legislation. But will “the egregious actions of a few. . . provoke a knee-jerk reaction?” (P.A. Miller, 2006, para. 36). The former president of the ALL has previously defended members of the lobbying community: “The vast majority of lobbyists here are honest, hard-working people performing functions that no one has any questions about. They aren’t sleazy or improper” (as quoted in Eisler, 1998, p. 80). Organizations such as the ALL, the American Association of Association Executives, the LobbySense Coalition, and individual GRPs (e.g., Copple, 2006) have publicly pleaded with lawmakers to not enact reform legislation rashly that may do more harm than good. Some proposals would

extend the cooling-off period, ban all privately sponsored travel, and bar former members from accessing the chamber floors of the U.S. House and Senate.

The purpose of these reform efforts are “to correct lobbying abuses [and] strengthen the relative voice of citizens” (Hoerstring & B.A. Smith, 2006) and to quell public disgust with the perceived unsavory, quasi-incestuous relationships between lobbyists and members of Congress. Lobbying is a First Amendment-protected activity; citizens have the right to petition to their government for a redress of grievances (Baran, 2006; Gray, 1989). This is but one reason why Congress is being urged to tread carefully with reform even though polls show that citizens overwhelmingly favor massive reform (Hoerstring & B.A. Smith, 2006, para. 1).

Another reform target is grassroots advocacy. Hoerstring and B.A. Smith (2006) outlined the argument that grassroots lobbying, like direct lobbying, also is a constitutionally protected activity: “The Supreme Court has recognized that ‘there is practically universal agreement that a major purpose of [the First] Amendment was to protect the free discussion of governmental affairs’” (sec. “Grassroots Lobbying Disclosure Provision may be Unconstitutional,” para. 1). This argument was successful in exempting grassroots advocacy from the 1995 LDA.

Thanks to the Abramoff and Cunningham scandals, two of the major activities of government relations, direct lobbying and grassroots lobbying, have bulls’ eyes on them and Congress just may have an itchy trigger finger. I believe that this renews the urgency and highlights the importance of conducting research on government relations — and makes this study all the more theoretically significant and practically applicable. From research such as this study, a more accurate and representative understanding of

government relations will emerge. Lawmakers from all levels of government could look to this study to make thoughtful, considered decisions about advocacy reform rather than a common scandal-pockmarked (mis)understanding of it.

In the absence of such research on government relations, resulting reform may do little to restore public confidence in governmental institutions and elected officials. It may be ridden with loopholes (like the LDA) or overzealous (as ALL and others have intimated may happen). At the time of this writing (in April 2006), the U.S. Senate has passed lobbying reform legislation that has underwhelmed senators who were eager to see significant change, including Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama (Birnbaum, 2006b). In an effort to not pass the “rushed” reform that many in the lobbying industry (and fellow lawmakers) feared and that the ALL and others cautioned against, the Senate perhaps overcompensated.

Not having an accurate understanding of a problem before leaping to fix it may have unintended consequences. Maryland provides an example of the unintended consequences of lobbying reform rules. Maryland reformed its Public Ethics Law in the 2001 and 2002 legislative sessions to address improprieties among some GRPs and lawmakers. One of the new rules forbade GRPs from paying for meals and beverages of individual lawmakers. However, they can pick up the tab for receptions to which “all members of a designated legislative unit are invited” (State of Maryland Ethics Commission, n.d.). One informant, a former lawmaker and current for-contract GRP, said this rule has had “unintended consequences,” one of the pitfalls of too-quickly enacted or not well-considered lobbying reform, or reform not informed by good research. The *intended* consequence of this new rule was to dismantle the overly cozy

“good old boy network” between some GRPs and lawmakers. The *unintended* consequence was that the opposite happened: The rule has actually hindered new GRPs from getting established in Annapolis while buttressing the positions of already-established GRPs who either had deep pockets to pay for receptions (or clients with deep pockets) or with whom lawmakers would be willing to “go Dutch.” This informant believed this rule diminished opportunities for many new self-employed GRPs to get to know lawmakers on a personal level to cultivate and nurture those all-important social circles. If a new GRP is not affiliated with an organization or lobbying firm that has deep pockets, then hosting a reception may be cost-prohibitive. This informant believed that these rules favor the GRPs who are well established — those who can rely on their social circles (instead of contrived social events) for opportunities to interact with lawmakers — and who have deep pockets. In fact, Mosk (2006b) dissected the growing concerns in Annapolis about this very issue.

This may portend yet another attempt at reforming the state’s Public Ethics Laws to get it “right.” The findings of my study, if I am able to get them into the right hands, may be useful in those efforts.

Implications of the Academic Exploration of Government Relations

Government relations lacks positive theories that would explain the actualities of “what people do” (Lave & March, 1993, p. 108) in its practice. Werder (2002) noted this was a problem for public relations generally. Springston and Leichty (1994) called for a “fuller understanding of how public relations practitioners interact with publics, and collect and use information about publics” (p. 687), as well as for a better understanding of routine boundary-spanning activities. I inferred from Werder (2002) and Springston

and Leichty (1994) that these were two of the four voids in the literature I identified in Chapter 1.

I believe that this study, which explored the work lives of boundary-spanning GRPs, helps fill those voids. From this study positive insights about the actualities of government relations and how boundary-spanning GRPs interact with organizational stakeholders have emerged. These insights, which contribute to the body of knowledge of government relations, could be extrapolated to public relations as well.

Boundary-spanning GRPs in Annapolis engage in direct advocacy; oversee member outreach, media advocacy, and PAC activities; facilitate organizational involvement in coalitions; attend formal meetings with stakeholders; participate in state task forces; cultivate and nurture social circles; attend social events during the 90-day legislative session and fundraisers outside of the session; duck partisan crossfire; and seek opportunities for dialogue and collaboration while also trying to optimize organizational self-interest. Through these activities (this list is by no means exhaustive), they work in the external-representation mode. Through this mode, they also procure valuable informational resources from the political environment, which enables them to work in the information-processing mode. In this mode they analyze, contextualize, and package this information for organizational members (some of whom may lack the political savvy to see the “big picture”); and they inject this processed information into the organization’s government relations decision-making process. They seek organizational members’ input on issues and potential courses of action and educate them about issues, challenges and opportunities, organizational strengths and weaknesses, and

viable courses of action. They help decide courses of action to take and implement them. Like the previous list, this list is not exhaustive.

