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ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE FORMATION: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY THROUGH INFORMAL NEGOTIATIONS OF SYMBOLIC SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE FORMATION: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY THROUGH INFORMAL NEGOTIATIONS OF SYMBOLIC SYSTEMS

By

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This study examines the cultural change process that occurred within an organizational culture. The focus is on how cultural meanings are socially created and defined and how they come to be shared. At a broad level, organizational culture change occurs as collective responses to group problems. The central problem concerns how a group, without conscious articulation, develops a relatively uniform definition of the nature of the "problem," how a consensus forms on the appropriate responses, and how these responses are communicated to and accepted by the group members. The research was conducted through participant observation and interviews at a local restaurant that was undergoing an organizational crisis. My research indicates that this shared nature develops through a nonconscious, informal negotiation process of symbols and their meanings. This conclusion is based on an extensive analysis of the creation, development, and use of a symbol which occurred during my research.

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I would like to gratefully acknowledge the members of my graduate committee - Kenneth David, Melissa Barker, and David Dwyer - for their insightful comments and willingness to share a great deal of their valuable time with me.

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INTRODUCTION

This Thesis examines the creation/change process of an organizational culture with a focus on the creation of the symbols that are used to transmit the modified meanings of the new culture. Specifically, I focus on how (and to a lesser degree why) symbols and their meanings are socially created, how they come to be shared, and the informal negotiation process through which this occurs.

I start by briefly introducing some relevant concepts from the literature that pertain to my thesis. The main body of the thesis is divided into two parts. The first deals at a general level with a discussion of issues concerning the formation of culture as collective definitions and responses to shared group problems, setting the general framework for the later more in depth analyses. In this section I also introduce the research setting. The central case involves a group's responses to an organizational crisis in which elements of the prevailing organizational culture were challenged.

To simply state that cultures form as responses to shared problems does not indicate how those responses are selected and come to be shared or how a shared definition of the problem develops in the first place. It also glosses over the underlying processes that are occurring. In order to get at these underlying processes I examine a single incident of the organizational crises, and follow the

over the underlying processes that are occurring. In order to get at these underlying processes I examine a single incident of the organizational crises, and follow the development of a symbol and its meanings that pertain to the incident. This analysis is supplemented by other examples from the research setting that elaborate upon the analysis and that present different, but related, mechanisms.

My concern is with how a group, without conscious articulation, develops a relatively uniform definition of the nature of the "problem," how a consensus forms on the appropriate "responses," and how these responses are communicated to and accepted by the group members. This social construction of reality occurs through the collective construction of shared symbols via a negotiation process. The negotiation process involves informal gossiping, discussions, complaining, humor, etc., and through this process different ideas and interpretations are informally presented to, and examined by, the group until a rough meaning, and its symbolized form, is implicitly agreed upon. A "reality" is constructed through the negotiation and interpretation of these symbols and their meanings.

This research is based on two years of participant observation in a restaurant where I worked as a waiter. I gathered additional data through in depth interviews (both taped and written) and through numerous shorter, informal interviews (rarely taped). The most productive data was acquired through close participant observation of informal

gatherings with short, unstructured interviews afterwards to verify my interpretations of what occurred.

This thesis is not structured along the traditional lines of an introduction, research data, analysis, and summary. The negotiation of shared definitions and responses to group problems did not develop in a linear fashion that was conductive to this sort of presentation. Rather, the negotiations occurred as an iterative process and the structure of this paper reflects this iterative nature. I start by presenting a broad level of data (the responses to shared problems section) and a general analysis. I then introduce data of a more specific nature or of another relevant point and provide further analysis. This cycle repeats itself several times before the summary is reached. I feel that this structure maintains the integrity of the phenomena studied. As the ordering of events can become confusing with such a structure I have included a diagram of the chronology (figure 2) on page 93.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to place this thesis in context within the organizational literature and to introduce relevant concepts, I briefly discuss some of the pertinent literature.

Organizational Culture

Within the past couple of decades, but especially since 1980, there has been a growing dissatisfaction in the organizational and business literature with the dominate view of organizations as rational, goal oriented constructs (Zey Ferrel and Aiken 1981, Fischer and Sirianni 1984, Ott 1988) and with the over emphasis on quantitative research methodologies (Morgan and Smircich 1980). The concept of organizational culture developed in response to such criticisms and within this perspective organizations are seen as minisocieties and cultures. In this view IBM has its own culture that is distinct from the culture of Texas Instruments, General Motors, the Navaho Nation, and the United States.

While most of the literature concerned with organizational culture agrees that culture is a crucial factor, even the determining factor, in the functioning of organizations, there is little agreement on what exactly organizational culture is (Schein 1985, Ott 1988). Some of the common definitions of culture are: the espoused values of a group (Deal and Kennedy 1982); the consciously held values and beliefs of a group (Sathe 1983, 1985a, and 1985b); the unconscious, internalized beliefs (assumptions) that are held by a group (Dyer 1985, Lundberg 1985, Schein 1985); the shared meanings of a group (Louis 1985a); systems of shared symbols and meanings (Smircich 1983b); the organization's philosophy towards its members and constituents (Ouchi 1980); the ways of behaving that are common to a group (Van

Maanen, cited in Schein 1985); the unwritten rules for behavior (Riley 1983); tacit agreements on transaction costs (Jones 1983, Davies and Weiner 1985).

Even with this variation, most of the definitions of organizational culture are derived from the functionalist paradigms and use a "systems theory" type of analysis that views organizational cultures as one business variable among many to be managed for success (Barley 1983, Smircich 1985). The machine and organism are the dominant metaphors used in such approaches, and the focus is generally on work values, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior and how they affect the efficiency of the organization (Morgan et al. 1983, Smircich 1983a and 1985). Organizational culture has only rarely been approached as a field worthy of study in and of itself. According to Smircich (1985) one should not be limited to merely studying organizational culture but rather should do a cultural analysis of organizational life. That is, organizational cultures should be approached in the same way that interpretive anthropologists approach culture.

Culture and Symbols

In my analysis I follow Geertz's (1973, 1983) definition of culture as a system or pattern of shared symbols and their meanings. Schall (1983) and David (1988) further elaborate by defining culture and organizational culture as a learned, relatively enduring, interdependent symbolic system of perspectives, values, assumptions, and meanings

that are imperfectly shared by the interacting group members. It allows them to "explain, coordinate, and evaluate behavior and to ascribe common meanings to stimuli encountered in the organizational context" (Schall 1983) by acting to classify, code, prioritize (organize values), and legitimize activity (Terpstra and David 1985).

Similarly, I use Geertz's (1973) definition of a symbol as "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception; the conception is the symbol's meaning." A symbol is more than just a "vehicle for a conception" but "is a sign which denotes something much greater than itself" (Morgan et al. 1983). "Symbols embody and represent wider patterns of meaning and cause people to associate conscious or unconscious ideas that in turn endow them with their deeper, fuller, and often emotion evoking meaning" (Ott 1988).

These cultural meanings and symbols are not individualized; that is they are not just "in peoples' heads." Rather they are (imperfectly) shared by all social actors existing between actors, not within them. A symbol may be an individual, object, award, routine action, ritual, behavior, word, jargon, phrase, motto, story, myth, joke, or anything else that serves as a "vehicle for a conception." Systems of symbols are not only models **of** reality but also models **for** reality (Geertz 1973). Symbols function as models of reality by expressing reality in such a way that the "true" nature of this reality is explained, clarified, or recalled.

When symbols are used as a model for reality they act in such a way as to shape people's cognition, perspectives, values, and assumptions to themselves, that is they manipulate "the nonsymbolic systems in terms of the relationships expressed in the symbolic" realm (Geertz 1973). Symbols do this by inducing in a person a distinctive set of dispositions; i.e. tendencies, propensities, skills, habits, moods and motivations (Geertz 1973).

While I have defined "culture" I have not defined what constitutes a culture. Within any group of people those understandings, symbols, and meanings that are roughly shared form their culture. This is not to say that a researcher arbitrarily chooses a group's boundaries or defines a group according to non-cultural criteria and then applies the term culture to whatever meanings happen to be shared. For example, at the restaurant where the research for this paper was carried out it would have been a mistake to single out the wait staff (a structural grouping) and then to examine their shared meanings as a culture. Instead the approach was to distinguish a set of meanings and then see who shared them. As it turned out both the wait staff and the management (before the organizational crisis that I will discuss presently) shared the same set of meanings and so comprised a culture. The point is not to delineate a culture's boundaries according to non-cultural (such as formal structural) criteria.

Subculture

The concept of "subculture" has been used very broadly in both the popular and academic literature (mainly in sociology but it is also beginning to be used in anthropology and organizational behavior as well). Most research has treated the concept of subculture as self evident and easily recognized in practice. One problem with this approach is that subculture often tends to be treated as a structural entity rather than a cultural one. This is the case when a youth culture is defined by age or an organizational subculture is defined by departmental or divisional units rather than shared cultural symbols, norms, values, or assumptions. There also seems to be the assumption that subcultures are closed, homogeneous entities which are isolated from the larger society (Clarke 1974, Fine and Kleinman 1979). For the purposes of this work, "culture" is used in place of "subculture" as the definition of culture that I have stated above accounts for multiple, overlapping cultures and thus accounts for the "subculture" concept. The distinction between subculture and culture is problematic as pristine cultures no longer exist, if they ever did, and almost any culture can be considered a subculture of some other culture.

Organizational Culture Formation

There are two common explanations in the organizational culture literature for the formation and development of

culture. Culture is often seen as a solution to group problems. According to Schein (1985b)

> The simplest way to think about the culture of any group or social unit is to think of it as the total of the collective or shared learning of that unit as it develops its capacity to survive in its external environment and to manage its own internal affairs. Culture is the solution to external and internal problems that has worked consistently for a group and that is therefore taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think about, and feel in relation to those problems. Such solutions eventually come to be assumptions about the nature of reality, truth, time, space, human nature, human activity, and human relationships - then they come to be taken for granted and, finally, drop out of awareness.

The other common explanation for the creation of organizational culture is that the organizational founder or leader creates the culture according to his or her own values, assumptions[1], and vision (e.g. Pettigrew 1979, Schein 1983 and 1985). In this view the founder deliberately guides or controls the formation of the culture such that the organizational culture is a reflection of the founder's personal beliefs and ideology (Martin et al. 1985). The culture that the founder sets up is viewed as continuing of its own accord long after the founder has left the organization.

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[1] Assumptions are "the tacit beliefs that members hold about themselves and others, their relationships to other persons, and the nature of the organization in which they live" (Lundberg 1985). Assumptions are the implicit, internalized, unconsciousness and taken for granted beliefs of the true nature of reality. They are rarely, if ever, questioned and only then if they are violated or directly challenged.

Both of these views are heavily functionalist and fail to deal with the importance of the symbolic aspects of organizational life. I found the "solutions to shared problems" approach useful in my own research, though only after a good deal of modification and "de-functionalization." The "founder" explanation had no applicability to the case that I studied, and I will discuss the implications of this in the summary.

Social Construction of Reality and Organizational Symbolism

A conceptual basis of my research derives from Berger and Luckman's The Social Construction of Reality (1967). They state that

> the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for "knowledge" in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such "knowledge." And insofar as all human "knowledge" is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations, the sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the process by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted "reality" congeals for the man in the street. In other words we contend that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality. [emphasis in the original]

A shortcoming of Berger and Luckman's (1967) work is its lack of empirical validation. Most of the insights are derived from "armchair" analysis and the interpretations of Einsteinian thought experiments to support and illustrate their points. Meltzer's (1961) criticism of George Herbert Mead's "Symbolic Interactionism" (upon which much of Berger and Luckman's work is derived) as being "a purely analytical

scheme, which lacks content" is true for Berger and Luckman as well. Most of the literature that uses the social construction of reality concepts relies on similar speculation and does not deal empirically with how, in practice, a reality is actually constructed. As Hofstede (1986) says "there is a strong need for speculating less and measuring more," and this is where this thesis proposes to make a contribution.

The organizational symbolism perspective developed as a response to the simplistic view of organizations that results from the use of the organism and machine metaphors (Morgan et al. 1983). Within this perspective, symbols are viewed in a variety of ways, ranging from seeing symbols as powerful tools that management can use to get things done (Peters 1978, Dandridge 1983, Wilkins 1983) to the view that organizations are patterns of symbolic discourse.

The separation of the social construction of reality and organizational symbolism perspectives is rather artificial and they are more persuasive when used together. Symbols do not just communicate reality, but reality is constructed, maintained, and modified through symbolic processes. A reality is created through the social construction of individual symbols, or rather systems of these individual symbols, and this work examines the processes through which symbols and their meanings get created, are modified, and become shared.

This research finds that meanings become shared through

informal negotiations. This finding is the major contribution of this work as such social negotiation has rarely been analyzed as a process and empirically validated. This thesis was written to correct such oversight.

