

The Role of Memorable Messages in the Process of Organizational Socialization

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This study examines the structure, form, and nature of the content and context of memorable messages exchanged within an organization. Based on the work of Knapp, Stohl and Reardon (1981) an analysis of interviews conducted within a small company indicates that all members were able to recall precisely a specific message which had a lasting influence on their work lives. The messages capsulized how one "should" behave in the organization and functioned to assimilate individuals into the work culture. The socializing and memorable nature of the messages were enhanced by several recurrent features in their form and structure, the receptivity of the respondent, the content, and the context.

KEY CONCEPTS *Organizational socialization, assimilation, memorable messages, organizational culture, organizational communication, memory, work, rules, scripts*

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A special attribute of the success-oriented, positive and innovating environment is a substantial tolerance for failure. James Burke, J & J's (Johnson and Johnson) CEO says, "One of the tenets is that you've got to be willing to fail." He adds that General Johnson, J & J's founder said to him, "If I weren't making mistakes, I wasn't making decisions." (Peters & Waterman, 1981, p. 223)

This paragraph exemplifies two major themes developed by Peters and Waterman (1981) in their best-selling book *In Search of Excellence*: 1) the importance of substantial tolerance for failure in excellent companies and 2) the importance of explicating and instilling strong corporate values within the organization. Throughout their book the authors provide numerous examples of the myths, legends, homilies, and vignettes that are used to acquaint new members with and reinforce insiders' knowledge of the rules, requirements, and "rationality" of the excellent companies. Burke's recollection of a specific corporate message capsulizing the essence of how one should behave within his company is illustrative of a less noted but possibly pervasive process by which individuals learn requisite organizational orientations—the transmission/reception of "memorable messages" within informal organizational networks.

The purpose of this study is to examine the structure, form, and nature of the content and context of memorable messages transmitted within an

organizational setting. Earlier work by Knapp, Stöhl, and Reardon (1981) found an overwhelming percentage of respondents were able to recall precisely a specific message that had a lasting and continuing influence on their lives. An analysis of the structure and content as well as the circumstances surrounding the transmission and reception of 224 "memorable" messages identified several recurrent features. The analysis further revealed memorable messages to be a rich source of information about ourselves and our ways of communicating and socializing.

There are only two necessary characteristics of a memorable message—an individual remembers the message for a long period of time and perceives the message had a major influence on the course of his or her life. However, many structural and contextual similarities were found among the recalled messages. The configuration of characteristics associated with most memorable messages are detailed in a later section of the paper but a general description of the findings from the Knapp et al. (1981) study and a few examples will help clarify the concept.

First, memorable messages were found to be brief oral injunctions. Second, the messages were personal, regarding important issues in people's lives and occurred at equivocal and often difficult points in time. Perceptual and emotional receptivity increased when the message provided a unique way of resolving a crisis, integrated diffuse and confusing experiences, and/or created hopeful guidelines for future understanding. Third, the messages prescribed rules of conduct and offered strategies for dealing with varied situations. Although the message initially referred to a specific event the wording was such that it could be applied to a variety of experiences. Fourth, the content reflected rather conservative social values, those attitudes most beneficial for the maintenance of the social system. Like personalized proverbs, memorable messages were found to embody cultural norms and provided individuals with rules to live by. Fifth, the source of the message was "older and wiser," perceived as having higher status than the recipient. The sender's credibility seemed both to legitimize the message and make it easier to recall (Knapp et al., 1981).

In other words, the recalled message, provided a transcontextual directive and exerted a powerful socializing influence on the respondent. A sampling of the messages in the original study include: "No matter what the other girls are doing, act like a lady," "Make your avocation your vocation," "Work smarter, not harder," "If you want a relationship to work, you have to work at it," "You make luck, luck doesn't make you," and "Don't worry about the mule going blind, just load the wagon."

Interestingly, although the open-ended interview schedule used in the original study did not specify a particular context for the reception of memorable messages a surprising percentage were received within the work setting. Informants were asked if there were "any messages you recall which seemed to have a significant impact on your life?"—over 40% of the sample supplied a message received while performing on the job. For example, one respondent reported that 14 years ago, when she first started her job and seemed hopelessly confused about her responsibilities, her boss of three

weeks said, "Don't say what I'm doing, say what I say I'm doing." She indicated she has often repeated this exact message to the young women entering the secretarial pool because "it says alot about the boss and the way the company operates in general." Another respondent provided the message, "Don't kick the king unless you kill him." This informant indicated that 25 years later the message still capsulized the way power struggles were handled in his organization. He cited instances during his tenure at the company where he implemented this advice, recalling the initial troubling situation clearly and frequently as he planned his "political strategies."