GRPs were able to effectively execute and complete these activities and responsibilities through their implementation of the personal influence and cultural interpreter models of public relations practice, which facilitated dialogic engagement. As I have noted in elsewhere, the use of two models in combination with dialogue explained many aspects of these informants' work lives as boundary-spanning GRPs.

It is logical with a dearth of positive theories about government relations there would be a corresponding dearth of government relations-specific normative theories. To be able to provide advice or offer idealized representations of how things *should* be — as normative theories do — a positive baseline of what is going on needs to be established. Baselines emerge from positive theory. I have determined from the informants' experiences that what they *are* doing as boundary-spanning GRPs negotiating organizational engagement with a jolted political environment is largely what I believe they *should* be doing. I offer the following normative insights about government relations based on an area where what they were doing was not exactly what I believe they should be doing.

Normative Insights

I believe informants and their organizations should pay closer attention to their perceived and actual partisan alignments than they do. These alignments were already salient aspects of their work lives. In a polarized political environment, an organization's partisan alignments are salient to its critical stakeholders as well. Being perceived as a party's "stalking horse" or a pawn (to borrow informants' chess metaphor), whether

justified or not, could cause the other party to consider the organization fair game in the party's partisan conflicts.

This relates to the role of values congruency in personal and organizational political legitimacy. Values congruency is of paramount consideration in political environments, particularly in those marred by partisanship, as Annapolis has been. A political stakeholder confers higher degrees of political legitimacy on those whose values are congruent than those whose values are incongruent. Political legitimacy has far-reaching ramifications for informants and organizations in terms of meaningful participation in governmental policy decision-making processes. It is in these processes where information and influence are exchanged (where procedural justice is sought) and where organizations advocate their interests (where distributive justice is sought).

I contend that organizations that traditionally have engaged in intentional partisanship should try to minimize doing so. As one informant observed about partisanship in Maryland, "The genie is out of the bottle." Even if Ehrlich loses his reelection bid in 2006, the number of Republicans in the General Assembly is on an upward trajectory; and Republicans like the taste of political power. Thus they may not be so easily dominated as they had been before Ehrlich's election.

For instance, many organizations endorse candidates in elections. Even though endorsements are based on a candidate's record of support for the organization's issues — not necessarily the candidate's party affiliation — endorsement likely will be interpreted as aligning with one political party. Organizations may protest against being labeled. Endorsement may work in the organization's favor if that candidate wins, but what if the candidate loses? Maryland is a polarized "you're with me or you're against

me” political environment. Intentionally or inadvertently aligning the organization with one or the other political party has diminishing returns.

The result of endorsing the eventual losing candidate can be the situation that at least one informant’s organization found itself in: *persona non grata* for endorsing Ehrlich’s opponent in 2002. Readers may recall that this informant’s plan was to suggest an entrepreneurial strategy for the 2006 gubernatorial election: Rather than endorsing a candidate, she would recommend that the organization publicize the candidates’ stances and records on relevant issues. The organizations could then sidestep the pitfalls of taking sides in a polarized environment. Of course, taking sides may be exactly what an organization wants to do and that of course is its prerogative. It must realize, however, that the strategy of purposely aligning with one political party is risky given a polarized political environment. This is an increasingly risky strategy in Maryland.

But even an officially nonpartisan organization may not avoid political labels in polarized political environments. That organization might work with lawmakers based on their affinity for issues, not their party affiliations. But what if most of the lawmakers with an affinity for the organization’s issues are members of the same political party? Avowing nonpartisanship provides partisan deniability but what counts is perceptions. These situations create perceptions about that organization; those perceptions form that organization’s reality. Informants could plead to lawmakers that their organizations were officially nonpartisan; but if the lawmakers perceived them as partisan or as “stalking horses” for the other party, that is the reality with which informants had to deal.

The normative way for informants to engage with stakeholders in a polarized political environment would be to minimize their and the organizations’ alignments with

either political party to avoid getting caught in the partisan crossfire. Nonpartisanship can buffer organizations from that crossfire (but as I have noted, buffers are cushions not Kevlar vests). Given the realities of politics in Maryland and elsewhere, this normative suggestion is all it will like ever be: normative. First, most GRPs come up through politics — which allowed them to be the personal influencers and cultural interpreters that allowed them to be effective, successful GRPs — which means that they likely held party-aligned jobs. It is of course possible to hold neutral jobs in politics, such as working for a nonpartisan state agency such as the Department of Legislative Services, and still be personal influencers and cultural interpreters. Second, the temptation to capitalize on “your guys” having political power may be too great.

Organizations will be tempted to maximize their self-interests in the short term, even though this may be problematic in the long term, when “the other guys” come into power and delegitimize organizations associated and aligned with their political adversaries (or enemies, if the partisan conflict is that bitter). Third, a nonpartisan entity is essentially a logical impossibility in a polarized political environment where political meaning is attached to every message and action.

I offer this normative recommendation that organizations are more likely to consider and implement: Be bipartisan. Even if an organization does not see an immediate need to do so, it should pre-emptively hire GRPs with affiliations to the party with which the organization and its current GRPs are not affiliated or implicitly associated.

Alternately, it may be possible to hire a GRP who is a true political animal, a person who loves either the game of politics or American democratic principles so much

that labels of Democrat and Republicans are of minimal concern. These are people like Dick Morris and David Gergen, political consultants who have worked for Democrat and Republican presidents and who have been criticized from the left and right for doing so. They are beyond nonpartisan; they are apartisan. However, if the Maryland K Street project is successful, organizations without Republican GRPs on staff may have no choice but to hire Republicans.

The strategy of being nonpartisan, bipartisan, or apartisan to avoid partisan crossfire in a polarized political environment relates to this noteworthy finding: I found that informants' importance and influence in organizational decision-making did increase post-jolt (as extant research predicted) but not to the degree that would be expected given the amount of turbulence and uncertainty in post-jolt Annapolis. Ehrlich's election heralded a new but not necessarily improved era of extreme partisanship and polarization that required organizations (even those that perceived his election as a boon) to tread carefully.