I use the term "negotiation" throughout this work in a specific way. The negotiations that I discuss occur informally and the participants were not aware that they were engaged in a negotiating process. In informal, unplanned gatherings individuals discussed, complained, and gossiped about their individual concerns and gradually one definition of a situation tended to emerge out of the different individual perceptions. There was not a conscious decision among individuals to come to an agreement on a problematic situation, yet a collective consensus was reached. This type of negotiation differs markedly from the more common usage of formal negotiations where all parties concerned specifically meet in order to explicitly negotiate a settlement to their differences, such as the negotiating of a treaty or business deal.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSES TO SHARED PROBLEMS

Many researchers (see Berger and Luckman 1967, Geertz 1973, Spector 1973, Fine 1979, Schein 1983 and 1985, Van Maanen and Barley 1985, among others) have viewed culture, at least in part, as social solutions or collective

responses[2] to shared problems, though they place different emphasis on this aspect in relation to other explanations. These responses involve coping with external problems of adaptation and internal problems of integration. This idea is based on the work of Cohen (1955) who believed that subcultures formed when a number of actors with similar problems of adjustment to the regular culture were in effective interaction with one another. While any group has interaction of some degree, effective interaction refers to the opportunities and ease with which group members communicate and interact in close contact with one another (Specter 1973). While Cohen's research dealt mainly with delinquent boys, one needs only modify his definition slightly to make it applicable to the formation of organizational culture. Thus, cultures form when the members of a group in effective interaction share common problems or new situations and they turn their attention to solving or coping with these problems.[3]

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[2] While Schein (1985b) and most of the organizational culture literature use the term "solutions" when referring to a group's response to a shared problem, I prefer the term "responses." The term "solutions" implies that the problem is solved rather than simply recognized or coped with and suggests an underlying presumption of a functionalist perspective. When I use "responses" (such as a group's responses to a shared problem) I am trying to convey a sense of the groups efforts in coping with, managing, and dealing with the perceived problems and the anxiety involved. I will continue to use "solutions" only when referring to the ideas of other authors who use the term.

[3] How group members come to perceive that a problem is shared and how they form a definition of the problem are just as important as their response to the problem and I deal with these issues presently. For the moment I will discuss primarily responses to group problems in order to set up the general framework for the

A crucial aspect of these problems is the perception that they are important and shared, not the objective "reality" of the situation. Even though the culture forms in response to the shared problems, the nature of the problems does not mechanistically determine the responses. There is a great range of possible responses, many of which are not functional from a purely objective point of view, that may be internalized, and the importance of the responses lies in the fact that they are perceived as coping with these problems.

There are a large number of potential problems of external adaptation and internal integration that an organization may face. Some of the problems of external adaption concern forming a consensus on the mission, the goals and the means to accomplish them, and on group evaluation of the organization (Schein 1983, 1985a, and 1985b). Common problems of internal integration include the formation of criteria for inclusion into the group, for the allocation of status, for rewards and punishments, and for handling interpersonal relations (Schein 1983, 1985a, and 1985b). Concerns between the worker's humanistic and the management's profit orientations also seem to be a fertile area of problems that often require cultural solutions (Walter 1985). Examples of these types of problems would be job security versus flexibility, privacy versus scrutiny,

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later discussion and because most of the organizational literature deals only with such responses.

self determination versus organizational direction, and comparable competence versus superior performance (Walter 1985). Most organizations have a variety of stories and myths which are focused on these themes (Martin et al. 1983) which suggests that these are common cultural responses to the individual problems of internal integration.

Schein (1985a and 1985b) suggests two ways through which new cultural solutions are learned. The first mechanism involves the positive reward and reinforcement of success. In this case if a solution solves the problem or, in a less functionalist interpretation, if a response adequately copes with a problem, it is rewarding and is adopted. As long as the solution (or response) continues to work it used, but once it fails it is quickly discarded. If the solution works often enough it becomes shared between all group members.

The second mechanism involves "avoidance learning" and here culture is learned as a way of dealing with social trauma, i.e. collective anxiety and pain. According to Schein (1985b) a "universal" psychological characteristic of humans is that they find it difficult to deal with significant degrees of uncertainty or stimulus overload, both of which cause anxiety.[4] According to this trauma model a new

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[4] While this statement reflects something of an ethnocentric bias by assuming that American psychological theories are universally valid when applied to the other countries of the world, it does have some support from the anthropological literature. Many anthropologists (e.g. Turner 1968, Geertz 1973, Leach 1976, Rosaldo 1980, and Sahlins 1985, to name just a few of the most prominent) have viewed culture, at least in part, as a coping mechanism for

group faces anxiety from uncertainty as to whether the group will be able to work together, survive, and be productive. This uncertainty is traumatic and group members seek ways to make organizational life more predictable. Catagories of meaning that reduce uncertainty and "organize perceptions and thought, thereby filtering out what is unimportant while focusing on what is important" reduce anxiety, become accepted, and thus solve this group problem (Schein 1985). Nicholas (1973) views social movements, which are defined as "a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture" (Wallace, cited in Nicholas 1973), as resulting from anxiety that is caused by one type of group problem, relative deprivation. Schein (1985b) even suggests that the basic function of culture is to reduce anxiety. While this may be an overstatement it does appear that most group problems result from situations of involving ambiguity and anxiety.

Avoidance learning, as the name implies, involves

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dealing with ambiguity and anxiety.

Other interesting questions are raised by Geert Hofstede's (1980) analysis of over 116,000 questionnaires from 40 countries. One aspect of his work involved measuring the acceptance of "the uncertainty inherent in life." He found that Americans were more tolerant of uncertainty and felt less anxiety and stress in the presence of ambiguities than people from 80% of the other countries studied. If culture is formed primarily as a response to the anxiety caused by ambiguity do the people of other cultures that are less tolerant to ambiguity form "deeper," stronger organizational cultures? Do areas with a higher tolerance for uncertainty develop less cohesive organizational cultures? These questions are based on the problematic assumption that the "objective" amount of uncertainty inherent in the situations of different people is roughly equivalent and that only people's tolerances towards the uncertainty vary.

learning to avoid negative stimulus, such as anxiety. Avoidance learning only has to work in the initial instance as once the source of the anxiety, the problem, is gone its continued absence will be attributed to the response that was initiated to cope with anxiety (Schein 1985b, Tossi et al. 1986). This occurs even if the original source of the problem that caused the anxiety is no longer present, in which case the response that was instigated to cope with the problem persists even though the problem no longer exists (Schein 1985b). It is difficult to ascertain the merit of continuing to employ the solution without risking the return of the anxiety. For this reason avoidance learning is much more persistent then positive reinforcement learning.

Both of these mechanisms reflect Schein's individual and psychological perspective, and neither mechanism adequately deals with the shared nature of culture. I will return to this problem in the next section.

The Case of Stratford's Restaurant

Examples of cultural formation as ways of dealing with shared problems were illustrated by events that occurred during my research at a restaurant (I will call it Stratford's[5]) in the summer of 1988. Stratford's is part of a nationwide chain and is widely considered one of the finest restaurants, in terms of the service and the quality of the

[5] The name of the restaurant and all personal names have been changed to protect the identities of the individuals.

food, in the local area, though it certainly does not compare to the finer restaurants of larger cities. The restaurant serves traditional American food with an emphasis on beef but some seafood as well.

In order to provide background and context I briefly discuss elements of the social structure at Stratford's before analyzing the cultural change process. The number of waitrons (a common term in the restaurant industry denoting both waiters and waitresses) at Stratford's varies from approximately 25 to 30 individuals. There are three managers within the organization, the head manager, the assistant manager, and the head chef (although the chef is never involved in issues that are not directly related to food purchasing and preparation). The managers are at the top of the formal authority structure and the level of authority of everyone else is the same. There is an informal prestige system in effect for the rest of the employees which, very roughly, occurs along two lines (see figure 1).

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managers > wait staff/bartenders > hostesses > busboys

managers > wait staff > cooks > dishwashers

Figure 1. The Prestige System at Stratford's

I have differentiated these two sequences because the cooks and dishwashers have almost no interaction with the hostesses and busboys and since power and prestige presuppose interaction it is difficult (as well as meaningless) to

determine who would have more if they ever did interact.

The waiters' prestige is based on several sources. First, along with the bartenders they have the highest paying jobs, with the possible exception of management. For this reason their positions are highly coveted and most busboys and hostesses want to "move up" to waiting. Since less than one applicant in a hundred is accepted into a wait staff position and there is little competition for the other jobs, there is a sense that the waitrons are the elite of their field. Other factors include differences in skill levels required to do the respective jobs and the degree of contact with the customers.

The waitrons also have a slight edge in power relations which follow the same general sequence mentioned for prestige above (see figure 1).[6] Waitrons at times request that a hostess, busboy, or dishwasher do a task for them, but never vice versa. This can be explained by many of the same factors associated with prestige. Also, according to Tosi, et al. (1986) an organizational group's power is determined by the degree to which they cope with the more volatile elements of the organization, the group's centrality with respect to other units, and the substitutability of activities. The wait staff deals with the most volatile elements

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[6] The exception to this statement occurs between the waitrons and the cooks. Waitrons have more prestige and respect but in just the waitron/cook interactions the cooks have more power. This corresponds to Pfeffer's (1981) resource dependency perspective in that the cooks control a valuable resource, the food, that the waitrons need to carry out their job.

(the customers), they are the only group which has frequent interactions with all the other groups, and no other group can perform the activities of the wait staff.[7]

Before the organizational crisis that I discuss below occurred, the management and the waitrons at this branch formed the dominant organizational culture. This culture contained a fairly uniform set of assumptions, understandings, and symbols. Everyone knew pretty much what to expect from fellow employees and management in any given situation. Agreements concerning the desired course of action to take in response to the various problems that arose from time to time were quickly arrived at without much, if any conflict. The Waitrons had a good deal of autonomy and prestige, and the management was easy going and emphasized working with waitrons to mutually solve problems. Waitrons were almost never criticized by managers and both the wait staff and management considered the waitrons more competent than management in dealing with most customer problems. If a customer problem occurred that required a manager's assistance, either the manager and waitron would come to a consensus on the proper course of action or the waitron would tell the manager what to do, rarely the other way around.

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[7] While no other group within the restaurant can substitute for the activities of the waitrons, it is very easy to hire replacements for any individual waitron. One would expect that this would give the managers a great deal more power over the wait staff than is the case. That the power discrepancy is not greater is probably due to the relaxed, laissez faire management style of the head manager and due to collective actions from the waitrons as a group (which I discuss below).

In one instance a waitress knocked over a drink which resulted in the customers at that table having to stand up for a few seconds while the drink was cleaned up. Back in the kitchen the waitress and the head manager had a disagreement over what to do to make up for the customers' inconvenience. The waitress wanted the restaurant to buy the customers' dinners while the manager thought that this was excessive and that a couple of free desserts would be sufficient. The manager conveyed his view through a logical argument using past cases for support. The waitress replied that she "just felt" that it would be better to buy the customers dinners. The disagreement remained pleasant and the manager bought the dinners.

This interaction, and other similar instances, became symbols by conveying certain meanings and values to the group, i.e., the incident acted as a vehicle for a conception. It clearly indicated that concerning specific customer problems, waitrons had more power than managers, at least informally, and that a waitron's "feelings" or intuition could take precedence over past practices. This event also conveyed information about the management style at Stratford's, i.e., on the accepted ways for handling conflicts that emphasized consensus decision making. The incident acted as a symbol that both embodied certain elements of the culture and reinforced them and in this way acted as both a "model of" the culture and a "model for" the culture.

The Cultural Crisis at Stratford's

In July, 1988 the assistant manager was moved to another restaurant and was replaced by a manager from the corporate headquarters. The new manager, Barbara, had a very different view of what the desired organizational culture at this branch should be and set out to bring the restaurant "into line." I believe that she had a different cultural ideal in mind, even though she was not aware of the academic organizational culture concept, as she did more than simply implement vast changes in work procedures and attempt to restructure relationships. By themselves these changes do not necessarily indicate cultural change, rather their importance lies with the fact that these changes were based on a different set of underlying assumptions. The new manager experienced a classic case of "culture shock," but instead of adapting to the existing culture she tried to force the organization to adapt to her concept of appropriate values and practices. According to Barbara "nothing is done properly here," and when referring to waitron's protests that she "keeps meddling in my section"[8] she replied that "you people need to stop behaving like children." She did not view her procedures and management style as simply a more effective way to achieve certain goals but saw her way as the intrinsically "correct way." The

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[8] A section is a group of three to five tables that the waitron is responsible for serving.

previous practices and waitron/management relationship were not just less effective but were intrinsically wrong, "unnatural," and "not proper" [her words].

The new manager immediately articulated, through verbal communications, meetings, and management practices a new set of perspectives and values that the waitrons were now expected to share. She set about eradicating the previously recognized symbols replacing them with her own.[9] The new order was based on a different set of assumptions concerning the internal integration of the wait staff, and this difference was blatantly apparent to the waitrons. For example, the new manager insisted on handling all customer problems, even small ones, herself. The wait staff interpreted this practice as an indication that management[10] thought the waitrons were not competent to do their jobs and that management believed that they were better qualified in

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[9] I do not mean to imply that she consciously decided that "here's a bad symbol which I will replace with a symbol that I've created." Peters (1978) and Weick (1979) state that the practice of management is really the management of symbols and that most managers implicitly understand this. Humans react to and use symbols without rationally analyzing the process and the new manager was no exception. She would respond to something that "sent the wrong message" and attempt to change it. As she was in a position with a high degree of formal power she could force a degree of overt compliance and so had to be taken seriously by the rest of the staff.