These examples suggest that the messages were deemed memorable because they supplied the individual with the social knowledge and skills necessary to maintain the system and behave as competent members of the organization. In other words the messages remained salient to the respondents because they functioned to socialize the individuals by inculcating appropriate values, expected behaviors, and knowledge essential for effectively assuming an organizational role (Brim & Wheeler, 1966). Organizational socialization is "the process by which a person learns the values, norms and required behaviors which permit him (her) to participate as a member of the organization" (Van Maanen, 1975, p. 67). The process is generally conceptualized as developed through a number of sequential stages (Jablin, 1984; Feldman, 1976). Communication plays a salient role as individuals change from recruits to full-fledged organizational members (Wilson, 1984). Memorable messages are heuristic devices people use for understanding and behaving in new situations. They may be significant symbols of the acculturation/communication process in organizations.

Memorable Messages and Organization Socialization

Whether the transmission/reception of memorable messages within informal organizational networks is a pervasive socializing experience is not clear. The original study identified a memorable message as a common "communication unit" but did not focus specifically on an organizational context. Furthermore, those messages that were received in a work setting did not come from one organization, thus, it is impossible to trace whether the recalled messages actually capsulized the essence of how one "should" behave in the work culture. By extending the investigation of memorable messages into one organization we can better understand their potential role in conveying the role-related and culture-related content of organizational socialization.

There is a need to investigate the processes by which organizational knowledge is acquired. Although informal communication and socializing interactions have long been regarded as essential to the formal organization (Barnard, 1938), the processes by which individuals "come to appreciate pivotal organizational values, role-related abilities and missions and interpretation schemes appropriate to the local culture have not been adequately explored" (Louis, 1980, p. 233). The existing research (with few exceptions, e.g. Brown, 1982; Kreps, 1983; Louis, Posner & Powell, 1983) neglects the

significance of interaction between organizational members (Wilson, 1984) and focuses heavily on the organization's perspective, often ignoring meaningful and memorable socialization experiences from the viewpoint of the employee. Examining employees' perceptions of what constitutes a memorable message will provide us with a unique source of information about the way individuals perceive they learn to understand and behave within a given organizational context.

In summary, the transmission and recollection of memorable messages is conceptualized as a communication process by which the requisite orientations are transferred to organizational participants. The transmission of memorable messages is not considered to be a formal socializing technique used by the organization. Rather, analogous to the important and unobtrusive socializing function of proverbs (Brunvand, 1968) and fairy tales (Bettleheim, 1976) part of the socializing and memorable nature of the messages is expected to be found in the receptivity of the target person, and the message's content, context, and form. Bettleheim (1976) forcefully argues that in order for a message to attain its fullest symbolic and interpersonal power, which includes transmitting a cultural heritage, creating meaning and offering behavioral options, it should be told rather than read.

Several predictions regarding the nature of the content and form of memorable messages are developed in the next section. The procedures of the study and the analysis are then described. The fourth section describes the procedures used to collect and analyze the messages. The final section presents the results and discussion.

Characteristics of Memorable Messages

The distinguishing characteristics of memorable messages will be examined from within four categories: 1) the structure and form of the message, 2) the circumstances surrounding the enactment and reception of the message, 3) the nature of the content of the message, and 4) the nature of the relationship between the recipient and source of the message (Knapp et al., 1981). It is important to emphasize that none of the specific features previously found to be associated with memorable messages are necessary components of any one message, rather, certain features are expected to enhance the memorable nature of the message. The only necessary and sufficient condition that distinguishes a memorable message from the thousands of others we receive each day is the retrospective judgment by the individual that the message was/is significant and can be precisely recalled.

The Structure and Form of the Message

Three predictions regarding the structure and form of memorable messages arise from past research. In general, the brevity and simplicity of oral messages are associated with enhancement of the process of memory storage and/or retrieval (Linton, 1975). Ong (1980) suggests that certain features of oral communication trigger a "light bulb" effect which does not occur with

written communication and "our experience in yielding to the wisdom of . . . brief oral injunctions and proverbs begins early in life when the communicative impact of orality is high" (p. 198). The greater strength of hearing memory than sight memory (Loftus & Loftus, 1976) and the greater attention paid to oral communication within organizations (Rogers & Rogers, 1976) further suggests the recalled messages will be transmitted orally.

Messages are also expected to be rather short, simple sentences. After five months, respondents in the original study were able to reproduce the message exactly (Knapp et al., 1981). A complex verbal construction would be far more difficult to remember and replicate (Linton, 1975).

The memorable nature of the message was also related to one other feature of its form. Over 60% of the messages were rule-structured. Based on the work of Shimanoff (1980) and Harris (1979) a model composed of four components was used to determine whether a message was rule-structured. Although this procedure underestimates the number of messages that function conceptually as rules it allows for a precise analysis of the structure of the remembered messages and will be followed here.