The Learning Curve of a Two-Party Political Environment

But I have interpreted informants' importance and influence not increasing commensurately with the environment's increased turbulence and certainty as good news: Informants *already* occupied elite positions within their organizations, enjoyed high degrees of personal political legitimacy, and wielded great influence within their organizations, *pre-jolt*. I believe this is because pre-jolt Annapolis was already a dynamic-complex political environment, even though Democrats controlled both the legislative and executive branches. Dynamism and complexity are standard dimensional baselines in political environments (DeHoog & Racanska, 2003).

After the jolt, despite the increased turbulence and uncertainty, there was not much “room” left for informants to grow in importance and influence within their organizations. This benefited organizations post-jolt because they already had people in positions of power who were accustomed to wielding influence within the organization and negotiating the organization’s decision-making processes, namely the informants. The informants had already mastered the learning curve for negotiating the organization’s internal processes, freeing them to master the learning curve of engaging with stakeholders in a partisan, two-party political environment.

I believe that informants at boon organizations might have had an easier time mastering this learning curve than bane informants. Boon organizations under Ehrlich were bane organizations under Glendening (and vice versa). Before the election of Republican governor, these organizations (political legitimacy considerations aside) had to engage with two Democrat critical stakeholders: the governor and the Democrat-dominated General Assembly. These organizations for more or less a generation have had no choice but to engage with the political party (Democrat) with which its value are less congruent because of that party’s dominance of the state government. Engaging with the minority Republican Party was relatively easier, as values congruency existed. Thus, Ehrlich boon organizations have effectively been dealing with engaging with an “unfriendly” critical stakeholder (viz., Democrats) for years. This was an experience that Ehrlich bane (but Glendening boon) organizations did not have: They have focused on engaging with Democrats, with whom they have values congruency, because Democrats have been all whom they needed to engage with to effect their goals. They did not have to engage with Republican lawmakers because Republicans could not make a significant

difference (positive or negative) in organizations' goal achievement. Ehrlich's election, along with some Republican gains in the legislature, forced these bane organizations to confront an unprecedented situation: They had to engage with values-incongruent stakeholders — Republicans — who for the first time in decades wielded real power in Annapolis.

In reviewing the transcripts, it appears that informants' at bane organizations were highly concerned about establishing connections to and engage with Republican stakeholders both in the General Assembly and Office of the Governor. Informants at boon organizations were more concerned about connecting with the Office of the Governor than the General Assembly, mainly because many of the people in the Ehrlich administration were new to Annapolis. These boon informants were relatively relaxed about engaging with newly empowered — but not “new” — Republican lawmakers. However, boon informants' were not as worried about making Republican connections as bane informants were. This is because they had existing connections with Republicans or because they anticipated that their personal and organizational political legitimacy would increase under a Republican governor.

I have one final normative insight gained from exploring the positive practice of government relations. My analysis did not reveal that informants conducted formal research about their critical political stakeholders or the political environment. Such information was typically gleaned through informal methods, such as environmental scanning and interactions with members of social circles. Some informants reported their organizations engaged in formal research activities not necessarily germane to their

government relations programs. A few informants also reported occasionally using polling data from lawmakers' constituents for persuasive purposes with lawmakers.

I have to wonder if in a political environment like Annapolis, when there is so much familiarity among people and so much information exchange, how much better or more accurate information about critical stakeholders formal research would have yielded as compared to what informal research had yielded. Some informants did report conducting formal research during the 2002 election on the two candidates for these same purposes. This included sending questionnaires to the candidates; bringing them in for interview meetings with organizational officials; and investigating their vote histories (this applied only to Ehrlich; the lieutenant governorship was Townsend's first elected office and she did not cast a vote during her tenure), policy positions, and past media interviews. Such formal research supported informants' accurate implicit associations: that Ehrlich, as a Republican, would be friendly toward certain interests and issues (e.g., business, agricultural and animal husbandry, and development) and less friendly than Democrats or unfriendly toward others (environmental and public education). Research also largely supported informants' implicit associations about Townsend (except on the matter of the Intercounty Connector).

Once Ehrlich became governor, informants' implicit associations largely held up; that they did not work out as hoped (or dreaded) was because of the partisanship that polluted the political environment. I think informants expected that there would be some partisan rumblings after Ehrlich's election but never imagined Annapolis would become as polarized as it has. Also much of the partisan conflict was rooted in the interpersonal conflicts among Ehrlich and the two Democrat leaders of the General Assembly (Busch

and Miller, who themselves were at odds). What if the previous speaker of the House, Casper Taylor, had not lost his seat in the 2000 election? He and the Senate President Miller enjoyed a much friendlier relationship than current Speaker Busch and Miller.

I also have to wonder how and what type of formal research could feasibly have been done that might have predicted the eventual polarization in Annapolis. Surveys of lawmakers about how they would react to the two-party situation in Maryland? I question the feasibility of such research. One, Annapolis is too small a community to be asking charged, personal questions that conceivably might have yielded useful information that informants could not have procured elsewhere through informal means. And two, questions like this have too much potential for socially desirable answers. I believe that given the realities and constraints of conducting formal research of critical stakeholders in Annapolis, informal research such as talking among social circles and keeping one's ears to the ground worked well and was informants' best option for information procurement. This research strategy did not work perfectly but it satisfied.

Implications of Conducting Qualitative Research on Boundary Spanning

This qualitative study provides a deep understanding of the individual, lived experiences of boundary-spanning GRPs. I believe my findings have helped to contextualize and triangulate knowledge already known about boundary spanners, their work activities, responsibilities, and areas of influence (further filling Springston and Leichty's [1994] and Jemison's [1984] voids). I believe that there is theoretical and applied value in having engaged in this qualitative endeavor. Those values notwithstanding, I believe that seeking knowledge for knowledge's sake is a worthwhile and admirable endeavor.

My findings did not reveal any trends in my informants' lived experiences as boundary spanners that suggested they experienced anything significantly different than what the extant, largely quantitative-established research on boundary spanning predicted. They worked in the external-representation and information-processing modes; engaged in environmental scanning; participated in their organizations' strategic decision-making processes; and enacted the managerial and technician roles concurrently. The informants did seem to function (by virtue of their personal legitimacy and social circles) as organizational buffers, which I believe deepens the existing public relations literature about boundary spanning.