[10] Even though nearly all the changes were instituted by the new manager, who was not even the head manager, the wait staff viewed the other two managers as almost equally to blame. The head manager did not take an active part in the changes and even viewed them secretly as excessive, but in public he supported the new manager completely, probably because he was told to do so by the district manager. Because of this support the wait staff perceived a united management front against them.

this area. The waitrons had considered themselves to be the skilled core of the restaurant, but the manager's actions, according to the waitron's interpretation, indicated that they were just low level employees like everyone else. Every time Barbara took charge of a minor customer problem it symbolized the new lower competency and lower prestige status of the waitrons.

The decreased status of the wait staff and altered relationship with management was further emphasized by the seemingly "hundreds" of commands each night to do what were considered petty tasks that the waitrons felt were beneath them. This "grunt work" involved such activities as carrying dishes from the dishwasher at the rear of the kitchen to the storage area in the front of the kitchen. These tasks were perceived as "bad enough," but it soon became clear that when business was slow, the manager would assign other tasks that were seen as unnecessary, such as scrubbing the ceiling, apparently for the sole purpose of keeping the waitrons occupied. This clearly symbolized the decreased status of the waitrons and the manager's assumptions concerning their worth as important employees, friends, and as human beings. At this point, the general feeling of the wait staff was aptly summed up by a waiter when he said "I don't treat the sewer rats in my house the way she treats us."

One final example of a work procedure change that had a great deal of symbolic significance was the new managers "no

excuses" policy. There has always been a standard "service progression" at Stratford's which is a detailed, step by step list of the proper procedure for a waitron serving a table. For example a waitron must greet the customers within two minutes of their being seated, greet them by their name, take their drink and appetizer order, return with their drinks within one minute, and so on. While every waitron knew this progression by heart, before the new manager came they were free to modify it to suit the unique needs of each customer or situation and were often praised by the management for doing so. The new manager changed this policy by insisting on every waitron exactly following the service progression every time. No matter what the reason she would accept "no excuses" for deviance and would refuse to listen to explanations. This new policy had a greater significance to the wait staff than just another decrease in prestige, autonomy, and perceived competence. By refusing to even listen to the waitrons and by denying them any input the radical cultural shift was blatantly highlighted. From being the absolute monarch of his or her section before the new manager's arrival, the waitron now found him/herself to be only an incompetent civil servant of an unimportant provence, answerable to others.

As even these few examples show, the new management challenged some of the wait staff's taken for granted assumptions and conceptions of reality. Some of the assumptions that were challenged concerned the waitrons beliefs

about their status and "worth," the "nature of human nature," the "nature of human relationships," and the proper way to behave and resolve conflicts.

The waitrons attempted to cope with the new order while retaining their own core assumptions but morale and performance plummeted. Within the first three weeks approximately one quarter of the staff had been fired for what were considered trivial reasons. The perceived purpose of the firings, from the waitron's point of view, was to set an example to the rest of the staff, and they symbolized the dictatorial nature of management control. As the new manager said, "either you do things my way or you leave, [leaving] on your own or with help [being fired]" and "if you don't do things the right way I'll help you, help you leave." Several sets of perceived shared "problems" became widely held throughout the waitron group at this time, the major ones being uncertain job security and an unpleasant working environment. While nearly all the waitrons were unhappy, no one seemed to want to do anything about the situation, possibly because of the strong conflict avoidance character of the original organizational culture. A general "let's wait and see" and "things have to get better" attitude was widely shared.

A key incident occurred about a month after the new manager had started work when she severely criticized and placed on probation a waiter due to the complaints of a customer. The other waitrons considered the customer's

complaints unreasonable. This conflict had great symbolic significance as the waiter in question was widely considered to epitomize the old values and assumptions of the restaurant and it served to highlight the perceived arbitrary and unreasonable nature of the management. A large part of the conflict was due to the fact that the waiter had dealt with the customer problem according to some of the "old" cultural values and assumptions by bypassing formal procedures in an attempt to quickly and efficiently rectify the situation on his own, instead of finding the manager and letting her deal with it.

The original problem involved a family of eight that consisted of grandparents, parents, an uncle and aunt, and two small children. The family was in an unpleasant mood from the start as the children were extremely noisy and constantly demanding attention from the adults. The group was unusual in that they could not seem to agree on any decision. For example, when the waiter first met them the grandparents told him to take their order immediately, while the parents told the waiter to get their drinks first. Both groups expected the waiter to obey only themselves, and when the waiter was forced to choose which to obey, the other couple became irritated. Several such conflicts occurred throughout the course of the dinner and the waiter attempted to cope by taking turns between which customer he obeyed first, but this only succeeded in alienating everyone. Other problems occurred with these customers throughout the

meal, such as the children knocking over drinks, screaming, and throwing food at other customers. Due to the highly visible and auditory nature of the conflicts the rest of the wait staff was well aware of these customers' progress during the meal. It was also obvious to the wait staff that the waiter was making nearly "superhuman" efforts to appease the table, but to no avail.

The manager, who had been in her office the whole time and was oblivious to the events out in the restaurant, happened to walk out onto the foyer as the family was leaving, and in reply to her question concerning their meal was told in no uncertain terms, but briefly, that they had had a terrible dining experience. She was furious and placed the exhausted waiter on probation on the spot, and she let him know that his job was in serious jeopardy. He opened his mouth to explain three times but each instance was told "no excuses" before he could utter a sound. This occurred in front of several employees.

The waitrons viewed the waiter's actions as unquestioningly proper and viewed the manager's position as completely irrational. Everyone's precarious job security was highlighted by this incident as the waiter was seen as having done an excellent job under extremely difficult circumstances and being put on probation for his troubles. The instance also highlighted the different assumptions concerning autonomy, prestige, and human relationships that I discussed previously in this paper. The problem was not just that the

new manager was implementing procedures and rules that the wait staff did not like, although this was certainly an important aspect, but that the manager's actions challenged the waitrons' version of reality. According to Berger and Luckman (1967) society as objective reality is based on the institutionalization of members actions and this "institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors" (54). In other words a society (really a culture) exists when its members share the same interpretation of common actions which frequently occur. Furthermore this

> institutional order is real only insofar as it is **realized** in performed roles and that ... roles are representative of an institutional order that defines their character and from which they derive their objective sense. [Roles mediate]... between the macroscopic universes of meaning objectivated in a society and the ways by which these universes are subjectively real to individuals" [emphasis in the original] (Berger and Luckman 1967: 78-79).

The new manager by imposing a different interpretation upon both the "habitualized actions" and the various roles was challenging the waitrons' construction of reality.

A great deal of informal discussion among the wait staff took place during the next few days resulting in vilifying the manager (who was now referred to as "the Nazi" or "Hitler"), ridiculing the "new" cultural values, and reaffirming the old values and assumptions with the addition of some new ones. I will discuss an example of how these new meanings were formed later on in the paper, but for now the point I wish to make is that the waitrons formed a

collective response to a group problem. The group rallied around the cause of the beleaguered waiter producing a solid front against the management with several of the "top" waitrons threatening to quit if he was fired. The old dominant culture had split into two distinct, conflicting subcultures. As the waiter in question was neither strongly liked nor disliked on a personal level and did not associate with the other staff outside the restaurant, it is unlikely that the support he received was due to overt feelings of friendship. Rather, he served as a symbol representing everyone's concerns and conceptualizations of the problems that they all faced vis a vis the new manager.

In dealing with his specific situation, the group was really dealing with their common problems and a new culture was formed. The new culture was not simply a reaffirmation of the original (before the "Nazi") culture. The new culture and original culture had many of the same characteristics, but the new culture involved a much more vigorous adherence to many of these aspects. For example, viewing the waitron's section as his or her exclusive responsibility had been taken for granted in the "old" culture, while with the new culture it was forcefully asserted. There were many counter cultural elements as well. While the previous culture had been characterized by a high degree of trust and mutual respect, the new culture had an "us against them" attitude. Management was not to be trusted, and a sense of trustworthiness towards other employees and new waitrons was

perceived as having to be earned, not automatically assumed. The wait staff became a much more cohesive group and the management, unwilling to combat a unified wait staff, gave in on this issue, and removed the waiter from probation. An "armed truce" ensued with neither side willing to compromise their values. The manager would tell a waitron to do something and the waitron would either ignore her, say s/he would do the task shortly and then "conveniently" forget about it, or do the task improperly. A few weeks later the new manager resigned.

Another Restaurant's Perceptions of the Manager

It is interesting to note that while their was a great deal of antipathy towards the new manager at Stratford's, at the nearby branch of this restaurant that the new manager came from she was well liked, respected, and there was even a good deal of personal loyalty expressed towards her. Although I only interviewed three waitrons and a cook from this other Stratford's, they all agreed that "we love her there." The qualities that these three waitrons praised in Barbara were her overall efficiency, hard work, ability to find and deal with problems when they first developed, her accessibleness as she was always where she was needed, clear rules and procedures, motivational skills, and ability to keep employees from taking advantage of others or the restaurant. For example if a waitress called in sick she had to provide proof that she was unable to work, unlike

Stratford's where waitrons often called in sick just to get the night off for some other reason.

If this is representative of the rest of the wait staff at that other restaurant, which I think it must be (at least partially) it adds further support to the proposition that the conflict was culturally based and not due to other possible explanations, such as the manager having an abrasive personality, lacking managerial skills, or a lazy wait staff. Many of the aspects that Barbara was praised for at one restaurant she was criticized for at the other. For example, her ability to find and deal with problems when they first developed and ability to always be where she was needed, while praised at the nearby restaurant, were perceived at Stratford's as her meddling with the waitrons section. These actions symbolized the manager's lack of trust towards the wait staff and their decreased prestige, autonomy, competence level, and power. Her rules and procedures were praised at one restaurant and perceived at the other to be stifling and unapplicable to "real life" situations.

The same manager, Barbara, with the same rules, managerial skills, and personality was a hero at one restaurant and a villain at the other. Discounting the unlikely possibility that all the individual personalities at one restaurant were more compatible with Barbara's personality than at the other restaurant, the most likely explanation for these different perceptions lies in the different

organizational cultures. The new manager attempted to force the other restaurant's culture on to Stratford's, and the changes she implemented challenged the wait staff's basic assumptions about their reality. Analogisticly, while the Ayatollah Khomeini may have been popular as a leader in Iran, had he been instantly transported as the leader of the United States one would expect a good deal of resistance to his programs.

Analysis: Responses to Shared Problems

Schein's social trauma model of organizational culture formation is applicable to this case as one of the major motivating forces for the cultural formation was group anxiety over job security, though this was by no means the only group problem. The actions of the group were largely taken to remove the anxiety involved with job insecurity and the ambiguity and anxiety that resulted by the wait staff being told that their assumptions were no longer functional.

Cultures start as shared definitions and responses to perceived group problems. At the very early stage of cultural formation there is a period of assessment as to whether the proposed response is useful in coping with the problem. If the response is not seen as helping to cope with the problem then it is unlikely to be incorporated into the culture. In the case of Stratford's, the initial response to the autocratic new manager was an attempt to accommodate her on a superficial level and hope that she

would eventually "fit in." After a few weeks this clearly did not occur and the problems were perceived to have even worsened. The response of partial accommodation was discarded and a new response was tried.

If, on the other hand, a group perceives that a solution is working it is incorporated into the culture, and if the solution continues to work it comes to be taken for granted (Smircich 1983b; Schein 1983, 1985a and 1985b). Once these solutions (or responses) are taken for granted they become assumptions and are taught to new members as the "correct" point of view. The assumptions generally become symbolized, and these symbols can exert a reinforcing influence back on the assumptions. At Stratford's the crisis incident involving the waiter who was placed on probation, was not only a main topic of conversation during the immediate aftermath, but it has since then become a sort of war story and a source of much humor, both of which have been communicated to at least three new workers and probably to the other new members as well. As both the story and humor convey certain meanings and is still being told six months later, this event would seem to have become symbolized as an organizational story or myth.

Another Case: A Non-Group Problem

Additional support for the theory of cultural formation as responses to shared problems is provided by another incident that occurred more recently (March 1989) at

Stratford's. An off-duty waitress, Jane, came in to eat with a friend and ordered a bottle of wine from her waitress, Lisa, who served it. There is a strict rule at Stratford's prohibiting serving drinks to anyone who is under 21 years of age, and the waitrons are supposed to "card" (check the driver's license) of anyone who looks under 30. Two days earlier a manager had told Lisa that no one on the wait staff was under 21. Unfortunately he had forgotten about Jane, but on the night in question he saw Jane drinking and remembered. The manager suspended Jane for two weeks and suspended Lisa for three days and demoted her to the hostess position, a decline in prestige and large pay reduction.

The wait staff was shocked at this treatment of Lisa. The fault was considered to lie with Jane and the manager. Lisa was seen as completely innocent, yet her punishment was far more severe than Jane's. In this case the rest of the wait staff agreed on the definition of the problem and believed that the management had acted in a completely inappropriate fashion. Lisa was well liked and there was a great deal of sympathy towards her and a comparable level of disgust towards management. Yet no group action or cultural process was invoked as was the case with the previous example; no other members became involved.