The four structural characteristics of regulatives rules include:

- a) an indication of the context or condition in which the rule is applicable—this condition must be of a repeatable nature if the behavior suggested is to become a rule
- b) a prescriptive marker which indicates obligation, preference or prohibition—the words "must," "should," and "should not" are commonly used
- c) an indication of the behavioral act which ought to, may, or must be performed to comply with the rule
- d) an indication of the desired consequences of behaving in the prescribed manner

(Knapp et al., 1981, p. 31).

For example, the message "If you have nothing to do, you should never do nothing or you'll be a nothing" would be coded as a rule because it includes all four components.

However, as in the Knapp et al. (1981) study the components do not have to be explicitly stated in the message. Any component may be obtained from other interview data. For example, a message given by the CEO when explaining what should be done before conducting the study was "In order to understand us you must first dust our shelves." This statement is rule-structured. The prescriptive marker (SHOULD), the behavioral act (DUST OUR SHELVES, i.e., spend some time in each area of the company) the desired act (UNDERSTAND US) are all present. Only the first condition is not stated (WHEN DOING RESEARCH) but this would be included in the interview responses regarding the context of the message. The context of social action is often unstated in verbal interaction (Cronen, Pearce & Harris, 1982). The classification of rule statements will require judgments based on the reconstruction of segments implicit in the interview data. Reliability amongst coders will be analyzed.

In summary, there are three hypotheses regarding the structure and form of memorable messages:

1. Memorable messages are orally transmitted.
2. Memorable messages are short, simple sentences.
3. Memorable messages are rule-structured.

Circumstances Surrounding the Transmission and Reception of Memorable Messages

Respondents in the Knapp et al. (1981) study linked feelings of personal insecurity, conceptual ambiguity and behavioral uncertainty with the receipt of memorable messages. The message, most often provided by a source who was older and/or of higher status, was perceived to help make sense of disconcerting experiences by illuminating guidelines for interpretation and/or providing guidelines for action.

The ambiguous situations and feelings of frustration associated with circumstances surrounding the reception of memorable messages are quite similar to descriptions of newcomers' experiences in organizations (Louis, 1980) and parallel the types of situations identified as key contexts for learning organizational ropes (Schein, 1968; Jablin, 1982).

According to Louis (1980) the major features of the entry experience—change, contrast and surprise—lead to special sense-making needs, suggesting a high level of receptivity for memorable messages. Specifically, Louis posits that newcomers "need help in interpreting events in a new setting, including surprises, and help in appreciating situation-specific interpretation schemes or cultural assumptions" (p. 244). Newcomers "scripts" are not adequate to rely upon when facing surprising events and the discrepant experiences trigger a need for explanation. Thus, messages, which may even seem trite and banal to an outsider, are likely to become memorable if they develop recipes (Weick, 1979) schema, and/or scripts for action (Abelson, 1976). Their deep significance lies in the uncertain circumstances surrounding the message.

The heightened sensitivity and cognitive needs of organizational newcomers suggest that most individuals will recall a message received early in one's career. The same message, given at a less stressful time, may not be perceived as insightful, important or meaningful.

However, memorable messages are not expected to come from the pre-arrival or orientation stages. Rather, messages received during the encounter stage (Van Maanen, 1975) are most likely to be recalled. In-response socialization activities of all types (i.e. those that are reactive, meeting individual needs as they proceed with their jobs rather than in-advance practices, providing the role-related and culture-related knowledge prior to on the job experience) facilitate sense-making and adaptation more effectively (Louis et al., 1983). Jablin (1984) concludes that it is during the encounter stage individuals are most interested in obtaining as much new information as possible from others and therefore are most attentive to others' messages.

Furthermore, it is likely the communication will be addressed directly to the individual in a private rather than a public setting. In the Knapp et al. study (1981) messages perceived by the coders to be hackneyed were described by the recipients as being memorable because they were purposefully directed to the individuals. The sources were perceived to have had benevolent motives when giving the message and the recipients recalled having shared the exact message with someone else whom they thought would benefit by it.

In brief, five hypotheses regarding the circumstances surrounding the reception of memorable messages have been developed.

4. Memorable messages are received early in one's career.
5. Memorable messages are exchanged once the person is on the job rather than during job preview or orientation sessions.
6. Memorable messages are exchanged in private informal settings addressed directly to the recipient.
7. Senders of memorable messages are perceived to have benevolent motives.
8. Employees have passed the message on to someone else in the organization.

Nature of the Content of the Message

The social knowledge embodied in the process of organizational socialization can be divided into two basic types of information. One, role-related knowledge refers to the acquisition of new sets of behaviors. Two, culture-related knowledge refers to the acquisition of information regarding how things get done, what meanings are ascribed to behavior, organizational values, and so on.