As I noted in Chapter 1, for various reasons, I was perplexed that I did not find more research on boundary spanning in the public relations literature given the centrality of boundary spanning. After all, I am not alone in concluding that public relations is a boundary-spanning function (e.g., see Everett, 1993; J.E. Grunig, 1991; J.E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; L.A. Grunig, 1987; Huang, 2004; Lauzen, 1994; Lauzen & Dozier, 1994; Mayhew, 1997; Newsom, A. Scott, & Turk, 1989; Philbin, 2005; Wyatt, S.S. Smith, & Andsager, 1996). Springston and Leichty (1994) must have been as perplexed as I was (although a decade before me), which prompted their call for more research on boundary-spanning activities and practitioners' interactions with publics (to use their term).

Like L.W. Porter and Roberts (1976) speculated about communication being difficult to study discretely because it pervades every human endeavor, perhaps boundary spanning is difficult to study discretely within public relations because it pervades every public relations endeavor. I believe there is much, much more that public relations researchers could add to this concept. I believe this dissertation is a good start.

Limitations and Strengths

As all studies do, this study has limitations; I discuss the two that are unique to this project. First, some scholars may find that this study is handicapped because I conducted the interviews with informants via telephone. I believe my geographical whereabouts (which were understandable and personally unavoidable) during the time of the data collection justified this approach. I do recognize that the best scenario for conducting qualitative interviews may be in person. However, given the successful process and outcomes of the telephone interviews, I daresay that conducting the interviews in-person would not have resulted in even marginally more success. Thus I do not believe that my study's data, findings, or implications need an asterisk cautioning: "Take this study with a grain of salt: Data collected via telephone."

Second, this was a Maryland-specific qualitative study, the findings of which were not intended to be generalized to boundary-spanning GRPs who operate in political environments elsewhere. However, Maryland does not have a monopoly on polarized partisan political environments; unfortunately these adjectives are increasingly accurate descriptions of other states' political environments, as well as of localities and Capitol Hill. This study's results may not be generalizable, but they may provide boundary-spanning GRPs beyond Maryland's borders with useful insights about what they have experienced in their respective polarized, partisan political environments and why.

I believe that the strengths of this study more than compensate for its limitations. One of these strengths is the counterpart to the last limitation, about this being a Maryland-specific study. Maryland served as a near-perfect contemporary laboratory for exploring the impacts of major political change and polarization on denizens of a political

environment. I conducted the interviews three years after Ehrlich was elected while the impacts of his election were on-going. I did not ask informants to recall long-ago events. I asked them about events fresh in their minds and their recent and on-going experiences. The study's timing minimized the potential for recall bias.

Another of the study's strengths comes from the quantity and quality of the informants' interviews. I collected data from 40 boundary-spanning GRPs. This is a significant number of interviews for a study, well beyond what Warren (2002) said was sufficient for a publishable study but on par with the "gold standards" established by the University of Maryland dissertations of Hon (1992) and Hung (2002). As I noted in Chapter 3, I reached informational sufficiency well before the 40th interview; but I continued to interview informants because of the breadth of perspective that was gained from the "extra" interviews. These interviews facilitated the deep understanding I sought of the individual lived experiences of boundary-spanning GRPs enduring a major jolt in their organizations' political environment.

I was fortunate with respect to three aspects of the data collection. One, my attempt to effect a stratified purposeful sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of boon and bane informants worked out better than I could have hoped: Seventeen informants worked for boon organizations, 17 worked for bane organizations, and six worked for organizations that perceived Ehrlich's election neutrally. This achieved a balance of views about Ehrlich, a Republican, becoming governor in a state where Democrats had dominated politics for decades. This also achieved an ideological balance across the spectrum of informants. Two, although I had solicited interviews with GRPs who, from their job titles, appeared to occupy senior, junior, and even entry-level positions, all of the

GRPs who participated in my study occupied senior-level positions. All of the in-house GRP informants occupied upper-echelon (i.e., not below the second row on the organizational chart) management positions in their organizations. The for-contract GRP informants held senior-level positions at their direct employers (i.e., lobbying consulting firms) or owned their own consulting firms. They also functioned as members of the clients' dominant coalition on government relations matters. Three, I did not have a "bad" interview in the bunch. All of the interviews were active, flowed naturally, and were conversational. As a result the data I collected were of very high quality and there were copious amounts of them.

The last strength unique to this study is the researcher, namely me. I have taken meticulous care over the nearly three years I have worked on this study to develop a richly conceptualized framework from the literatures in public relations and organizational theory. I was rigorous and disciplined and compartmentalized my political biases and cultural topoi throughout the data collection, description, analysis, and interpretation phases of the study. I have strived to clearly articulate that framework, as well as the research design, the findings, and my analyses and interpretations thereof. I hope that the study's readability, thoroughness, interestingness, and — most importantly — its theoretical insights and practical applicability offset its lack of brevity.

Directions for Future Research

This dissertation has uncovered real theoretical and practical needs for research on the interpersonal communication and networks of organizational boundary spanners in government relations specifically and public relations generally. Weedman (1992) used the concept of social circles to study the interpersonal communication channels between

boundary spanners. Drawing on the work of Kadushin (1968), she defined a social circle as “a set of individuals connected to one another by some form of social choice” (p. 258). “Social circles” has been my shorthand term for one’s network of personal and professional contacts. It logically can be assumed that members of social circles discuss their jobs and thus exchange work-related knowledge, insights, and gossip and that exchange occurs more quickly, frequently, and readily among members than non-members (Burt, 2000).

As I learned from my informants, social circles were important in many other aspects of their work activities and responsibilities beyond information and influence exchange. I have traced many of the study’s major findings about organizational legitimacy and the prevalence of the personal influence model and dialogue to informants’ social circles. Informants’ social circles were in the background of every other finding; they were subtly ubiquitous but extremely important. They factored into organizations’ political legitimacy; they functioned as unofficial forums for dialogue, deliberation, and decision-making; they provided entrée; they served as buffers; they helped organizations play the asymmetrical game of politics; they facilitated the effective execution of nearly all boundary-spanning activities; and they enabled informants to be personal influencers and to enact the manager role within their organizations. Social circles were cohesive elements that held all aspects of informants’ work-lives together. Informants realized this, which is why they were so concerned about the breakdown and slow rebuilding of social circles after the jolt of Ehrlich’s election. In fact, I think my insights about social circles help fulfill the research void about factors that affect

boundary spanners' influence (Jemison, 1984). This is the last of the four voids in the public relations literature I asserted my study would help to fill.