One reason for this seeming anomaly lies in the fact that the problem was not perceived as representing any present or future concern for the other members of the

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group. Since it was very rare for anyone to be hired as a waitron who was under age 21 and since all the other waitrons were over 21, the chances of this problem ever occurring again seemed slim. It was defined as an individual and not a shared group problem, and caused no anxiety in any one else. This suggests that a cultural response occurs only with shared problems, not isolated, individual ones.

Further Analysis of Responses to Shared Problems

The shared problems/responses level of analysis that I have limited the discussion to (for the present) fits nicely into the simple ambiguity-conflict-resolution theory of cultural change
that is used in one form or another by Turner (1974) in discussing social dramas; by Schein (1985b) in his discussion of planned organizational change; and by Nicholas (1973) in his analysis of social movements." The first stage of this cultural change theory involves the advent of a crises which challenges member's cultural assumptions by creating ambiguity and anxiety. This first stage involves the first two phases in the progression of Turner's social drama, the breach of regular, norm-governed social relations and the mounting crises. I have discussed this stage as the

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" For example, Turner's (1974) definition of social dramas as "units of aharmonic or disharmonic processes arising in conflict situations" is compatible with both Schein's view that organizational culture changes in response to crises and with Nicholas' view of movements as a deliberate collective effort to promote cultural change.

advent of shared group problems. In the crises case at Stratford's this stage would involve the advent and continual addition of each of the new manager's violations of the cultural norms which culminated in the placement of the waiter on probation.

The second stage involves the formation and testing of responses to cope with the problem(s) presented in the first stage. The waitron's original "she'll eventually fit in" collective response and later solidarity would apply to this stage. In the last stage there is a successful implementation of responses resulting in the elimination of, or ways of coping with, ambiguity and a corresponding decrease in anxiety. At Stratford's the waitron's agreement on the final response and their legitimization of an irreparable schism fit in this stage. Most researchers tend to focus on grand events and crises in their analysis of cultural formation and change. Schein (1985a and 1985b) views the crises that an organization must overcome early in its history as the crucial determinants of culture. According to Schein, if the solutions to these early crises work well they will be applied to later crises, as this lessens personal anxiety, and thus the organizational culture is maintained. Once the group has learned a way to avoid traumatic situations, it will continue to function according to the same solutions without examining them to see if they are still functional. While this is sometimes true it perhaps places too much emphasis on crises and not enough on everyday

events. For example, Smircich (1983b) points out that the solutions to the little, common day to day problems are far more numerous, and they soon become routinized and taken for granted and so facilitate coordinated action. Both Rosaldo (1980) and Scott (1985) argue convincingly that culture is better understood through a symbolic analysis of everyday events than an examination of grand rituals. Both views have merit and a relatively complete understanding of grand events must be based on a thorough understanding of the everyday ones. A consideration of such everyday symbols is presented in the next section.

Once these responses become taken for granted - or in Berger and Luckman's (1967) terminology, once these actions are repeated often enough to become habitualized - they become assumptions which are manifested through symbols and are in turn influenced by these same symbols. As long as the responses, both the grand and every day ones, are perceived as effective the culture is unlikely to change, yet organizations, like societies, are almost constantly being presented with both major and minor problems and so must continually renegotiate new responses. Even if for a time no new problems arise, a renegotiation of the old problems may lead to what is perceived as "better" responses, or the fact that the culture is perceived as static (i.e. the organization is seen as unadaptive) may in itself be seen as a problem that results in a new response. As the responses are renegotiated the culture is thus changing as well. This

means that organizational cultures and subcultures are dynamic entities, constantly in flux, and connected, to a degree, with their perceived environment.

An organizational culture is not, however, a completely plastic entity changing to meet every new problem no matter how small. There is a certain degree of anxiety associated with the uncertainty of change and anxiety is itself a problem that needs to be resolved. Often it is coped with by denying the need for change and thus avoiding the uncertainty involved. This is why culture generally changes very slowly, with small modifications, after it is clear that the change is beneficial - as each of these lessen anxiety. The culture undergoes moderate to major changes generally when the anxiety caused by the problem is greater than the anxiety resulting from change. This was the case at Stratford's as when the new manager originally caused problems, the wait staff reacted as little as possible, hoping things would clear up on their own. It was only when the problems took on what was judged to be intolerable proportions that forceful responses were adopted.

According to Schein (1985b) the norms that provide the greatest success are the ones that are adopted by the group and that survive. It may seem tempting to apply an evolutionary or cultural materialist framework to the cultural formation process by theorizing that the optimum response will be selected to each problem, a form of infrastructural

determinism[12], but this effort would be misplaced for several reasons. The problems that stimulate the cultural formation often lie outside the infrastructure and as the problems and responses are based on intra-member negotiation and people's perceptions, which may differ from "objective reality," there is little chance that the responses will be functionally optimal. As Berger and Luckman (1967: 119-120) state, cultural theories (cultural responses) work when they are taken for granted, not the other way around.

NEGOTIATED SYMBOLS, RESPONSES, AND MEANINGS

The Development of the Flashlight Story and Symbol

To simply state that subcultures form as responses to shared problems does not indicate how those responses are selected and glosses over the underlying processes that are occurring. For the remainder of this paper I analyze how a group, without conscious articulation, develops a relatively uniform definition of the nature of the "problem"; how a

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[12] According to Marvin Harris (1979) and Harris and Ross (1987) the infrastructure is made up of the "mode of production" (the technology and practices employed for expanding or limiting basic subsistence production) and the "mode of reproduction" (the technology and practices employed for expanding, limiting, and maintaining population size). The infrastructure is the interface between nature and culture. Infrastructural determinism is Harris' theory that the modes of production and reproduction probabilisticly determine the structure and content of nearly all aspects of the culture and social structure.
Cultural materialism is the general theory of infrastructural determinism that takes a "macro-historical-evolutionary perspective of cultural anthropology and anthropological archaeology" (Harris and Ross 1987).

consensus forms on the appropriate "responses"; and how these responses are communicated to and accepted by the group members. The social "construction of reality" occurs through the social construction of shared symbols via an informal negotiation process. The negotiation process involves gossiping, informal discussions, complaining, joking, etc., and through this process different ideas and interpretations, encoded in symbols, are informally presented to and examined by the group until a rough meaning, and its symbolized form, is implicitly agreed upon. In order to illustrate these ideas I will present an event from Stratford's in which the creation, negotiation, and development of a closely related set of symbols emerged.

Two days after the crises when Barbara had put the waiter on probation a group of ten waitrons, including myself, was drinking after work trying to make sense of the problem. Soon the discussion digressed into a general "bitch session" during which a competition seemed to develop to see who could portray the new manager in the most derogatory light. These negative characterizations tended to be of a nonspecific nature, such as calling her a "Nazi", "Hitler", and "bitch." Gradually the derogatory comments began to refer to more specific characteristics of the "Nazi" and to specific examples of her behavior.

One waitress broke this trend and remarked favorably on the improved cleanliness of the kitchen, attributing it to the new manager. Even before she finished the sentence it

was evident that her view was not supported or shared by the rest of the group and her voice drifted off without finishing her statement. The audience's disapproval was communicated both nonverbally, through disapproving facial gestures such as frowning and grimacing, and verbally, through trivializing grunts, derogatory scoffing, and articulated disagreements. While these acts of disapproval were directed at the content of the waitress's statement they also caused her to experience visible discomfort. The rest of the group remained silent and sullen for a few seconds afterwards.

Soon a waitron asked if anyone had "closed"[13] with the new manager recently. Two waitrons started to reply and, Susan, the one that won out continued on with her story. She mentioned having had to wait for some guests who lingered after their meal for an excessive length of time so that she was at the restaurant very late and in a hurry to leave. The group made some mildly sympathetic noises. Moving on with her story, Susan said that since it was really late she had only done a quick job of straightening out the dining room but the manager caught her and made her do it properly. The group was again sympathetic and another waiter agreed that the manager could have been nicer, but at

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[13] Every night there are two waitrons who are assigned to "close" the kitchen and dining room. These two waitrons must stay until all the customers and other wait staff have left for the night and then neaten up the dining room, clean up the waitron's area of the kitchen, put the food away, and mop the floors. After they are through cleaning, it usually takes about an hour, a manager must "check them out" by making sure the work was done properly.

this point the audience was not giving the Susan its undivided attention. Eyes had begun to wander and a side conversion between two people had developed.

Susan went on to tell of the manager looking over her shoulder while she cleaned, making her redo many areas, and telling her to do other areas that were not considered a normal part of the job. This received more of a response from the audience. She was interrupted several times to give examples and after each example various members of the group offered comments like "that bitch" or "if she had told me to do that I would have told her to fuck off." The group was paying more attention to her now, encouraging her by offering frequent comments, and responding more enthusiastically to the more derogatory parts of her comments. The side conversation had ceased.

By this time the story had become a string of examples of the new manager's "unreasonable" and "excessively perfectionist" behavior. Susan told of the manager being so concerned with cleanliness that she carried a flashlight with her, even though the kitchen is brightly lit, to check every nook and cranny. This example received the most enthusiastic response yet, in the form of laughter and feigned disbelief. Susan immediately retold this example with a good deal of elaboration. Apparently the manager did not just shine the light into cracks but actually crawled part of the way into one of the deep cupboards to examine the interior. This resulted in a great deal more laughter.

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The other waitron, Zack, who had started to speak at the beginning of the story said that when he closed the other night the manager had crawled all the way into the cupboard. The laughter was continuous now and one of the members of the group asked how she could possibly fit into the cupboard as her "posterior" seemed to large. Zack replied that the manager could not fit all the way in and her large rear stuck out. Amidst more laughter he related in a very comical manner about how all he could see were the managers two feet and "fat ass jiggling up and down" (this part of the story was accompanied by Zack physically thrusting his hips to illustrate and emphasize the sexual appearance of the manager's movements) as she moved to examine every inside corner.[14] The group was laughing so vigorously that several members had difficulty speaking. A third waitress said something to the effect of "I've heard of extreme anal compulsive behavior before but...."(drowned out by laughter), and this double entendre seemed to capture the essence of the story perfectly.

Within the next several days I observed six of the original nine members of the drinking group who had been present the night the story was first told telling the final

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[14] I find it difficult to believe that the manager actually crawled all the way into the cupboard and this aspect of the story is in all likelihood exaggerated, but the validity of the story is irrelevant when considering its symbolic aspects.

version[15] to other waitrons. Later, the other three waitrons told me that they had discussed the incident with waitrons who were not present that night as well. While everyone discussed the story, Zack told the story the most often. If a group of waitrons was talking together he was often requested by one of the original nine group members to tell the story (with the appropriate gestures) to the group. It was clear that he was the preferred storyteller.

There was a good deal of speculation as to whether the practice of "checking out" waitrons with a flashlight would be continued. A couple of waitrons even went to the trouble of checking the manager's work schedule to find out when she would "close" next. The two waitrons who were to "close" with her were instructed to observe the "check out" process carefully and give their findings back to the group. The manager made it a habit of using the flashlight for most future "check outs" and the next several instances each resulted in a fresh round of retelling the "flashlight" story. A further relevant note is that the original story session did not occur immediately after the first time that the manager used the flashlight. She had used it at least several times in the preceding two weeks without eliciting comment.

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[15] While no retelling of the story was ever exactly the same the various retellings were similar in content and all had the same message that for all intents and purposes they were the same story.

At one point, about a week later, a group of five waitrons gathered together for the specific purpose of telling the story to the head manager, with Zack as the storyteller. They wanted to see what the head manager's reaction would be. I was not present that evening and was told about the incident the next night along with several other waitrons who were again socializing after work. Apparently the head manager's reaction was less than what the group had hoped for; while he seemed to implicitly acknowledge that using the flashlight was excessive (according to the storytelling group's interpretation of the head manager's response), he defended the Barbara's compulsive neatness. The group had hoped that the head manager would agree that the "Nazi" had finally gone too far with her crackdown.

About a week and a half after the flashlight story was first told and well after everyone had heard of it, another relevant incident took place. It was a Thursday night around 8:30 and business had started to slow down for the evening so most of the waitrons were in the kitchen cleaning up in preparation for going home. The "Nazi" walked in and began telling certain waitrons how to do the cleaning more thoroughly.

After her second order, a waitron at the other end of the kitchen mentioned the word "flashlight" loudly. The kitchen erupted into laughter, except for the Barbara who looked confused. The laughter seemed to go on for a long

time but probably lasted about 30 seconds before died down. The manager asked what joke was, but the waiter avoided the question by claiming that he was just talking privately to the waiter next to him. Without provocation a waitress started laughing again (she said later that she just remembered Zack's description of the manager crawling into the cupboard) and this set everyone off once more. The manager once again attempted to find out what the joke was, but the second waitron she asked claimed ignorance. The manager was obviously uncertain about what to do, and she started to say something but then stopped herself and left the kitchen. It seemed that she suspected that she was being made fun of but could not directly single out any offending act. The waitron's spirits seemed to have risen after the incident, which one waitress characterized as a "nice victory for a change." Another waitress commented that "that [the joke] was mean, but she deserved it."