The previous work indicates that most memorable messages are action-oriented, prescribing specific behaviors that can be applied to a variety of situations (Knapp et al., 1981). Within organizations action-oriented messages are most likely to deal with role-related expectations. Culture-related information is often descriptive and passive in nature. Thus, most memorable messages are expected to contain specific role-related content.

Earlier, memorable messages were referred to as personalized proverbs because like proverbs their content encapsulated cultural norms and reflected rather conservative social values most beneficial for the maintenance of the social system. Organizations are also interested in perpetuating themselves and maintaining the status quo. Formal messages are often designed with this goal in mind (Barnard, 1938). Just as the long term value of the original messages was enhanced because of the consistency of the content with the society at large, the content of memorable messages within an organization is expected to be consistent with the information provided through official channels.

However, which role-related messages become memorable is not expected to be based merely on what is consistent with upper management's formal communication. Individual's current needs and emotions affect memory processes (Linton, 1975). Therefore, a person's position will determine, in part, what messages he or she may recall. People within the same organiza-

tional level are expected to perceive and report messages related to similar content areas. For example, middle management personnel, anxious for promotion, may recall fewer messages about present role-related behavior and more messages regarding "how to get ahead" whereas non-career oriented/part-time employees will recall more messages which focus on their present role-requirements.

Overall, there are four hypotheses regarding the nature of the content of memorable messages. These are

9. Memorable messages prescribe specific role behaviors.
10. The action-oriented messages are transcontextual.
11. The content of memorable messages is consistent with other information provided through official channels.
12. An individual's position in the organization is related to the memorable nature of the content.

Nature of the Relationship Between the Recipient and the Source

The importance of insiders as potentially rich sources of help in diagnosing and interpreting surprises is stressed in the socialization literature (Van Maanen, 1975; Louis, 1980). Informal links between junior and senior members offer key relationships through which information, perceptions, and interpretations of the events in the organization can be exchanged. Recruits' supervisors are key persons in organizational assimilation processes (Jablin, 1984) and the most important socialization aids are reported to be interaction with peers, supervisors, and senior co-workers. Louis et al. (1983) found that informal communication with equal or higher status workers (as compared to the readily available communication with clerical staff) was perceived by employees to be the major contributor for the socialization process. It seems probable that these individuals will be the major sources of memorable messages.

Proximity and frequency of contact are strong predictors of communication behavior (Rogers & Rogers, 1976). Thus, the source of a memorable message is expected to be a person who is embedded within the recipient's social network and has frequent contact with the individual.

In summary, three hypotheses regarding the nature of the relationship between the recipient and the source have been developed.

13. The source of a memorable message has worked in the organization longer than the employee at the time he/she received the message.
14. The source of the memorable message is of higher organizational status than the recipient.
15. The source of the memorable message is embedded within and a frequent contact in the recipient's social network.

Overall, fifteen hypotheses regarding the structural attributes of memorable messages have been explicated. The following section describes the study designed to investigate one process by which *employees perceive they acquire role-related and culture-related content and to examine the nature of the messages they recall.*

The Study

The Organizational Context

This study was conducted in a midwestern corporation employing 65 people. There are three distinct production areas within the company: 1) a commodity investment service, 2) a stock investment service, and 3) the publication of a monthly newsletter. The company has grown significantly since 1967.

An extensive two hour interview with the president of the firm revealed a distinct and overt philosophy of management and organizational life. The president is strongly committed to humanizing the workplace, believes in flexible hours (there are no time-punch clocks in the company) and argues that a job should allow for social benefits as well as task responsibility. He continually spoke of "the mission." He believes he knows what is best. There is no smoking in the building and no elevators, "It is healthier for us all to walk the stairs." The espoused philosophy is that one must trust the employees if they are to do a good job. He suggests that the organization is trying to be like "one large family" but is aware that the increasing size is making the task more difficult. He also suggests that because many jobs are intrinsically unfulfilling individuals must learn to make contributions to society in alternative ways outside the workplace.

Procedures

Data Collection

After an initial meeting with the editor of the child development newsletter, appointments were made to interview each member of the organization. Three interviewers (the author and two undergraduate students) interviewed a total of 42 company employees. The senior investigator interviewed all heads of the divisions and the president of the firm. The interviews lasted an average of thirty minutes.

The Sample

Forty two employees were interviewed over a one month period. The remaining employees were either working in the warehouse or unavailable for interviews.

The sample included 32 females and 10 males. Three respondents were upper management (two male, one female), 11 were supervisory personnel (four male, seven female) and 28 were hourly workers (four male, 24 female).