However, I do believe my findings about the centrality of informants' social circles in their work activities and responsibilities, participation in organizational decision-making, influence in their organizations, and the legitimacy conferred on their organizations by stakeholders highlights the importance of interpersonal communication and interpersonal networks in government relations (as well as other specialized forms of public relations). Interpersonal communication and networks are often explored within the context of interpersonal relationships; this is logical because communication comprises and influences relationships (Rogers & Escudero, 2004), as do social bonds.

The idea of exploring the concept of relationships in public relations is not new. Public relations scholars began to give serious attention to the concept of relationship management when Ferguson (1984) suggested that relationships — instead of communication, organizations, or stakeholders — should be the unit of study for public relations. In the ensuing years, many scholars have ruminated about what relationships are; whether they can be measured and if so, how; and their implications for public relations theory and practice. One of the other most pressing research priorities is relationship management in public relations. Much of this research is at the organizational level, focusing on organization-public relationships (OPRs; see Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; J.E. Grunig & Hon, 1999; Hung, 2002; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000).¹² I am calling for research on communication and networks at the level of interpersonal relationships. In fact, research on OPRs borrowed concepts (e.g., the four

¹² I have purposely delimited this literature from my study. There is a “flood” of research on OPRs. Fully incorporating it into my study might have drowned it. Further, the relationships of interest to me for this study are found at the individual, interpersonal level.

dimensions of trust, commitment, control mutuality, and satisfaction) from the research literature on interpersonal relationships (J.E. Grunig, 2001; see Canary & Stafford, 1992; Huang, 1997; Stafford & Canary, 1991).

Coombs (2001) called the intersection of interpersonal theory with public relations “an idea whose time has arrived” (p. 105). As I have discussed, individual-level relationships between informants and the people who functioned as boundary spanners for critical stakeholders (e.g., staff members in the governor’s Legislative Policy Office or lawmakers themselves) had significant implications for organizations. My research substantiated that these interpersonal relationships were the major factor in how politics and governance were accomplished (or not) in cliquish, small-town Annapolis. Research attention should be paid to interpersonal relationships and communication in public relations. I also believe that related concepts such as social circles and networks (e.g., see Borgatti & Everett, 1992; Kadushin, 1968; Milgram, 1967; Weedman, 1992) and social capital (e.g., see Burt, 2000; Lin, 1999) provide fertile ground for future public relations research in government relations that would also benefit the general body of knowledge in public relations. Additionally, interpersonal justice is a major component in the group-value model of procedural justice, a concept which I assert holds much promise for public relations.

Research involving any of these topics also would have tremendous positive implications for the public relations body of knowledge and real-world organizational outcomes. Such research would be useful for nourishing the somewhat lean body of positive knowledge of government relations as well. I believe results related to social circles and the personal influence models are positive steps toward understanding why

the Excellence theory does not explain government relations as well as other specialized programs in public relations. Further, I believe those positive steps are in the direction of social networks and social capital.

I offer this story about manned versus automated customer-service call centers to illustrate my point about why research should focus on the interpersonal level. The story also illustrates the positive impact of interpersonal communication on customer satisfaction, loyalty, organization reputation, and organizational effectiveness. These translate into measurable outcomes such as sales and market share. This story also illustrates some of my points about the potential utility of organizational justice in public relations research.

Russ et al. (1998) suggested that customer-service agents could function as organizational boundary spanners; they function as points of contact for customer stakeholders, listening to (and perhaps resolving) their concerns, and bringing information gleaned from these stakeholders to the attention of other organizational members. Public relations professionals should take notice of W.C. Taylor's (2006) plea to corporations with automated customer-service call centers: "Answer the phone! How can companies listen to their customers if those customers have such a hard time reaching a human being when they call?" (para. 7). W.C. Taylor interviewed the president of an organization that conducts research of customers' evaluations of interactions with customer-service call centers. Customer service-related interactions with live people generate more positive outcomes, such as customers' volunteering useful information and heightening their sense of loyalty, than automated interactions (e.g., "Press one if you have questions about your bill"). This is true even when the agent is unable to resolve the

situation that generated the customer's call. Even this is about justice: Talking with a live customer-service agent is more procedurally just than contending with an automated system. Human interaction enhances the interpersonal justice factor of procedural justice, as well as customers' control over the process and their true voice in it. And a more-just process more than compensates for less-just outcomes. This president said: "You create more value through dialogue with a live agent. A call is an opportunity to build a relationship, to encourage customers to stay with the brand. There can be a real return on this investment" (as quoted in W.C. Taylor, 2006, para. 10). Brand and company loyalty are difficult to muster in competitive, saturated markets. As a result, engaging in engaging activities can pay big dividends for corporations.

W.C. Taylor's (2006) article illustrates my point that interpersonal interaction, whether between a customer service agent and customer or a GRP and a lawmaker, can have significant implications for the organization. More generally, this is why political campaigners canvass neighborhoods and stand post at high-foot-traffic areas (like Metro stations or neighborhood meeting spots) in their legislative districts: They want to meet people, look them in the eye, shake their hands, and make them feel as if there is a connection between them. These efforts heighten perceptions of interpersonal and procedural justice.

More anecdotally, Al Kamen, the political quasi-gossip columnist for the *Washington Post*, recounted this tale of how interpersonal communication with a Democrat has changed the party loyalties of ardent "life-long conservative" Jeffrey Volk. Hurricane Katrina trapped this well-connected Republican high-dollar donor and his family in New Orleans. His many calls to the White House and FEMA yielded no results

and little satisfaction but many excuses. He then called the office of his U.S. senator, Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton, whom he had never met, to see if her office could in any way assist the group of New Yorkers who had banded together to ride out the storm and ensuing flooding of the city. Clinton's office kept in constant contact with him throughout the ordeal; he said: "I can't begin to tell you how much that meant to us" (Kamen, 2006, para. 11). After this ordeal, Volk and Clinton met in person, finding that although they disagreed about some things, they agreed on much more than either of them expected. He now says he will seriously consider supporting her as yet-hypothetical bid for president in 2008. The lesson of all this, Kamen noted, is to never forget or ignore constituent service. But this anecdote again goes to show that the time and effort an organizational boundary spanner invests in simple interpersonal communication may have an exponential ROI. To paraphrase a 1990s political admonishment: It's about the interpersonal communication, stupid!