There is one final incident concerning the flashlight story that is relevant. The following Saturday (two days later) had been a very busy and very stressful night[16], and

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[16] Waiting tables is often cited as one of the most stressful American jobs (Tosi et. al. 1986), and a recent issue of Newsweek even rated it as one of the ten most stressful jobs in America. Once or twice a month at Stratford's, on average, a waitron or manager will "fall to pieces" due to a particularly stressful situation and, leaving his or her customers in mid meal, run out of the restaurant in tears or lock oneself in a restroom until s/he has regained composure. To my knowledge no one has ever been reprimanded for such a break down.

My own view as to why waiting can be so stressful concerns the fact that waitrons generally try very hard to win the guests approval. What distinguishes an excellent from poor waitron is not mainly their serving skills but their personality, so when a

once things started to slow down five waitrons sat down for a break at a table in the back of the kitchen. There happened to be a flashlight at the table, though not the one that Barbara used for "check outs." An exhausted waiter sat down, glanced up and seemed to see the flashlight for the first time, and without warning violently struck out with his fist knocking the flashlight across the room with a crash. This action surprised me and I asked him why he had done it. His response was "I can't deal with her shit right now." No one needed to ask who "her" was or what "her shit" referred to. The waiter who struck the flashlight was neither present at the session where the flashlight story was told for the first time nor was he a part of the group that told the story to the head manager, though he was in the kitchen when the word "flashlight" was spoken to make fun of the "Nazi."

After this incident there were several jokes created that extended the flashlight story, and these jokes tended to be repeated over and over. One involved asking a waitron who was cleaning where his flashlight was, and another involved handing a cleaning waitron a flashlight and saying something to the effect of "here, you'll need this." While

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customer expresses disapproval, either through a low "tip" or verbally, the waitron often views it as a failure of his or her personality. Waitrons are also often blamed for factors that are outside their control. On a busy night when things are going poorly a waitron is often running around desperately trying to please everyone and being continually rejected at a personal level. This continual rejection produces stress.

the "Nazi" was still working at the restaurant such jokes as these seemed to be occurring several times a night. After she resigned they gradually decreased in frequency until now, nine months later, they are only mentioned occasionally (although still in the same sorts of situations).

Analysis: The Early Stage of Negotiations

The question that I now turn to concerns how is it that separate individuals each with their own perceptions, biases, and unique information come to share a relatively uniform conception of a problem? If there are ten or a hundred reasonable interpretations of a situation, how is a single one generally agreed upon? Not only does a shared understanding of the problem occur, but a shared response to it develops as well. I argue below that this process occurs through a negotiation of symbols and their meanings until a relatively shared definition of the problem is accepted by the group members. The definition of the problem limits the appropriate responses and usually implies a preferred response. The negotiation process is not a linear, two stage process whereby the problem is defined first and the response is determined after the problem is defined, but the two are negotiated together. Just as defining the problem indicates certain responses, the defining of a response affects the way in which the problem is perceived.

I mentioned earlier that the waitrons' original response to the new manager's changes was to do as little as

possible. Barbara's changes caused anxiety and uncertainty among the wait staff as the changes conflicted with the waitron's deeply held and unquestioned assumptions, but the process of cultural change itself (even change to cope with a problem) also causes a degree of uncertainty and anxiety. The wait staff initially coped with the anxiety by denying the fact that the new manager's actions represented a different set of assumptions, thus denying both sources of anxiety. The "Nazi's" actions were perceived as compatible (or at least as eventually becoming compatible) with the current culture.

The "do nothing" response concurs with the (widely held) theory that people attempt to incorporate problems into the existing culture (Berger and Luckman 1967, Geertz 1973, Rosaldo 1980, and Sahalins 1985). Berger and Luckman (1967: 24) claim that the incorporation is done through invoking common sense rules and this is what seemed to occur at Stratford's. Common interpretations of the "Nazi's" behavior included such sayings as "because she's new she's gung ho" and "she's just trying to impress (the district manager)" and thus indicate her worth to the restaurant. Both of these statements imply that eventually she would, by loosing her initial enthusiasm and becoming more secure, "fit in."

When the "Nazi" put the waiter on probation it became obvious to the wait staff that the "do nothing and she'll eventually fit in" response to the new manager's changes was

not coping adequately with the problem. It was now clear that the problems would not disappear and that it was impossible to avoid these problems any longer. There was a great deal of confusion, anger, and anxiety among the wait staff, and while everyone seemed to agree that they were in the midst of a crisis, opinions differed as to its nature. This lack of consensus was apparent at the onset of the discussion among the members of the drinking group who created the flashlight story.[17] A wide range of opinions was presented to the group, most of them concerning various negative characteristics of the new manager but a positive comment was offered as well.

I view this initial group interaction as the first phase of an informal, nonconscious negotiation process whereby the group[18] was trying to make sense of a complex crisis. By complex I mean a crisis that was difficult to cope with and to define. Group members were each presenting their individual views and a wide range of views was offered, but the negotiation towards a shared definition had already begun. The views offered tended to be presented

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[17] It is important to remember that the group met just two days after the probation incident took place.

[18] I often come close to personifying the group and treating it as a single entity with such statements as "the group felt this ..." or "the group was trying to make sense of ...," but this is not my intent. What I mean by such statements is that most of the members of the group in one way or another indicated that they felt in such and such a way so that it would appear from an individuals point of view that this was a group response. I refer to "the group" as an "actor" only for convenience sake.

with qualifications and to be only moderately derogatory, such as "It may be just me, but Barbara sure seems to act kinda' weird sometimes." A statement like this is exploratory in that it is offered to test others views without putting the speaker "out on a limb" from which s/he can not retreat if the other members do not agree. By qualifying the beginning of the statement the speaker is acknowledging that it is his or her own tentative perception which may be wrong, and by using the loosely defined "weird" the interpretation of the statement is left ambiguous and can fit several meanings. I will discuss what I mean by "out on a limb" presently , but first I will consider the relevance of the individual's psychological need for acceptance and affirmation by other group members.

Group members made an effort to offer statements that would be accepted by the group. According to Weick (1979), Schien (1985b), and Tosi et al. (1986) humans have a psychological need to be accepted by the group towards which they feel membership. This need for acceptance is so strong that individuals will often advocate ideas that they think correspond to those accepted by the group even when the individual believes that these ideas are not in their own, or the group's, best interest (Janis 1971, Harvey 1981). This helps explain why the waitrons seemed to be making an attempt to offer statements that represented the collective opinion. The difficulty with this, from the waitron's point of view, was that in the early stages of the group's

interaction with the "new" problem there was not an easily apparent collective opinion, and any individual waitron had only his or her own perceptions with relatively little information on what would be acceptable to the group. Since the speaker was uncertain as to the group's conception, or future conception, the initial statements were general enough to encompass a variety of broad meanings and thus more likely be accepted.

The first statement was followed with the slightly harsher, but still nonspecific "I think she's a bitch" from another waitron. The first statement "broke the ground" in that the second speaker could offer a similar opinion without going as far "out on a limb," and the second statement also acted to reinforce the validity of the first and to further refine the concept. The second statement also provided a degree of group acceptance for the first as at least one other group member agreed with the negative portrayal. Several other group members offered similar statements, which were both general and negative, upon seeing that there was some agreement for their views. It was now clear to the waitrons that the group had accepted the negative perspective and this set the direction that the rest of the negotiation would take. The group had now already begun to define the nature of the problem by limiting the possible definitions to negative ones.

Even at this early stage, the negotiation process has begun. The tentatively offered individual statements formed

a base for the ongoing negotiation of the collective opinion. The original, hesitant, and mildly derogatory "she's kinda weird sometimes" had been modified by the second speaker to the definitely derogatory "she's a bitch," implying that her "bitchiness" is not just an occasional characteristic but an ever present one. Other group members now had two slightly different statements to chose from in forming their own response. That they chose the second, along with the first speaker who became more derogatory in his succeeding statements, indicates the direction in which the negotiation was heading.

There were nonverbal methods of communicating acceptance as well. As an individual spoke s/he tended to observe the person or persons that the statement was directed to and note their reactions. Such reactions usually are not consciously directed and are made up of nodding agreement, facial expressions, vocal grunts and exclamations, subtle gestures, body language, and so on. These signs communicate degrees of acceptance back to the speaker as s/he speaks, thus a dialogue of sorts is occurring even as a single individual speaks. The speaker in this way can get a rough idea of how the statement is being received in progress and adjust it accordingly. This is one way a meaning is negotiated. I will offer some examples to support this statement later in my analysis.

The negotiation process is further exemplified by the group's response to the waitress who remarked favorably on

the new cleanliness of the kitchen. Even before she had finished her statement she had observed and was responding to the nonverbal signs from various group members. The same types of signs that acted as indicators of acceptance above now acted as sanctions. I observed seven of the eight other group members frowning or scowling in response the waitress's limited praise of the manager, and three of the waitrons openly scoffed when the waitress first mentioned the cleanliness of the kitchen. After the waitress was finished another waitress claimed that the kitchen was not really cleaner but just seemed cleaner because the wait staff had to do more work cleaning things which were not dirty in the first place. A Waiter added that the time he spent unnecessarily cleaning kept him from spending more time with the customers. These statements seemed to better represent the feeling of the group and the group members turned to the first waitress, apparently to give her a chance to reply. The ensuing silence was interpreted by the other group members as the first waitress conceding the point and later, she was the waitress that made the "anal compulsive" joke.

Such subtle group sanctions of disapproval are an important aspect of the negotiating. The waitrons attempted to avoid causing even minor disapproval from the group and when it occurred, attempts were made on both sides to resolve it. According to Harvey (1981) separation and alienation are universal human fears and "both research and

experience indicate that ostracism is one of the most powerful punishments that can be devised."[19] The group's minor sanctions or negative responses to a statement are subtle forms of social exclusion or implicit threats of such exclusion. Even though these more subtle forms of exclusion do not carry the same force as complete ostracism, a temporary or incomplete ostracism still produces a degree of anxiety that individuals attempt to avoid.

While the desire for acceptance and fear of alienation are often seen as different sides of the same coin, that is the lack of one often implies the other, they are really different processes and modify behavior and meanings through different means. The desire for acceptance and the reaffirmation of acceptance act as a positive reinforcement mechanism while the various degrees of exclusion act as punishment[20] if applied by the group or avoidance learning if actions are taken to avoid future social exclusion.

The fear of even minor alienation helps explain the

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[19] The reason that Barbara resigned was probably due to the fact that, for all practical purposes, the group had ostracized her from all but impersonal and necessary job interactions. The threat of social isolation may also be an explanation for the higher than one would expect degree of power possessed by the wait staff relative to the head manager.

[20] According to social learning theory and reinforcement theory perceived consequences of past behavior determine future behavior and cognition (Tosi et al. 1986). There are four basic types of consequences of behavior. (1) Positive reinforcement and (2) avoidance learning have already been discussed earlier in this paper (albeit within a different context). (3) Punishment is the application of negative consequences to a response, and (4) extinction is the cessation of a previously established reinforcer (Tosi et al. 1986).

tentativeness and generality of the group members' first statements. Any statement can, in varying degrees, be either accepted or rejected by the group members. In the very early stages of the negotiation process there is less information concerning other members' views (since they have not expressed them yet) so the possibility of proposing a view that is at significant odds with the others is much higher and thus the possibility of rejection is higher.[21] By qualifying the statement with something like an "it may be just me" the speaker is in effect saying that "this really is not my steadfast or deeply held view so you can reject my view without rejecting me." By making the view subject to alternative interpretations the rejection rate is much lower and it is a way of testing the waters, so to speak, and of making sure that speaker is on the "right track." Once the broad definition is agreed upon, members can observe other members' responses and gradually refine and specify the definition through negotiation.

In this early stage of negotiation, the group was not only moving towards a very general shared perspective but they were negotiating what was relevant and what was illusory. Most negative characteristics of the assistant manager were seen as relevant and were accepted by the group. The statement concerning the new cleanliness of the

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[21] It seems significant that the only serious conflict among the waitrons occurred early on in the negotiation process before the group had articulated a coherent view.

kitchen was perceived as not only irrelevant, but misleading. The presence of a moderately clean kitchen before the new manager arrived was not perceived by the wait staff as a problem so the "improvement" to an exceptionally clean kitchen was perceived of as unimportant. Furthermore, it was pointed out the kitchen "wasn't really cleaner but just seemed cleaner," so any apparent cleanliness was really an illusion. By defining the new cleanliness as illusory what could have been considered the new manager's most obvious positive contribution to Stratford's was nullified. The waitrons were constructing a reality in which they were the "good guys" and the "Nazi" was the "bad guy." In order to fit this "reality" the "bad guy" could not be seen as doing a good job, thus her seemingly good job was challenged as illusory and further reinterpreted as actually "bad" since it kept waitrons tied up with unimportant work instead of taking care of the customers which was considered to be their first priority.

Analysis: The Negotiated Flashlight Story

When Susan began to tell of her "closing" experience two nights earlier the group's interest quickly waned. The experiences she related were everyday stuff that had little significance to the rest of the group. Even when Susan mentioned the manager making her restraighten the dining room, she admitted that she had not done it properly the first time. In this case, the manager had acted according

to the group's idea of expected managerial behavior. Susan was not addressing a concern of the other waitrons and their attention was wandering, which she must have realized.