Employees worked an average of 33 months for the company, ranging from four weeks to eight years (s.d. = 25 months). The mean age was 33 years ranging from 19 to 57 years (s.d. = 9.3 years).

The Interview

An adapted version of the memorable message interview schedule (Knapp et al., 1981) was utilized. The introductory remarks are as follows

It is not uncommon for people to look back on their years of work and recall something somebody said to them which had an important effect on their work life. Each day at work we are bombarded by a lot of messages, but the interest here is on those messages we vividly remember because they seemed to have a sizable impact on how we behave at work, the expectations we have of the organization or the people we work, how we try to get ahead at work or in the organization, and career decisions we made. In general, the messages we are interested in have had a significant impact on your occupational life.

General questions about the company, one's impressions, and hopes for the future were also discussed. Extensive field notes were compiled and the interviewers met regularly to discuss the interviews.

Analyses

To analyze the messages the interview data were classified and coded according to four major categories discussed above. Information from each of the 42 messages were coded into 22 subcategories derived from the Knapp et al. (1981) study. Inter-coder reliability was assessed by determining the percentage of agreement for the responses by two trained coders for each category. In cases of disagreement final classification was made with consultation to a third coder. Reliability ranged from .88 to 1.00.

A goodness-of-fit Chi Square analyses identified those sub-categories in which the obtained frequencies were statistically different from what would be expected by chance. The expected frequencies were predicted upon equal distribution among each sub-category. In those subcategories where there were only two possible values, i.e. $df = 1$, Yates correction was used (Siegel, 1956).

Results

Clear patterns emerge in the structure of the messages, the nature of the content, the circumstances surrounding the messages and the nature of the relationship between the recipient and the source. Table 1 presents the frequency data and reliability scores for each of the 22 subcategories. Each of the four major categories are discussed below.

Structure and Form of the Message

As expected all interviewees were able to recall a memorable message. Respondents provided messages that were orally transmitted [Hypothesis 1] and short, simple sentences ($\chi^2 = 34.38, p < .001$) [Hypothesis 2]. Unlike the previous study messages were not significantly more rule-structured ($\chi^2 = .38, p = n.s.$) [Hypothesis 3].

However, although only 55% of the messages met the criteria for being coded as a rule, many more functioned conceptually as rules. A large proportion of the non-rule structured messages set up schematic cognitive structures which served to guide behavior. The messages functioned in the same manner as "weak scripts." According to Abelson (1976), weak scripts

MEMORABLE MESSAGES

Structure and Form of the Messages			
(frequency)	(percentage)		(percentage of agreement between coders)
<i>Number of sentence</i>			
40	(95)	Single sentence	100
2	(5)	Two or more sentences	100
<i>Rule-structured</i>			
23	(55)	Rule structured	91
19	(45)	Non-rule structured	90
Circumstances surrounding the Messages			
<i>Number of months in position at time of the message</i>			
1	(2)	not in organization	100
27	(64)	1 day through 2 months	100
8	(19)	2 through 12 months	100
6	(14)	12 or more months	100
<i>Position in organization at time of message</i>			
3	(7)	Upper management	100
11	(26)	Supervisory personnel	100
28	(67)	Workers	100
<i>Setting</i>			
11	(26)	Public	91
31	(74)	Private	94
<i>Audience</i>			
35	(83)	Alone	100
7	(17)	With others	100
<i>Recollection of wording</i>			
30	(71)	Extremely certain (8, 9, 10)	100
9	(21)	Moderately certain (5, 6, 7)	100
3	(7)	Uncertain (1, 2, 3, 4)	100
<i>Perception of sender's purpose</i>			
37	(88)	Benevolent: recipient's own good	100
5	(12)	Impersonal: no intention	100
0	(0)	Selfish: sender's own needs	100
Nature of the Content of Messages			
<i>Situation Applicability</i>			
36	(86)	Transcontextual	94
6	(14)	Single referent	100
<i>Behavioral Orientation</i>			
25	(60)	Active	88
17	(40)	Passive	88
<i>Subject Matter</i>			
6	(14)	Family	100
3	(7)	Advancement	100
20	(48)	Role behavior	90
2	(5)	Organizational Structure	100
4	(10)	Evaluation	100
6	(14)	Communication	100
1	(2)	Personal growth	100

MEMORABLE MESSAGES (Continued)