To conclude, I encourage future research on communication, social networks and circles, social capital, and shorter-term (e.g., between a customer and customer-service agent) and longer-term interactions (e.g., between a GRP and a critical stakeholder) at the interpersonal level. Such research would benefit the comprehensive body of knowledge not just of government relations but of other specialized public relations programs as well.

APPENDIX A

First Appeal Mailing to Sent to Group 1 Potential Informants

<<DATE>>

<<Title>> <<First Name>> <<Last Name>>

<<Position Title>>

<<Organization Name>>

<<Address 1>>

<<Address 2>>

<<City>>, <<State>> <<Zip>>

Dear <<Title>> <<Last Name>>:

By virtue of your position at <<Organization Name>>, you function as a “boundary spanner” between your organization and Maryland’s political environment. This puts you in the unique position of being attuned to and affected by changes in that environment. That is why I am contacting you: to invite you to participate in a research project about how and why major political change affects boundary-spanning communication professionals at nonprofit organizations that, to some degree, engage in political advocacy. The backdrop for this project is the election of Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. in 2002 as Maryland’s first Republican governor in nearly 40 years. I am hoping that you would share your insights with me for this important project. **To that end, please consider participating in two telephone interviews with me.**

I am a doctoral student of public relations in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland. Maryland is widely considered to have the nation’s top graduate program in public relations. I also have several years of experience in political public relations. This dissertation project, “How Boundary Spanners Experience Organizational Recalibration to ‘Jolted’ Political Environments,” melds my academic and professional interests. One of my goals for the project is to develop an “expectations framework” that boundary-spanning professionals can use to understand what may happen to them during times of major political change and why.

As you consider participating in this important project, I encourage you to both read the enclosed Informed Consent Form and visit www.geocities.com/simoneterp/LSTwebsite.html. My Web site offers more details about:

- the study,
- why you were contacted,
- who I am,
- the Informed Consent Form and how you can attest to your informed consent,
- why the interviews need to be conducted by telephone,
- the participants’ raffle, and

- how you can pick the date and time for your first interview using an on-line scheduling program.

Please note that each interview may take up to 90 minutes of your time (or more or less—it's up to you) and if you grant me permission to do so, I would like to audiotape the interviews. You will never be identified by name in any reports emerging from the project; I will keep your identity *strictly confidential*, meaning that only you and I would know that your answers are in fact *yours*. If you are interested, once the project is complete, I will be happy to send an executive summary of my dissertation to you.

Should you decide you'd like to participate, please visit my Web site to (1) determine how you would like to attest to your informed consent and (2) access the on-line interview scheduler. **Everyone who participates will be entered into a raffle for a \$100 American Express gift card.**

I would be happy to answer any questions you might have about this project or your participation in it. Please feel free to contact me at (228) 875-7587 or leahtuite@bellsouth.net.

Your assistance on this project is greatly appreciated. Thank you, <<Title>> <<Last Name>>, for your time and consideration.

Very truly yours,

Leah Simone Tuite
Doctoral Student

P.S.—As you consider assisting me in completing this important research project, please remember to check out my Web site, www.geocities.com/simoneerp/LSTwebsite.html.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Maryland, College Park on December 14, 2005.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identification of Project/Title	How Boundary Spanners Experience Organizational Recalibration to “Jolted” Political Environments
Statement of Age of Participant (parental consent needed for minors)	I state that I am 18 years of age or older and wish to participate in a program of research being conducted by Dr. Larissa A. Grunig and Leah Simone Tuite in the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland College Park, Maryland 20742-7635.
Purpose	The purpose of the research is to explore the experiences of public relations, communication, media relations, and/or government relations professionals (“boundary spanners”) who work for nonprofit organizations or for-profit corporations during major external political change.
Procedures	<p>The procedures involve participating in two telephone interviews, each envisioned to last no more than 90 minutes, with Leah Simone Tuite, about my experiences as a boundary spanner for a nonprofit organization. With my consent (indicated in a box at the end of this form), the interviews will be audiotaped.</p> <p>Some likely questions include: How did your work activities change once Robert Ehrlich, Maryland’s 1st Republican governor in nearly 40 years, took office in January 2003? How did your organization assess his election? Did his election affect your position within your organization’s power structure? If so, how?</p>
Confidentiality	All information collected in the study will remain confidential, and my name and the name of my organization will not be identified at any time unless I give my express consent to reveal these identities. The data I provide will not be linked to my name or organization; the data will be grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation. All data will be securely stored and kept in the possession of the Student Investigator in her home office in Mississippi. Further, all data will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of five years after data collection, as is standard academic practice.
Risks	I understand that there may be a minimal personal risk associated with my participation if I consent to have the interview audiotaped. That the source of the data could be identified presents another potential minimal risk.
Benefits	I understand that this research project is not designed to help me personally, but that the investigators hope to learn more about how major changes in an organization’s external political environment may affect an organizational boundary spanner’s work activities, responsibilities, and organizational position.

Freedom to Withdraw, & Ability to Ask Questions I understand that I am free to ask questions and/or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty and/or decline to answer certain questions.

Contact Information of Investigator(s) Dr. Larissa Grunig (Principal Investigator) and Leah Simone Tuite (Student Investigator)
University of Maryland Department of Communication
2130 Skinner Building
College Park, MD 20742-7635
Phones: 301-405-6532 (Grunig), 228-875-7587 (Tuite)
E-mails: lgrunig@umd.edu, leahtuite@bellsouth.net

Contact Information of Institutional Review Board (IRB) If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-4212**

Obtaining a copy of the research results I understand that I may obtain a copy of the results of this research after July 1, 2005 by contacting Leah Simone Tuite at leahtuite@bellsouth.net.

Printed Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

PERMISSION FOR MY INTERVIEW TO BE AUDIOTAPED

YES, I grant permission for my interviews to be audiotaped.