In response to the group's tepid reaction, Susan presented an example of the manager acting inappropriately by making her do work which was not considered part of the normal job. This sparked the group's interest as it was relevant to the crisis they all faced. The group's approval of the new direction that this story was taking was indicated through verbal agreement, members intensely focusing on the speaker, nods of agreement, and asking for more details. The group approval resulted in Susan emphasizing and reiterating this subject, presumably to receive more approval. While the examples that she used all portrayed the manager in a negative light, they referred to a wide range of negative characteristics, ranging from the noises the manager made while eating, to her "superficial" attempts at friendliness towards Susan.

When the flashlight example was first mentioned, originally as a single sentence, the group's response was even more enthusiastic than before. Susan responded by elaborating the sentence into a brief story. The emphasis in the first story concerned the manager's compulsive irrationality in wanting to examine the cracks, but the flashlight was not mentioned this time. A waitress asked if Barbara really carried a flashlight with her and to this Susan gave the example of the manager getting on her knees to peer into the

cupboard.

The informal, nonconscious negotiation of a common interpretation of at least one aspect of the problem was now becoming apparent. The informal group discussion and complaining developed the general direction for the later discussion. As Susan related specific incidences the group let her know through various informal forms of feedback the ones in which they were most interested. When she mentioned a problem that the other group members found relevant to themselves, they responded in a positive manner, and when she mentioned incidents that were irreverent to the rest of the group they reacted negatively (either by withholding approval or through indications of disinterest). In this way Susan was nonconsciously encouraged to pursue topics of interest and relevance to the group. A dialogue occurred with Susan communicating to the group and the group communicating back to her. The dialogue had begun with participants mentioning any negative characteristic of Barbara's and developed gradually into a discussion concerning a single, specific negative aspect of the manager; the ridiculous, compulsive, irrational nature of her excessive focus on petty procedures.

This case illustrates the basic mechanism of the negotiation process. A positive response by several members of the surrounding group to a statement generally resulted in the further elaboration, by the speaker or others, of the statement or its underlying concept. A negative response by

several group members tended to result in an the cessation or curtailment of the statement and its underlying concept. This process seemed to hold true even for groups of only two people, but it was more prevalent in larger groups. Through this process, a group of individuals engaged in informal discussions generally develops a shared understanding and definition of the problem.

An important aspect of the negotiating process is its face-to-face nature. Berger and Luckman (1967) view the face-to-face interaction as the most important form of social interaction and as the basis of all other forms. While they are referring only to interactions between two people, it is true with groups as well. In the face-to-face interaction one individual's subjectivity is more apparent to the other than through any other means (Berger and Luckman 1967), and the negotiation of shared meanings is really the negotiation of an intersubjectivity, thus the importance of this type of interaction.

According to Berger and Luckman (1967) there is an inherent sense of reciprocity in the face-to-face interaction, especially through the use of language. They state that

> Both of us hear what each says at virtually the same instant, which makes possible a continuous, synchronized, reciprocal access to our two subjectivities, an intersubjective closeness in the face-to-face situation that no other sign system can duplicate. ... Now, however, as I objectivate my own being by means of language, my own being becomes massively and continuously available to myself at the same time that it is so available to him. (:37-38)

While this may be true, it is difficult to empirically demonstrate. A type of reciprocity that can be demonstrated though, is through the use of verbal and nonverbal responses from the other interacting individuals (as I have previously discussed). In this way the speaker is aware of the listeners' subjectivity, to some degree, and vice versa, so an intersubjectivity can develop. Shared meanings and symbols are negotiated through such a process.

It is not coincidental that the specific focus on the manager's compulsive, irrational rule adherence helped clarify the nature of the current organizational crises to the waitrons present. Before the discussion had started the waiter on probation had taken all the correct steps to solve the customers' problems, yet for some "inexplicable" reason, he had been placed on probation. The reason could now be understood. The "Nazi" wanted everyone to function according to her narrowly defined rules and tolerated no deviance. The problem was that her rules, according to the waitrons, were so specific and often irrational that they were not functional; they could not be applied to real life situations. The waiter was faced with a situation that the manager's rules did not adequately cover; even though he did the "right thing" the manager placed him on probation for not following her rules. I will offer further support for this interpretation as the analysis progresses.

Zack retold Susan's story but further embellished the ridiculousness and irrationality of the manager. The same sort of negotiation process was occurring with his retelling as well, and the story was modified further until its final form was established. By relating the great lengths that the manager would go to in accomplishing her objectives Zack further highlighted their irrationality, and by portraying the "Nazi's" actions that resulted from her compulsive procedures in a very derogatory and ridiculous manner, the telling of the story also attached these meanings to her actions. The message of the story was that not only were the managers procedures irrational, compulsive, and dysfunctional, but they are also ridiculous, ludicrous, humorous, and worthy of scorn. The double entendre remark "anal compulsive behavior" that a waitress used to characterize the manager's behavior in the story captures these two meanings succinctly. "Anal compulsive" referred to the manager's compulsive neatness carried to dysfunctional extremes and also to the ludicrous scene in the story of her posterior being too large to fit in the cupboard and moving in a fashion that had sexual connotations.

The negotiating that took place during this phase of the storytelling had more to do with the affective aspects of the story than its content. When Susan had told the story the managers actions were portrayed as moderately irrational and ludicrous. Zack took the same basic story and by portraying, with help and direction from the group

members, the manager's actions in an exceedingly graphic and comical manner imbued not only those actions but the underlying procedures and values upon which they were based with an excessive degree of absurdity. The central meaning and "function" of the story was to ridicule the "Nazi's" perfectionist values.

The Flashlight Story as a Symbol

I have followed Geertz (1973) in defining a symbol as anything which acts as a "vehicle for conception," and by this definition the final version of the story was a symbol. It acted as a "vehicle for conception" by representing the previously discussed meanings to the group. The story clarified aspects of the crises situation to the waitrons who were present at its formation. In the process of negotiating a shared understanding of the problematic crisis situation, the group had negotiated a symbol which conveyed the shared understanding. In this case at least, the negotiation of shared meanings, definitions, and symbols occurred in the simultaneously.

The story was not only a symbol for the nine waitrons who were present during its development, but became a symbol for the whole wait staff. Within the next three days the story had been told to every other waitron at Stratford's and in this way, the understandings that the group had formed were communicated to the rest of the wait staff. I did not observe any renegotiation of the meaning of the

story and it seemed to be accepted completely by the waitrons who were not present at the group. The rapid acceptance and vigorous adherence by the other waitrons indicates the story's effectiveness in offering a definition of the problem that was more than satisfactory to the wait staff.

The social construction of the story just two days after the waiter had been put on probation was not a coincidence. I have argued that the group constructed a set of meanings and a definition of their shared problem through the negotiation of the flashlight story. These meanings were not intrinsically inherent in the manager's use of the flashlight and a similar story would not have developed whenever this example was "brought up" in a group. That the context was important was indicated by the fact that other waitrons had observed the manager using the flashlight to "close" at least for two weeks before the probation incident.

The new manager "closes" three or four times a week and each night of the week two different waitrons "close" as well, so in the previous two weeks a minimum of four waitrons, and probably six to eight, must have seen her use the flashlight. At this time using the flashlight did not merit mention. According to the group's definition of the situation, it would have been just another example of the new manager's peculiar behavior that would eventually disappear as she gradually "fit in." The group's response made sense

of such managerial actions as checking deep cracks for cleanliness. After the waiter had been put on probation, the original group response was rescinded as it no longer seemed to help the waitrons make sense of the changes that were occurring. In this new uncertain situation, the previous explanation that could account for the use of the flashlight was shown to be false. The flashlight's use now lacked a "valid" or shared interpretation and was free to be reinterpreted.

As the Barbara continued to use the flashlight in her "check outs" it reinforced the meanings conveyed in the story. The effort that some of the waitrons went to in order to find out if the manager would continue using the flashlight indicated a desire to further reaffirm the version of reality that had been constructed. For example, I was present when a waitress who had closed the previous evening reported to a group of three waitrons and later a group of two waitrons that the Barbara had in fact used the flashlight to "close" that previous evening. Objectively one might expect a response of displeasure to this news as it meant a greater amount of work would be required from the waitrons when it came to be their turn to close. In both cases though the waitrons were exceedingly pleased with the news, reacting with good natured laughter. I believe this was because the news corroborated the meanings of the story and thus reaffirmed the social definition of the problem. The social definition of the problem is what had made sense

of the situation and removed some of the anxiety resulting from the uncertainty of the crisis.

That the story conveyed a specific set of meanings to the wait staff was further exemplified by the situation when several waitrons got together for the specific purpose of telling the story to the head manager and gauging his reactions. The waitron's intent was to observe the manager's reactions indicating that an implicit understanding that the story was more than just a funny joke, but communicated specific meanings. By telling the story to the manager they were asking him to affirm their definition of the problem and rejoin the waitron social group. The head manager's defence of Barbara's excessive cleanliness immediately after hearing the story indicates two things. First, it suggests that the meaning of the story was clear and unambiguous since he responded to central message and did not treat the story as just a funny incident. Second, it indicates that for whatever reason, he was rejecting the waitron's interpretation of the problem and their offer to rejoin the group. According to a waitress present at the exchange, "we gave him a chance but he took Barbara's side."

Further Development of the Flashlight Symbol

The set of meanings that were associated with the flashlight story soon became associated with the single word "flashlight." This was apparent during the incident when the waiter in the crowded kitchen with the manager present

simply spoke the word "flashlight" and sent everyone, except the manager, into almost uncontrollable laughter. There seems little question that the laughter was due to individuals remembering the meanings of the story, and the waitress's specific mention of the incidents in the story as causing her laughter support this claim.

The context in which the word "flashlight" was mentioned is also relevant. It was not mentioned haphazardly at a time when Barbara happened to be present, but it was mentioned in the same sort of situation that the waitrons had perceived as part of the original problem. The story was used not only as a way of coping with the original problem, but it served as a way of coping with similar future problems as well. I have already discussed the waitron's objections to being ordered around and especially to being ordered to do "grunt" work and the effects that this had on their self perceived prestige. Since the flashlight story had originally formed in response to such situations, when the waitrons were presented at a later time with the same threat to their culture, the same set of meanings and symbol was evoked to cope with the problem.

Whether it was the speaker's intent or not, the spoken word "flashlight" and the resulting laughter also acted to publicly ostracize, to a degree, the manager from the group. It was obvious to all present, including Barbara, that the manager was being deliberately excluded from the group, especially when the waitrons avoided telling her what the

joke was about. There was a clear social distribution of knowledge and as Barbara was not a member of the social group she was not privy to such knowledge. This social knowledge, and Barbara's ignorance of it, was used by the waitrons as a weapon. In this instance the word "flash-light" acted to reaffirm the group's solidarity in acting against the shared problem, as was clearly demonstrated by a waitress's remark that "that was a nice victory for a change."

The phrases "where's the flashlight" or "take the flashlight" became commonly used symbols for representing the set of meanings of the flashlight story. Whenever a waitron felt compelled to break a management rule in order to perform more effectively (according to the waitrons definition of effectively of course) or even to break a "useless" management rule someone was likely to say "where's the flashlight." For example, Barbara decided to allow the waitrons to carry no more than four plates on a tray, even though five can easily fit and with some balancing six can fit as well. According to the manager more than four plates on a tray does not look "appropriate for a fine dining restaurant." This rule was inconvenient for the waitrons as if they had a table with five or six customers they would then have to make two trips from the kitchen to carry out the meals. During one such instance a waiter had five meals ready to be taken from the kitchen to the table. A second waiter who was helping him arrange the plates on a tray

asked "take the flashlight?" The first waiter replied "of course" and took all five plates to the table.

I have never heard of any waitron refusing to "take the flashlight" as it is really asking if one wants to do the job right, according to the meanings in the flashlight story. This statement as it is commonly used applies the ludicrous and irrational meanings of the flashlight story to a single case and thus reaffirms these meanings for the participants. It also reaffirms the wait staff's values of autonomy as it is a deliberate breaking of the manager's rules when the waitron, on his or her own authority, does not judge the rules to be applicable to the situation. The use of this phrase also implies that the group sanctions such rule breaking.

The pervasiveness of the set of meanings originally symbolized in the flashlight story is further indicated by the use of a physical flashlight as a symbol that represented the same meanings. That the tense waiter instantly and unthinkingly struck a physical flashlight and that the other waitrons who observed this act found it understandable, both indicate the depth to which these meanings were internalized in such a relatively short time and the adaptability in finding various symbolic forms to represent the meanings.

Analysis: The Flashlight Story as a Response

The negotiation of a group's responses to a problem

cannot be separated from the negotiation of the definition of the problem as the two usually occur together and an agreement on a response sometimes precedes the agreement on the nature of the problem. The original "do nothing" response was agreed upon before the nature of the problem was defined. No one wanted to do anything about the unsettling conflicts that began to arise soon after Barbara started work, seeming to believe that if the situation was ignored it would go away. As the problems got gradually worse, waitrons began justifying their response with the "she's just gung ho" type statements.