Structure and Form of the Messages			
(frequency)	(percentage)		(percentage of agreement between coders)
<i>Effect of message</i>			
9	(21)	Follow rules	89
10	(24)	Show more initiative	90
13	(31)	Change attitude	92
6	(14)	Communicate differently	100
3	(7)	Stay with job	100
1	(2)	No effect	100
<i>Content Consistency</i>			
33	(79)	Consistent with Organization	100
9	(21)	Inconsistent with Organization	100
The Relationship Between Source and Receiver			
<i>Status Comparison</i>			
37	(88)	Sender of higher status	95
1	(2)	Sender of lower status	100
4	(10)	Sender of equal status	100
<i>Gender of the communicators</i>			
18	(42)	Male to female	100
0	(0)	Female to male	100
10	(24)	Male to male	100
14	(34)	Female to female	100
<i>Tenure at job</i>			
37	(88)	Sender's tenure longer	100
4	(9)	Sender's tenure equal	100
1	(2)	Sender's tenure less	100
<i>Message given within the regular social network</i>			
28	(67)	Yes	95
14	(33)	No	93
<i>Message will be exchanged within the organization</i>			
33	(79)	Yes	100
9	(21)	No	100
<i>Message had effect outside the organizational context</i>			
16	(38)	Yes	88
26	(62)	No	93
<i>Message is consistent with official information</i>			
33	(79)	Yes	100
8	(19)	No	100
1	(2)	Don't know	100
<i>Message is consistent with other messages from sender</i>			
31	(74)	Yes	97
11	(26)	No	100
<i>Message is consistent with other official information</i>			
26	(62)	Yes	96
9	(21)	No	89
7	(17)	Don't know	100

organize expectations about the behaviors of oneself and/or others, but they do not specify the exact sequence of behavior. An example of this type of message is "There's plenty of time to sleep when you die." The respondent interpreted this message to mean that within the company she SHOULD never seem too overworked to do any job asked of her. If she wanted to keep her job, her presence should communicate total commitment and willingness to work.

Circumstances Surrounding the Transmission and Reception of the Messages

A large percentage of the messages (64%) occurred within the first two months of employment as compared to 19 percent being received between the third and twelfth month and 14 percent after the first year ($\chi^2 = 37.04$, $p < .001$) [Hypothesis 4]. Respondents indicated the messages were exchanged once the person was working in the organization (98%, $\chi^2 = 38.1$, $p < .001$). The average length of employment is 33 months, suggesting that those messages people perceived as most memorable were received during the period of greatest ambiguity within the organization—the encounter stage [Hypothesis 5]. However, the majority of the messages (75%) were not associated with a particular crisis or difficult situation.

Messages were exchanged in private settings (74%, $\chi^2 = 9.52$, $p < .001$) and the two individuals were most often alone (83%, $\chi^2 = 28.0$, $p < .001$) [Hypothesis 6]. Individuals were extremely certain of the wording of the message (71%, $\chi^2 = 28.71$, $p < .001$). They believed the message was given for their "own good." The motives of most sources were perceived to be benevolent (88%, $\chi^2 = 57.57$, $p < .01$) [Hypothesis 7] and although most of the interviewees had not passed the message on to someone else within the work environment they indicated they would if the appropriate situation arose.

Nature of the Content of the Messages

In almost all cases (86%, $\chi^2 = 11.9$, $p < .001$) the message was transcontextual, i.e. the advice given or the perceived insight was salient across situations [Hypothesis 10]. For example the message, "If you're not helping, you're hindering," was given when the individual was at her desk with her work completed. She felt her supervisor relayed this message "with the intent to get me to help the others out that day, but I realized that it really was the way I was supposed to act all the time. Now I'm always checking to see how I can help, what we do is so important!"

Many messages were action-oriented (60%) "plan your work and work your plan. However, this did not reach statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 1.52$, $p < .02$) [Hypothesis 9] and the percentage of action-oriented messages was far smaller than in the previous study. When people are first learning about a new culture it seems probable that information about how things get done, what meanings may be ascribed to behavior, and actual evaluation by members of the culture are as important as information regarding how to

behave. Sense-making and action are separate steps. Memorable messages fulfill a dual role for the individual, they enable understanding of ongoing organizational events and provide a guide to the appropriate behavior.

The largest proportion of the messages (48%, $\chi^2 = 44.66$, $p < .01$) contained information about specific role behaviors, "Remember your priority is commodity," followed by messages about the family-like atmosphere of the organization, "It's one big family here," communication, "If you ever have a problem, come to me," evaluation, "You gave 100%, but not 110%." Seven percent of the messages dealt with how to advance in the organization, "Give people what they expect and a little bit more," and five percent about the organizational structure, "Enjoy your work, relax, there's no where to go." Only one message was about personal matters, "Your place is with your family."

All messages were serious in intent and given within a professional context. The messages were perceived to affect an employee's behavior in one of the following ways: following rules (21%), showing more initiative (24%), communicating differently (14%), and staying with job (7%). The effect of 31 percent of the messages was reported to be a change in attitude. Of course, the interactive relationship between attitudes and behavior suggests that many of the perceived behavioral changes affected employees' attitudes as well as the reported attitudinal changes affected employees' behaviors.