NO, I do not want my interviews to be audiotaped.

Initial _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

Second Appeal Mailing Sent to Group 1 Potential Informants

<<DATE>>

<<Title>> <<First Name>> <<Last Name>>

<<Position Title>>

<<Organization Name>>

<<Address 1>>

<<Address 2>>

<<City>>, <<State>> <<Zip>>

Dear <<Title>> <<Last Name>>:

As you may remember, I contacted you in late December about participating in my dissertation research project, "How Boundary Spanners Experience Organizational Recalibration to 'Jolted' Political Environments." This project is looking at how and way major political change affects boundary-spanning communication professionals at nonprofit organizations that, to some degree, engage in political advocacy. The backdrop for this project is the election of Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. in 2002 as Maryland's first Republican governor in nearly 40 years.

Since I sent you and others that letter, it has become clear to me that my project was flawed. One, I was asking for too much and two, the timing was terrible. It was unrealistic to ask working professionals to do two 90-minute (or so) telephone interviews with me, let alone to ask for these interviews during what is their busiest time of the year, namely the state's legislative session.

To address the study's (fortunately) not-quite-fatal flaws, I have developed a "Version 2.0: of the project, which I hope you will mull over being a participant in. **Specifically, please consider participating in one 60- to 90-minute telephone interview with me sometime during the next several months.** Even if you can spare only 30 or 45 minutes, I would still value your contributions to the project.

As you consider participating in my Project Version 2.0, I have taken the liberty of enclosing a printout of my Web site (<http://www.geocities.com/simoneterp/LSTwebsite.html>). The Web site offers more details about the project and participation. It also explains how you can either go ahead and schedule your interview or postpone your interview to a less-busy time of the year (see the enclosed "Delayed" Interview Preference form). You can use the enclosed stamped, pre-addressed envelope to send this form and/or the University-required Informed Consent Form to me.

Again, I would be happy to answer any questions you might have about my project or your participation. Please feel free to contact me at 228-875-7587 or leahtuite@bellsouth.net. Thank you, <<Title>> <<Last Name>>, for thinking about giving my dissertation project a shot.

Very truly yours,

Leah Simone Tuite
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

Third Appeal Mailing Sent to Group 1 Potential Informants

<<DATE>>

Dear <<Title>> <<Last Name>>:

Now that the 2005 Maryland legislative session has ended, **I am undertaking one last attempt to drum up participants for my dissertation research project**, “How Boundary Spanners Experience Organizational Recalibration to ‘Jolted’ Political Environments.”

As you may remember from my previous communications to you, I am seeking to talk to people about their experiences working in government relations, public relations and communications for nonprofit organizations and trade associations that operate in Maryland and, to some degree, engage in political advocacy.

Only about 30 people are needed to participate in my study for it to be “dissertation worthy,” and truth be told, I am rather short of this goal. I am hopeful that with the legislative session now over, people would have the time to spare for my study. **All that participation entails is a one-hour or so telephone interview with me sometime before the end of September.** Thus I am contacting you again—the last time I will do so—to ask if you would **please participate in my study.** Everyone who participates will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 American Express gift card.

For more details about my study, please visit www.geocities.com/simoneterp/LSTwebsite.html. You can self-schedule an interview through this site, or you may contact me at leahtuite@bellsouth.net or 228-875-7587 to do so.

Thank you so much for reconsidering being a participant in my dissertation project and helping me realize my dream of becoming a Ph.D.!

Best regards,

Leah Simone Tuite, Doctoral Candidate
University of Maryland, Department of Communication

APPENDIX E

Appeal Mailing Sent to Group 2 Potential Informants

<<DATE>>

<<Title>> <<First Name>> <<Last Name>>

<<Position Title>>

<<Organization Name>>

<<Address 1>>

<<Address 2>>

<<City>>, <<State>> <<Zip>>

Dear <<Title>> <<Last Name>>:

My name is Leah Simone Tuite; I am a doctoral candidate in communication at the University of Maryland. I am writing to you today to ask for your assistance in my dissertation research project.

Despite its overly academic title (“How Boundary Spanners Experience Organizational Recalibration to ‘Jolted’ Political Environments”), the project itself is quite rooted in the “real world.” The project is exploring the work lives of government relations and communication professionals in Maryland against the backdrop of the election of the state’s first Republican governor after nearly 40 years of Democrat governors.

I am seeking to talk to people about their experiences working in government relations, public relations and communications for 501(c) organization that operate in Maryland and that also, to some degree, engage in political advocacy. **All that participation entails is a one-hour or so telephone interview with me sometime before the end of September.** Even if you could spare only 30 or 45 minutes, I would still value your input on the project. Everyone who participates will be entered into a drawing for a \$100 American Express gift card and will receive an executive summary of the project once it is completed. (In case you are wondering, I am conducting the interviews by telephone because I live in Mississippi due to my husband’s job as an officer in the U.S. Navy.)

As you consider participating in my project, I have taken the liberty of enclosing a printout of my Web site (<http://www.geocities.com/simoneterp/LSTwebsite.html>). On this site, you can find more details about the project, the University-required Informed Consent Form (also enclosed), and me.

Should you like to assist me in the completion of my dissertation by doing an interview, you can self-schedule your interview through the Web site, fill out and return the enclosed “Please Contact Me” form (also enclosed is a stamped, pre-addressed return envelope), or simply contact me at leahtuite@bellsouth.net or 228-875-7587.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have about my project or your participation in it. Please feel free to contact me at leahtuite@bellsouth.net or 228-875-7587. Thank you so much for considering being a participant in my dissertation project and helping me realize my dream of becoming a Ph.D.!

Best regards,

Leah Simone Tuite
Doctoral Candidate

P.S.—Your participation in my study would not cause you to disclose any proprietary or confidential information to me. I am purely interested in your individual experiences and insights from your perspective as a participant in the Maryland political process. Further, all information collected in the study will remain confidential, and neither your name nor the names of your organization or clients will be identified at any time unless you give your express consent to reveal these identities. The data you provide will not be linked to your name or organization or clients; the data will be grouped with data others provide for reporting and presentation.