A situation where the problems and responses were negotiated together occurred more often. Often the definition of the problem implies or determines the responses. After the probation crisis the new manager's procedures, behavior, and values were shown through the flashlight story to be irrational, dysfunctional, and ludicrous. By definition normal, intelligent people do not behave or hold values that are irrational, dysfunctional, or ludicrous and since the waitrons viewed themselves as normal, intelligent people, according to their definition of the problem they could not participate in such activities, at least not if they could help it. The response of struggling to the utmost against those aspects of the problem which the group had defined as ludicrous, such as the managers compulsive cleanliness, were inherent in the definition of the problem.

Barbara's Replacement

In much of the remainder of this thesis I discuss events that occurred after Barbara had resigned. To "set the stage" I briefly discuss her replacement, Joe, who was also from the corporate headquarters. Before he started work at Stratford's he had been told in detail about the conflicts that Barbara and the wait staff experienced. Within his first several days at work he repeatedly told each waitron that he considered the level of service at Stratford's exceptional and that he was a "laid back, easy going type of guy." For several weeks he did not impose any new rules or enforce existing ones, and he had the waitrons teach him the "proper" procedures rather than telling them what to do. He also made an effort to socialize with the waitrons.

Joe's purpose with these approaches was to avoid the conflicts that Barbara had experienced and in the process he adapted to the waitron's culture. While the waitron's did not trust him at first, within a couple of weeks they accepted him. Both the wait staff's distrust of management in general and their almost reluctant acceptance of Joe were illustrated by a dialogue that took place two weeks after he started work. One night while several of the wait staff were present in the kitchen a waiter asked Joe why he was a restaurant manager as he "actually seemed like a normal

guy." Before Joe could answer a waitress said "give him time, they [managers] all become assholes eventually." Even though these statements were mentioned in a joking manner they indicate the waitron's distrust of management as well as an implied threat to Joe.

Joe's arrival did not significantly affect the cultural or structural relationships at the restaurant. Unlike the situation when Barbara was present, the Head manager was perceived as the major decision maker and Joe rarely seemed to be an active participant in any of the minor crises that occurred. In fact, Joe was perceived of occupying an almost mediatory role in that he was not considered a real manager (a compliment from the waitrons' point of view), but he was not considered a full member of the waitron social group either. After Barbara left the management as a group was not perceived of as the "enemy" any more, yet they were considered unpredictable and not to be trusted. Joe's mediatory position meant that in some situations he could be trusted and in others he could not.[22]

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[22] For example, if a waitron had a dissatisfied customer it was still the common practice to keep this fact from Joe. In other instances, such as when a waitress and waiter were playfully wrestling and she broke her hand (costing the restaurant several hundred dollars in medical bills and costing each manager to loose a couple of thousand dollars from their end of the year bonis) the waitress felt safe in confidentially telling Joe the real reason for the accident, even though had the head manager had found out about the real cause he would have almost certainly fired both of the waitrons involved. The cultural rule applicable to such situations seemed to be that if Joe found out about a problem on his own he was not to be trusted, but if a waitron brought a non-customer related problem to him then he was trustworthy.

Negotiating Between Different, Completely Formed Interpretations

The negotiation process that resulted with the flashlight symbols occurred in an almost linear fashion from a loosely defined problem that was gradually refined by the group to a more specific definition. This is not the only pathway through which social definitions are negotiated. I observed two other pathways, the first of which was a group being presented by several definitions and choosing one. In the other pathway the negotiation process did not take place within a localized group whose members were all present at the some time, but occurred within an informal communication network as information was passed on from one individual to the next.

There were several instances where the group was presented with several definitions of a situation and the task was to decide which one was the more appropriate. One such case occurred in the spring of 1989 long after Barbara had resigned and concerned the wait staff's internal social relations. Restaurants always seem to have an abundance of intragroup romantic affairs and minor scandals, but a month previously a particularly unfortunate incident had occurred. Zack was perceived to have, in a very deceitful "smooth talking" manner, convinced a naive waitress to have an affair with him, and then without warning he "dumped" her.

This incident ended with an abundance of bad feelings and caused a good deal of friction within the wait staff as it pitted the supporters of Zack against the supporters of the waitress, all of whom had to work in close proximity with each other. This conflict was resolved through a group negotiation process similar to the flashlight case, and it resulted in the development of certain norms of behavior that waitrons were now "expected" to pursue in regard to any future romantic liaisons within the wait staff.[23] All intrawait staff relationships were mildly disapproved of but if one occurred, both parties were expected to behave in a totally open and truthful manner.

A month later in a group of eight waitrons, Stan was accused of Zack like behavior (e.g. taking advantage of a waitress) by a second waiter, Tony. According to Tony's version a new waitress's car battery had run down while she was at work leaving her with no way of getting to a party that a waitron was throwing after work. Even though Stan had jumper cables with him, he convinced the waitress to let him drive her to the party, got the new waitress drunk, and then took her back to jump start her car, which took over an hour. The implication was that Stan took advantage of the waitress's lack of mechanical knowledge by saying that the

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[23] It is interesting to note that these norms of proper behavior applied only to fellow employees, not to relationships with non-employees. Candor was valued as correct behavior within the group but there was no moral sanction from the group to apply it to outside relationships.

battery would take an hour to charge so that he could be alone with the waitress inside the car while the battery was charging. Tony knew all this because he had followed the couple back from the party and observed their behavior clandestinely. He claimed that "that's slime, to treat someone you work with that way."

Stan claimed that he was "just being nice" (which caused some scoffing laughter among the group) and that his jumper cables were of a small diameter so that it really took that long to recharge the battery (resulting in more laughter). Furthermore, according to Stan, it was obvious that Tony was the one who was behaving like Zack as Tony was trying to manipulate Stan out of the picture so that Tony could have the new waitress all to himself. Stan claimed that if they wanted to talk about deceitful behavior then they should refer to Tony's clandestine spying on his fellow workers. A member of the group remarked that both waiters were acting like Zack.

Three possible interpretations had been presented to the group; Stan's version, Tony's version, and the possibility that they were both "acting like Zack." The negotiation process that occurred in this case was different from the "flashlight" example in that here the group was presented with three interpretations and the negotiating was over which one to accept. In the "flashlight" case the group did not start with a choice of interpretations but began "from scratch."

The "correct" interpretation was not immediately obvious and the group proceeded to informally negotiate their definition. Tony responded that the jumper cables must have been the size of hair in order to take a full hour to charge, and this resulted in a good deal of laughter. Stan replied by making the comment that certain people (referring to Tony) need to make up for their own inadequate social life by voyeuristically observing others. This comment received a few chuckles but not to the same degree as Tony's hair quip, and a waitress defended Tony by saying that "someone needs to keep you [Stan] honest."

As even these few comments suggest, the group member's views were slowly shifting in favor of Tony's interpretation both in terms of the number of supporting comments offered and in the degree of approval accorded to each statement. This trend continued for fifteen more minutes until all the remarks favored Tony and Stan became silent. The group's joking at Stan's expense was another example of the group applying a minor sanction against behavior that did not correspond with their definition of proper behavior. In future interactions with the waitress in question, Stan went to exaggerated lengths to ensure that everything was done "above board" and even went to the trouble of arranging for three of the waitrons from the group to be present the next time he asked the waitress out for a date.

Negotiating through the Grapevine

The third type of negotiating process does not occur within a group meeting like the others but results from many one on one interactions, such as gossiping and discussion. In this case the topic in question is discussed through the informal communication network or "grapevine." As a problem is discussed between two individuals a small scale negotiation process similar to that which occurs in groups takes place. Although the desire for acceptance and the discomfort from sanctions may not be as strong with only two individuals as it is in a larger group, these concerns are still present. The two individuals often form an agreement on the nature of the problem and they convey this agreement to the next person each encounters. Once again the agreement can be renegotiated, the result of which is passed on and renegotiated again and so on. Often the problem is "tossed around" for several days to a week with various individuals contributing several times until a general consensus is reached. This may seem like a slow and laborious process but several researchers (Rasberry and Lemoine 1986, Tosi et al. 1986) have discussed the "uncanny speed" of transition of such informal communication, which generally occurs at a faster rate than through the formal communication network even within organizations that are widely dispersed geographically. It is clear that this type of negotiation can occur only if there is effective interaction between participants.

An example illustrating this proposition occurred at Stratford's in October, 1988 (after Barbara had resigned) when the wait staff was presented with a new problem. The problem concerned extremely high bar costs (bar costs are the amount of money that the restaurant spends for bar supplies over the amount of money that it makes from selling these bar products). The management blamed this on the waitrons for receiving free and extra strong drinks from the bartenders after work, and the waiters were prohibited from the common practice of patronizing the bar after their shift ended. This was viewed as a serious problem and great insult by the waitrons as it challenged some of their assumptions, such as their "right" to privileged treatment, prestige, and the recently reaffirmed manager/waitron comradely. This case provides a good example of the effect of negotiating through the "grapevine" since the only setting that could accommodate groups of more than four individuals at Stratford's was in the bar, so the prohibition against patronizing the bar removed the possibility of large group gatherings.

At the onset there was a great deal of disagreement over the "real" cause of the problem and of what to do about it. During the first two days I heard hundreds of instances of "bitching" and gossiping about the problem and almost 90% of these discussions proposed responses. Some common interpretations of the problem were: the bartenders drink the profits and give free drink to their personal (non-employee)

friends; management some how made errors with the inventory and "they need a scapegoat so they're blaming us;" "sure we get extra good drinks but we deserve them for all the crap we have to put up with;" "management doesn't think it looks good for waiters to be in the bar with customers;" "the restaurant makes such a profit on alcohol [about 300%] that they can afford our occasional free drink;" "the head manager just wants to assert his power;" and others. The possible responses that were mentioned included: giving deliberately poor service to the customers; deliberately breaking enough plates and glasses that the cost of replacing them would be higher than the bar losses; making the head manager's life "hell" by ostracizing him; having every waiter try to convince the head manager individually to change his mind; and doing nothing, as soon management would realize how much money they were loosing by not selling the wait staff drinks.

I heard many individual instances of waitrons debating various responses, which supports the hypothesis that gossip acts to communicate responses. I gave up trying to record all the different interpretations of the problems and types of responses, but there were at least several dozen during the first two days. After a week the wait staff had decided on one interpretation of the problem[24] and one general response with two minor varieties. The final interpretation

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[24] Out of 18 waitrons questioned 14 agreed, 3 did not have an opinion, and 1 had a radically different interpretation.

was that the head manager was using the wait staff as "scape goats" in order to deflect blame by the corporate headquarters away from himself. The response was to apply social pressure towards the manager along with thinly veiled threats of petty sabotage and poor performance.[25] From this information, it seems clear that in the space of a week the gossiping and bitching acted not only to communicate the problem quickly, but to negotiate a reasonably united response.

The head manager admitted (though not publicly) that there was a far greater degree of opposition to the removal of bar privileges than he had anticipated and that he was concerned about the "morale" of the wait staff. I interpreted this to mean that he was concerned about the waitrons' enthusiasm in dealing with the customers, thus it seemed as if the waitrons' threats worked. It is interesting to note that once again the management gave in to the waitrons' demands and within three weeks had reinstated bar "privileges."

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[25] Each one of the two minor varieties of responses was held by a single individual. One waitress agreed with using threats of petty sabotage but did not think the social pressure would work as, the manager was an "ass hole." Another waitress thought that the group should actually carry out some sabotage, not just make threats. While neither waitress completely agreed with the response that was implemented neither was willing to act on her own to implement her version.

The Rate Acceptance

Most of the potentially problematic situations that occurred at Stratford's were explainable within the context of the existing culture and required little or no negotiation. For example, Zack and a bartender caught a waiter stealing a bottle of wine from the restaurant. They reported it to the head manager, and the waiter was fired. There was a fairly long story about how Zack discovered the theft and it was rapidly communicated through the grapevine so that within two days everyone knew the details of the incident. There was no real negotiation over the interpretation of this situation as the interpretation was obvious. Part of the cultural definition concerning the waitron's autonomy is that they are capable of dealing with situations in the "correct" way, that is, they are worthy of a high degree of trust. The waiter violated this trust not only from the management's point of view but also from the perspective of the rest of the wait staff. This was not an ambiguous situation. Even though the waiter was well liked, he violated rules that the group perceived as legitimate and was dealt with accordingly. It is only when a problem arises that does not have an obvious interpretation or that presents ambiguity that the negotiation occurs to establish the meaning and make sense of things.

When the negotiation occurs in groups, a consensus on the definition of the problem occurs quickly. In all the groups that I observed a collective definition was formed

within two hours. It seems obvious that nine individuals at one point in space and time who are in close interaction would form a consensus quicker than a widely scattered group of individuals in only loose interaction, as was the case with the bar costs problem. What needs explaining is why the rest of the wait staff should accept the definition of a group that, after all, was made up of only about one third of the total number of waitrons. One might expect the group's definition to be renegotiated once it is presented to each other waitron, in a fashion similar to the "grape-vine" type of negotiation.

An explanation lies in the fact that a group of nine waitrons is large enough to be fairly representative of the wait staff as a whole. Negotiation results from shared problems, that is, a situation that causes a degree of shared anxiety. If nine members perceive a problem to threaten their social construction of reality it is likely that, since this social construction is shared, other members feel the same sense of anxiety. By negotiating a definition of, and response to, the problem the group members come to understand it (according to their definition) and the ambiguity and anxiety associated with the problem are reduced. Any social definition that is powerful enough to clarify things for nine individuals will likely clarify the same problem to other members of the same culture. This was what occurred with the flashlight story. The story made such sense of the problems that everyone was experiencing,

that it was adopted by other waitrons who were not present during its creation.