The content of the messages was considered to be consistent with information provided through official channels (79%, $\chi^2 = 10.71$, $p < .001$) [Hypothesis 11] but the context and personal transmission of the information made it memorable for the individual. This consistency held true across organizational levels ($\chi^2 = 2.22$, $p = ns$). In other words co-workers were as likely to supply consistent messages as were vice-presidents. The informal organizational messages that became memorable vitalized and conditioned the formal organizational messages.

Most messages (71%) were also perceived to be consistent with the individual sending the message. "Don't call me sir, call me Dennis," was not a surprising message from a president who believes his company should be like a family where everyone is important. An examination of the messages reported to be inconsistent with company philosophy, e.g. "No one wearing a uniform is allowed on front stairs or main office," or inconsistent with what the recipient thought of the sender, e.g. "At one time or another everyone sells out," reveals some interesting information. When individuals received inconsistent but memorable messages of either type, the recipients' attitude became more negative toward the sender but not toward the organization ($\chi^2 = 21.76$, $p < .001$). Dissonance seems to have been resolved in favor of the company, the "family" was a pervading metaphor used in most interviews, employees felt people who espoused inconsistent attitudes were deviant. This may also account for why individuals were so unlikely to report negative or inconsistent memorable messages. A different set of introductory remarks, perhaps requesting memorable messages that were surprising to the individual possibly would elicit a different type of message. However, the bias

towards recollecting positive messages was also apparent in the Knapp et al. (1981) study. "When negative messages were recalled, they were presented in the context of having 'overcome' them . . . there are both psychological and social pressures against the idea that one message can cause us to behave or believe in a negative manner" (p. 38).

The status of the individual also affected the type of message that was reported as memorable ($\chi^2 = 21.76$, $p < .01$) [Hypothesis 12]. Middle level personnel who account for only 26 percent of the sample ($n = 11$) reported all the messages related to advancement, organizational structure and most of the messages (4 out of 6) related to communication issues. These issues are most salient for "getting ahead" and suggest that one important outcome of organizational socialization (as perceived by insiders) is the acquisition of knowledge about how, who, when, and with whom to communicate (Elsea, 1979).

Nature of the Relationship Between the Recipient and the Source

Sources of memorable messages worked longer in the organization (90%, $\chi^2 = 61.85$, $p < .001$) [Hypothesis 13] and were overwhelmingly of higher status than the recipients (88%, $\chi^2 = 57.00$, $p < .001$) [Hypothesis 14]. This seems to be the case not only in terms of position within the organization, but in traditional society in general. Although there were more female supervisory personnel than male, 56% of the females reported receiving their messages from males, compared to 44% received from females. No males reported receiving a memorable message from a woman in the organization.

A high proportion of the messages (67%, $\chi^2 = 4.66$, $p < .05$) were received from someone directly in one's work area who was seen on a daily basis [Hypothesis 15]. These messages were most often related to role behavior and communication (62%). For example, the message "Supervisors can't supervise if you don't ask for supervision" was provided by an experienced co-worker with whom the interviewee shared an office. Messages regarding advancement issues, "There's only way to go . . . down," family atmosphere, "We're one big family here," and organizational structure, "The investment section allows you to invest in children" were most often given by individuals outside the employee's regular social network.

These findings suggest some interesting possibilities about the importance of network linkages. The results indicate that 1) messages related to getting ahead are most often given by the highest level personnel who are outside the daily social network of most employees, and 2) the people who are more likely to interact with high level personnel are those already advancing within the organization. Thus, information about advancement may be withheld from those who are not in positions to advance or to develop weak links, possibly precluding them from having a chance to advance. In other words, once you begin to advance in the organization you increase the likelihood of learning how to succeed in the company, those not already on the move do not receive the same information. Thus, these socializing messages may be both a cause and effect of organizational promotion.

Alternative explanations are also apparent. Individuals who desire to progress within the organization may seek out memorable messages, those who are less concerned may passively receive them. Those who have a diverse network early on in their careers may be more likely to receive messages about how to make it in the company than those who only communicate with those directly around them. Preliminary evidence suggests that the topic of the message received is related to the area and position of the sender ($\chi^2 = 26.31, p < .001$). Messages received from managers in the areas of financing and marketing are more likely to be about advancement and organizational structure than any other topics.

The findings here may also be a result of the research design. Those not in management positions may simply not remember or perceive those types of messages to be important. The evidence provides some interesting possibilities, it is up to further research to investigate empirically the relationship between messages received and social network attributes.