APPENDIX F

Interview Protocol

Name of Informant:

Title:

Organization/Client(s):

Date of Interview:

Time start:

Time stop:

Pre-brief:

- _____ Engage in small talk with the informant.
- _____ Thank the informant for agreeing to be a part of the study.
- _____ Reintroduce the study.
- _____ Remind the informant of rights, confidentiality considerations, etc.
- _____ Answer questions he or she may have about the study, me, etc.
- _____ Reconfirm audiotape decision. Then explain that he or she will be placed on speakerphone to facilitate the audiotaping and to let you know when/if they want taping to stop.

<p>Always ask the first question set first. Then ask these questions/cover these topics in no particular order. Use probes and follow-up questions!!!</p>	<p>Notes and Impressions</p>
<p>_____ Professional background.</p> <p>_____ How did you come to work for your organization?</p>	
<p>_____ Connections to Ehrlich administration?</p> <p>_____ To Glendening administration?</p> <p>_____ To the General Assembly?</p> <p>_____ Democrats or Republicans?</p> <p>_____ How do you know them?</p> <p>_____ Benefits/implications of connections?</p>	

<p>_____ Benefits of knowing the “ropes”?</p> <p>_____ Effect of Ehrlich’s election on connections?</p>	
<p>_____ Organization’s views of Ehrlich winning the 2002 gubernatorial election?</p> <p>_____ Views based on what?</p> <p>_____ His election was good or bad for organization?</p> <p>_____ Organization’s views now, two plus years into the Ehrlich administration?</p> <p>_____ Effects of Ehrlich’s election on Annapolis?</p>	
<p>_____ What do you think the Ehrlich administration thinks of your organization?</p> <p>_____ How does this compare to Glendening’s views?</p> <p>_____ Reasons for their views?</p> <p>_____ Implications of good or bad graces?</p> <p>_____ How often does the Ehrlich administration include (or consult with) your organization?</p> <p>_____ How does this compare to Glendening?</p> <p>_____ Reasons for their inclusion or exclusion?</p> <p>_____ Describe interactions.</p> <p>_____ Satisfied or dissatisfied?</p> <p>_____ Implications?</p>	
<p>_____ Tell me about your job. Describe a typical workday/workweek (if there is such a thing!).</p>	

<p>_____ What government relations activities does your organization engage in?</p> <p>_____ Your involvement?</p> <p>_____ Lobbying</p> <p>_____ Grassroots</p> <p>_____ Grasstops</p> <p>_____ Coalition work</p> <p>_____ Task forces</p> <p>_____ Media advocacy</p> <p>_____ PACs</p> <p>_____ Social activities</p> <p>_____ Strange bedfellows</p> <p>_____ Nonpartisan/bipartisan</p> <p>_____ Involvement in elections</p> <p>_____ Differences pre- and post-Ehrlich election?</p>	
<p>_____ Management structure – Where do you fit in?</p> <p>_____ Answer to whom?</p> <p>_____ Work with whom?</p> <p>_____ Who makes government relations decisions?</p> <p>_____ Your involvement in such decision-making?</p> <p>_____ Describe organizational decision-making process(es).</p> <p>_____ How much autonomy in your job?</p>	

<p>_____ Latitude to make strategic/tactical decisions?</p> <p>_____ Differences pre- and post-Ehrlich election?</p>	
<p>Wrap-up questions:</p> <p>_____ What's different for you since Ehrlich's election?</p> <p>_____ What's different for organization since Ehrlich's election?</p> <p>_____ What's different for Annapolis since Ehrlich's election?</p> <p>_____ Implications for you?</p> <p>_____ Anything else you like to mention that we have not touched upon but is relevant to what we've been talking about?</p>	

Debrief:

- _____ Thank the informant again.
- _____ Ask if it would be OK to contact for follow-up if necessary.
- _____ Confirm that he or she wants a copy of the executive summary.
- _____ Explain when you will send those out and the AmEx gift card.

APPENDIX G

Information About Informants

#	Position	Type of Organization	Professional Background
1	Executive director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local government Legal work
2	Member, board of directors	501c(3)/501c(4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historic preservation Fundraising Legal work
3	In-house GRP	501c(6)	Law enforcement
4	For-contract GRP	501c(4) and 501c(6) clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State legislative work Legal work Military
5	Executive director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journalism
6	State director	501c(4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journalism Policy research
7	For-contract GRP	501c(4) and 501c(6) clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal legislative and political experience State legislative and political experience Legal work
8	Department director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Association management
9	Committee chair (volunteer)	501c(4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal government Legal work
10	President	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business management Federal-level trade association government relations
11	For-contract GRP	501c(4) and 501c(6) clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal-level campaign management and fundraising State-level campaign management and fundraising Corporate government relations
12	Regional director	501c(3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Banking Business development Fundraising
13	Vice president	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rose up through organization

14	Committee chair (volunteer)	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal work
15	Managing director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education
16	For-contract GRP	501c(4) and 501c(6) clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former elected official • State government agency GRP
17	For-contract GRP	501c(4) and 501c(6) clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate legal and legislative counsel
18	Department director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal legislative experience • County legislative experience
19	Department director	501c(4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City government GRP • Legal work
20	President and CEO	501c(3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social work
21	Department director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal government agency experience • Former appointed official • Campaign management
22	Executive director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association management • Corporate government affairs
23	Executive director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Public school administration
24	President and CEO	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association management • Higher education
25	President and CEO	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Association management • Corporate public relations • Public information for city government
26	Executive director	501c(3)/501c(4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education • Local government • Science
27	Co-chair	501c(4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military • Computer and software testing
28	For-contract GRP	501c(4) and 501c(6) clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former elected official • Legal work
29	For-contract GRP	501c(4) clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher education

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former appointed official • GRP
30	Associate director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State government experience • Legal Work
31	Assistant executive director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Political public relations
32	Department director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal-level legislative and campaign experience • State-level legislative and campaign experience • Legal work • Former appointed official
33	Department director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State government experience
34	Department director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business management • Volunteer work
35	Senior vice-president	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-level legislative experience
36	Executive director	501c(4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State government experience • Legal work
37	President	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical doctor
38	Department director	501c(3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy research • Government agency experience • Lobbying
39	President	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State agency GRP
40	Executive director	501c(6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care finance • Public accounting • Association management

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