There are two other factors that may promote the acceptance of a group's definition to the other cultural members. Any definition of a problem that is already held by a group of individuals is more likely to be accepted by an individual than the same definition that is only advocated by one individual. With the definition that is advocated by a group the aspects of group acceptance and alienation are brought into greater play than with the individually advocated definition. The second factor concerns the notion that since reality is socially constructed, there is no intrinsically right or wrong definition. THerefore, the advocated definition does not need to meet objective criteria. It "copes with" the problem, at least initially, if the group members believe that it "copes with" the problem.

Connecting Elements of Reality

Throughout this paper I have argued that culture forms in response to perceived group problems whose definitions and responses and their resulting symbols and meanings are all negotiated. This negotiation is really a process of socially creating reality. By saying that groups create their own reality through cultural creation and modification I do not mean to imply that they create something out of nothing. Physical and behavioral phenomena, like the new

manager putting the waiter on suspension, are real and have an independent existence, but these individual elements are without meaning until they are arranged together in a significant way and thus given meaning. This is a creation process, as any individual element can be used in a variety of ways. Smircich and Stubbart (1985) use an analogy with the stars to describe how upper management enact the organization's environment, but the analogy holds true to a social creation of reality as well. In their analogy, they state that there are really no constellations or groups of stars just individual stars randomly distributed throughout the universe. People have arbitrarily clustered the stars and formed imaginary lines between them to form constellations, such as Orion and the Big Dipper, thus creating their own reality. In fact, the same stars that are clustered to form the Big Dipper to some people are clustered in a slightly different way to form Ursa Major (the bear) to others. The environment is not some objective reality that presents problems that the organizational culture responds to, but the environment, like culture and reality, is socially created. By the environment I mean context within which the culture develops, so in the case of my research the environment was the environment within Stratford's--including the previous whole organizational culture, the management and their policies and actions, and the customers. It is how the single phenomena of the environment are connected that is subject to negotiation and forms the

creation process.

This social creation of reality is illustrated by the probation case at Stratford's. While some might claim that the waitrons' problems were real and that the creation of the new culture was a functional response, this is not really true. The group connected certain actions of the manager in such a way as to create a "reality" where she was perceived as "out to get us." From another point of view, that of the manager and unknown to the rest of the staff, she had a passionate personal dislike for the waiter that she put on probation and that was a major factor. From this perspective her actions were no threat to the rest of the group and she was mystified over the whole backlash. According to her by getting rid of the "bad personalities" and "shaping up" the restaurant everyone would be happier and earn more money. Both the group and the new manager defined reality differently and thus the clash.

SUMMARY

My research from Stratford's supports the theory that organizational cultures arise as shared responses to group problems, but also indicates that the formation of a shared definition of the problem is of equal or greater importance. Group members construct shared definitions of the problems, responses, and meanings through a social negotiation process that occurs through everyday gossiping, discussion, and

casual gatherings. The shared meanings and understandings often become symbolized as stories, rituals, behaviors, vocabulary, jokes, objects, etc., and these symbols and their meanings, in turn, act to maintain and shape the shared aspects of the culture. The negotiation process is, in effect, a process whereby a group socially creates "reality" and the symbols through which it is transmitted and maintained.

I began the thesis (after a brief review of the relevant literature) with a description of the organizational crisis that occurred at Stratford's when Barbara started work and attempted to change the organizational culture to what she saw as a more effective system. The wait staff's original response of attempting to incorporate the new manager into the existing organizational culture was not perceived to have coped adequately with the situation. When Barbara placed a waiter on probation for behaving in a manner that the wait staff perceived as correct, the crisis became critical. The waitrons were presented with a group problem and the culture changed to cope with it. In order to further support this explanation I presented another incident where there was a crisis which was not perceived as a group problem and which did not result in a cultural mechanism for coping with the situation. The fact that Barbara was well liked at another restaurant was discussed in order to highlight the cultural nature of the conflict and eliminate explanations having to do primarily with her

individual personality or managerial skills.

While culture may form as responses to shared problems I was interested in how these problems were defined as shared and on how a response was agreed upon. In order to examine this question in depth I focused on the creation and development of a single set of symbols. The case occurred at a gathering of waitrons shortly after the probation "incident." As there was no shared definition of the crises before the group met the first comments offered by individual members were tentative and general. A dialogue of sorts took place whereby the speaker modified his or her statements according to the group's various degrees of reinforcement. The process developed from a general "airing" of negative interpretations to a specific definition of the problem through collective negotiations. This process resulted in the creation of the flashlight story that was a group effort and represented the group's definition of the problem that they all faced. The flashlight story was communicated to the rest of the wait staff and the symbol was elaborated in other mediums as well. This symbol helped create the wait staff's perception of reality by defining the nature of the problem and by defining the illusory aspects of it. I also discussed two other pathways that the negotiation may follow and discussed the various rates of acceptance associated with each.

This work has not really dealt with the creation of a culture but rather with the creation of a few elements of a

culture. A culture is made up of a complex interaction of systems of symbols and their meanings, thus an attempt to comprehensively describe the culture and its change is far beyond the scope of this work. By following the development of a few of the prominent problems, responses, symbols, and meanings, I have attempted to illustrate how this process progresses.

Implications for Future Research

While the concept of the social construction of reality is often used in the works of various disciplines there have been few empirical studies that really examine how this process occurs. There has been a great deal of "armchair" speculation and not enough observation. By suggesting that social reality is constructed through a process of negotiation and analyzing real examples of this process, this work provides a tentative step towards a better understanding of how individuals actually come to share a set of meanings and understandings without conscious articulation.

Most of the studies on the creation of organizational culture share three assumptions; that the culture is monolithic and shared throughout the organization, that the founders/leaders deliberately guide the cultural creation, and that the resulting culture reflects the founder's personal ideology (Martin et al. 1985). At Stratford's, a culture formed without any of these assumptions occurring. It is a mistake to assume that the boundaries of a culture

will overlap perfectly with the organizational boundaries and this certainly did not occur at Stratford's. The original culture at the restaurant was shared only between the wait staff and management and even this group split into two cultures after the arrival of a new manager. While it is too early to say with any certainty, it seems as if the waitrons and management are now (after the resignation of Barbara) moving towards a single shared culture as more meanings and symbols are coming to be shared between the two groups. This suggests that organizational cultures are not the monolithic, stable entities that they are often portrayed as, but are more fluid than is commonly realized. Further research would help clarify this issue, which has managerial as well as theoretical implications.

Importantly, not a single leader among the waitrons at Stratford's had a major role in shaping the culture that developed. The new meanings that became shared were the result of a collective group negotiation process. This calls into question the theory that cultures are created and guided by charismatic leaders, and since there was not a single leader the culture was certainly not a reflection of any charismatic founder's personality. Furthermore, Barbara, who was described as charismatic in another restaurant, had almost no success in shaping the culture according to her ideas at Stratford's. These findings suggest that the occurrence of a leader is not necessary for cultural change.

A related point concerns what Smircich (1983a) refers to as a the managerial bias in organizational literature. Smircich states that researchers tend to approach research from the management's, not the worker's, point of view and assume that managers have the capacity to change the organizational culture along desired lines if they proceed properly. At Stratford's the management had little control over the cultural change, despite their formal authority and power. The cultural change that occurred was an employee generated and controlled process. These findings suggest that organizational researchers would profit by spending less time studying managers and formal structures and more time studying workers and informal processes.

Within the new Organizational Symbolism perspective many authors (cf. Peters 1978, Dandridge 1983, Wilkins 1983) are vigorously promoting the use of symbolic management. The claim is made that symbols are powerful new tools that managers can create and then use for shaping employee behavior. According to Peters (1978)

> An effective set of change tools is actually embedded in senior management's daily message sending and receiving activities and that these tools can be managed in such a way as to energize and redirect massive, lumbering business and government institutions. The tools [are] characterized as symbols.

Such statements assume that the management created symbols and meanings are accepted according to management's definitions. The findings from my research indicate that symbols

and meanings, from whatever source, are negotiated and renegotiated by the group to suit their own needs, thus managers cannot simply create a meaning and expect workers to accept it. Some of the symbolic management research would benefit by taking notice of this.

A further implication of this research is that in order to even begin to acquire an understanding of an organizational culture and the cultural change process the researcher must devote a significant amount of time undertaking participant observation. This fact, though vigorously advocated by anthropologists in their cultural studies, has not yet made much inroad into the organizational culture field (Gregory 1983, Beck and Moore 1985, Berg 1985, and Smircich 1985 are notable exceptions). Most of the data used in this work would have remained unknown had I used Schein's (1985a) clinical approach (a psychologically influenced method of interviewing), structured or unstructured interviews, questionnaires, formal organizational documents and histories, some sort of quantitative logical-positivist quasi-experimental approach, or any combination of these methods. I do not deny that some of these methods can be of great use, but only in conjunction with a form of participant observation. Culture is a complex and still imperfectly understood phenomena and so a significant investment of time by the researcher is required to develop an understanding of a particular case. The studies that quickly describe the culture of an organization based on days or weeks of

research miss out on the complexity and underlying processes that are occurring.

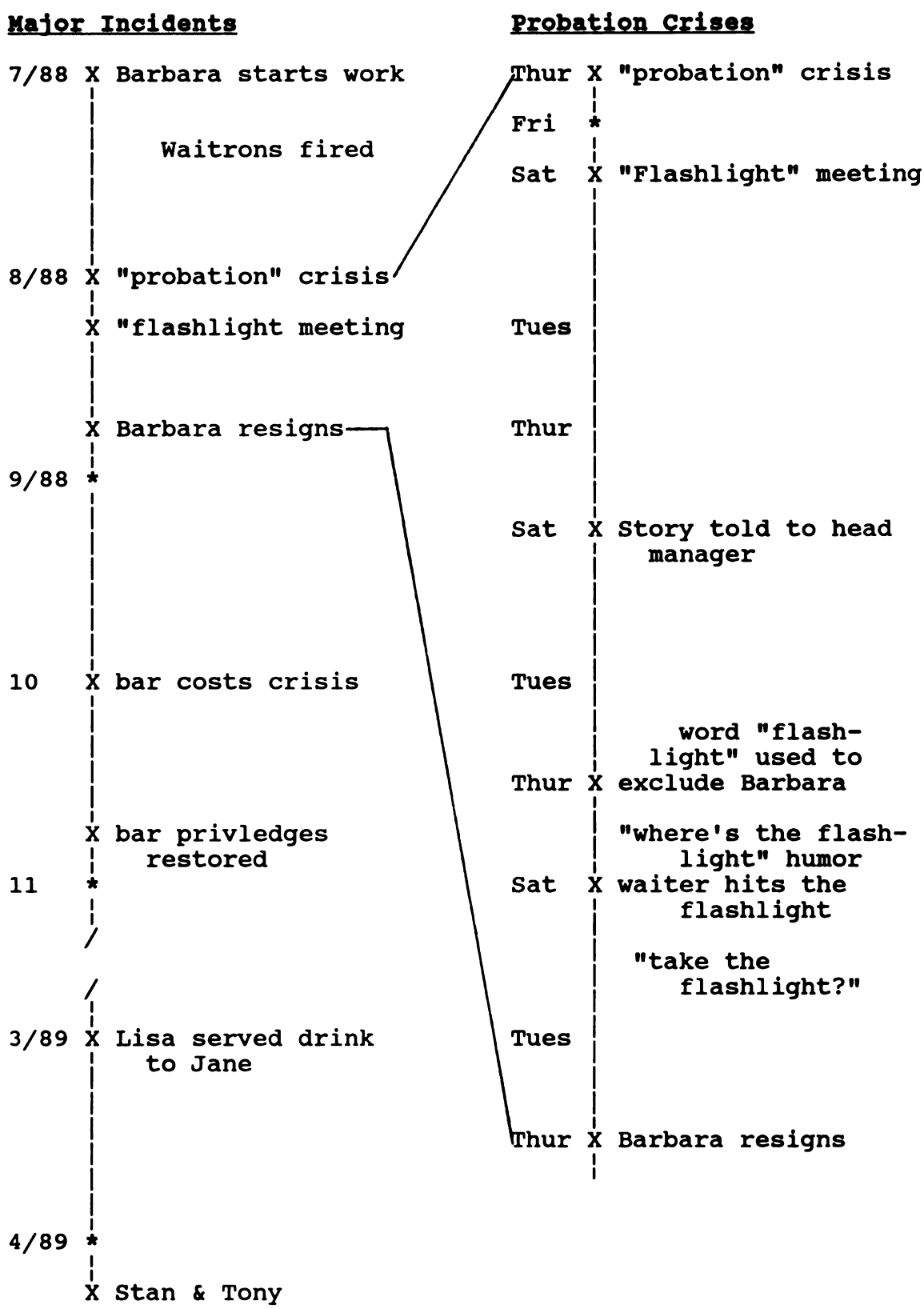

Figure 2. **CHRONOLOGY**

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