Transmission of messages within the organization also seem to follow a predictable pattern. Amongst the respondents who reported they have passed the message on to someone else it was most likely they repeated the message to someone they see on a daily basis ($\chi^2 = 11.24, p < .01$). The messages reported most likely to be repeated are those involving task-related role behavior. Content of the message also seems to effect the likelihood that the recipient will tell the sender what effect the message had. Messages about the family atmosphere were most likely to be discussed. One respondent explained why she told her supervisor about the effect the message had. "It was that phrase that kept me from quitting. I am so glad I remembered it . . . it sort of helped to ease the way and I wasn't quite so upset. I thought she deserved to know what she had done."

Conclusions

This study investigated a specific communicative event perceived by individuals to help them learn about their roles, the rules, and the rationality of their organization. The analysis of memorable messages provided a unique approach to a fundamental organizational communication issue—understanding how individuals become acculturated.

Most members within this organization had very little trouble in deciding upon a message to discuss. As soon as the introductory remarks were given by the interviewer, most respondents came up with a message within a minute. This suggests that a memorable message is a unit of analysis that has salience within the organization.

The reception of memorable messages within the organization served two organizational functions simultaneously—social and socializing. The collection of memorable messages serves at least four functions for the researcher interested in socialization.

First, the analyses of the content of these messages provides information regarding the norms, values, expectations, rules, requirements and rationality of the organizational culture. Memorable messages provided two types of

benefits for the employees. One, they enabled understanding of situations and thus provided sense-making structures. Two, they provided a guide to behavior appropriate to the organizational setting. The importance of fitting into the company's image was apparent from these messages, the paternal approach was identified, "appropriate" communicative procedures were explicated, and the appropriate way to solve problems and get ahead was catalogued. Role-related and culture-related contents identified by researchers (Louis, 1980; Etzioni, 1975) were recalled by organizational members.

Second, the analyses of the circumstances surrounding the enactment of the messages provides information about specific enculturating performances. Although many of the messages had been heard before in other contexts, the personal setting, the equivocality of the situation and the relationship between the interactants legitimized the message. Louis's (1980) position that "in-response socialization practices facilitate sensemaking and adaptation far more effectively than in-advance practices" (p. 276) is supported by these data. Employees recall and perceive as most influential that information obtained within equivocal social interactions once they are on the job.

Third, the analyses of who gives the messages to whom, and the types of messages provided by different organizational members provides information regarding the importance of social network linkages on organizational socialization. The data tentatively suggest that the more diversity and weak links within a network, the more likely one is to receive information regarding different topic areas. Louis (1980) suggests that practices in which insiders rather than other newcomers are the newcomers primary associates and informal socializing agents should facilitate adaptation. The results of this study indicate that employees are aware of the importance of understanding an insiders interpretive scheme; it is the "establishment" that provides the messages that are deemed "memorable."

Fourth, the importance of informal communication with higher levels of the organizational staff becomes evident from the results of this study. Few messages reported to be memorable came from secretarial or clerical staff although these sources were often available to the respondents. Interestingly, Louis et al (1983) found that availability of secretary support staff was negatively related to level of job satisfaction, commitment, and tenure intention. Although the authors provide no direct explanation for this inconsistent finding (the perceived overall availability of socializing opportunity was positively related to job attitudes), this study provides a possible interpretation. Communication with low status insiders is not perceived by employees to have an influential impact upon their behavior within their organizations (as indicated by the lack of memorable messages obtained from clerical sources). Thus, it may be that socialization practices that foster links between and amongst workers and superiors have the greatest chance of having an impact on an individual's cognitions and behaviors.

These relationships are still unclear. The data from this study are used to exemplify one possible approach for understanding how the culture of a large group is conveyed in an organizational setting. The content and context of

memorable messages may differ depending upon organizational size, purpose, structure, etc. For example, employees of small participatory organizations have greater opportunities than employees of larger, more traditional organizations to meet and talk with upper level managers, learn about larger corporate issues, and recognize and influence the premises upon which decisions are made. Thus, newcomers' coworkers in the less traditional organizations are more likely to be potential sources of memorable messages because they have greater access to the types of information newcomers need.

Furthermore, many more messages need to be collected before we can fully understand the nature of these messages and generalize the role they may play in the ongoing experience of the organization. Employees had to choose only one message to discuss, collection of other messages the same employee feels are important will provide clearer evidence. Other types of information are also needed. For example, in future studies, the social networks of the employees will be identified and the actual movement of messages within these networks will be traced.

Memorable messages provide individuals with a sense of shared reality. Understanding a situation involves a search of one's memory to draw on previous situational experiences similar to the present one (Shank & Abelson, 1977). As I finished my last interview, an employee of the company said to me "You're the only one to ask me, so you're the only one I've told. To understand the process of organizational socialization we must talk to those who are involved in the ongoing process. As researchers interested in organizations that is a message we should always remember!

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