SILENCE: THE REASONS WHY PEOPLE MAY NOT COMMUNICATE

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SILENCE AND SERENDIPITY

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ABSTRACT

This is a dissertation about how and why information does not flow in an industrial organization, and has impacts on owners, managers or employees when such issues as production errors, retention, or corporate survival are the result of missed transmission or reception of information. Each instance when information was not sent or received is called silence. The idea of silence will be explored to reveal its theoretical definition and operation within an ecosystem of multi-dimensional factors. This dissertation is a qualitative foundation for future study by finding a full spectrum of relevant factors.

Interviews, discussions, observations and artifacts were collected from two newspaper newsrooms in the northwestern United States in 2007 and 2008. These data add to knowledge in at least five important ways: the range of factors related to silence were expanded, narratives recorded historical changes that may help future researchers understand the evolution of newsroom cultures, synthesized several research streams to show how they interacted with silence, may have expanded concepts related to factor dimensionality in general, and may have been the first to apply factor dimensionality to silence research.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This is a dissertation about how and why information does not flow in an industrial organization, and has impacts on owners, managers or employees when such issues as production errors, retention, or corporate survival are the result of missed transmission or reception of information. Each instance when information was not sent or received is called silence. The idea of silence will be explored to reveal its theoretical definition and operation within an ecosystem of multi-dimensional factors. This dissertation is a qualitative foundation for future study by finding a full spectrum of relevant factors.

The concept of silence was mentioned in possibly the oldest story written and retained by humanity. The Epic of Gilgamesh contained in the first five lines this passage: “…He saw the Secret, discovered the Hidden, he brought information of (the time) before the Flood” (Kovacs, 1989). Silence, as a broad term representing contexts where communicating did not occur such as secrecy, has been an issue of interest and concern since nearly the beginning of human communications. In recent discussion on the topic 2500 years later, there are several research streams investigating human capacities for not communicating. Relevant to the discussion within this dissertation were authors publishing in Communication Theory, Western Journal of Speech Communication, or Communication Studies (i.e. Acheson, 2007; Andersen, 1991; R. P. Clair, 1997; Johannesen, 1974; Motley, 1990) who discussed silence where a sender or receiver was aware of a tangible silence such as a pause between spoken words to add emphasis or a perceived lack of communication from another. For the most part, such
authors argued that humans cannot not communicate and the authors speak in terms of a communicative silence. In contrast authors in *Academy of Management Review* and *Journal of Management Studies* (i.e. Argyris, 1974; Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Morrison & Milliken, 2000) have viewed silence as situations where an act of communication with actionable information did not happen; such as when a person observes a dangerous thing in a warehouse and tells no one or when all persons at a corporate meeting simply fail to even think of, let alone speak about, a major problem with their operations.

Communications oriented authors have argued humans are always communicating and management oriented authors voiced a contingency that people can fail to send and/or receive communication. The primary crossover between those two orientations is nicely summarized by Motley:

> “Thus, if communication is defined as the attribution (by a "receiver") of meaning to behavior, then it makes sense that one cannot not communicate (provided another is present and attributes meaning to the behaviors).”
> (Motley, 1990)

In other words, communications oriented research does recognize that under some conditions there is no communication: in the quote above Motley refers to being present (i.e. awareness) and attribution of meaning (i.e. awareness). This dissertation is oriented more in the management research stream and to examine that awareness hole – the silent gap in the communications process. However, as will be discussed, awareness may not be the only relevant factor for non-communicative silence.

In recent times, humanity has witnessed an impressive release of information that was once silent to the public when WikiLeaks released U.S. State Department communications with resulting impacts in and from Tunisia. Separately, the Palestine Papers were released via Al Jazeera, and the X-Papers (Journalistic secrecy and
corruption) in India resulting in debates about advertising-based financial structures for Indian media. In the recent past, American journalism has seen the Jason Blaire episode with plagiarism and complicit blindness to his plagiarism, and there has been overt silencing of Russian and Mexican journalists assassinated for reporting on corruption. Far less notorious yet absolutely important examples for individual journalists and operations include: Notre Dame’s Kara King’s resignation over miscommunication and the release of an anti-gay cartoon (2010), ABC News’ miscommunication that resulted in a news blackout and missed feed to affiliates (2003), time-zone-influenced publishing errors with Wohlgelernter’s Israel Baseball League story (2007), and technological constraints for paper printing and communications efficiency that caused misinformation in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette’s “Joy to Horror” publication (2006) (Abbey, 2007; Martin, 2006; Romesko, 2003, 2010).

The above international and national production errors and effects of silence were caused by personal, interpersonal, temporal and spatial factors, and collectively played a role in why journalism production went awry. Silence in each of the examples was a moment when mission-critical information was not conveyed from one person or group to another.

In the broadest sense, silence is essentially a concept encompassing any instance when something is not communicated from a sender to a receiver. In a way, silence is equivalent to “secrets” whether intentionally kept or not, yet silence is a more encompassing term that may include but is not limited to: ignorance (simply any state of not knowing of a thing), deception (a tactic for keeping a secret such as lying), communications silence (literally not speaking or otherwise not physically
communicating - with or without intent), structural silence (physical or social barriers that inhibit knowledge transfer), or secrets (an object kept hidden, either physically or socially). The above five types are general types identified in the literature or examples from observations during study. By the end of my research, the range of silence concepts was significantly broadened.

**Delineation:** Some readers may read the word “silence” and deduce that while it may be a different word from communication, theoretically silence may only be a reflection of communication and, therefore, theoretically redundant. By redundant, one may suggest that if an idea A and an idea B relate to the exact same factors, and in effect behave the same but simply inverse, then idea A and idea B are the same thing and are only terms used to describe the presence or non-presence of the same idea. However, silence is not the mere reflection of communication: below are a series of factor dimensions to suggest similarities and differences:

- **Temporal:** If two actions always occur at the same times, then they may be dependent or the same thing. However, data suggest communication and silence can be concurrent. For instance, lying is both communication and silence at the same time.

- **Spatial:** This factor appears to be functionally similar with time above – communication and silence can appear dependent in the same space.

- **Factor Profiles:** If someone is angry, for instance, the factors relating to the choice to communicate or to not communicate were observed to relate to different factors. For example, two sets of managers had almost all the same factors to react to the same problem, but one set chose to speak and the other not to speak.
The set that spoke did so because they believed knowledge would help their staff be relaxed. The other set did not speak because they did not have trust in their staff, and believed not speaking would help their staff be relaxed. In the two scenarios, different factors were required to trigger the different responses, and not that the same factors were present or not present. More interestingly, both scenarios had similar pre-conditions, catalysts and desired outcomes such that many confounding variables were fairly well kept to a minimum.

- Factor Relational Strength: Just because two ideas relate to the same factors does not mean they relate equally. If idea A and idea B both relate to factors X, Y and Z, idea A may relate to the factors X and Y strongly and Z weakly, while idea B relates to the factor X weakly and Y and Z strongly. What possibly made idea A occur was different from B such that factor presence is not alone sufficient to say ideas A and B are equivalent. For example, in the two scenarios above (Factor Profiles), many of the same factors were observed in both contexts, but trust in staff appeared to weigh differently in the decision processes of those involved.

- Effect: An idea A and an idea B may have dissimilar outcomes and there is one notable difference: communication provides a receiver some information which then limits the range of alternative effects. In a way, one may argue that idea A might be infinity minus one and idea B is infinity – in other words, different ideas. For example, using again the two scenarios above, the group that communicated found that staff was given a frame (ideological point of reference) from which to communicate their feelings and desires. The group that was not communicated with seemed to have no point of reference and communicated
among themselves many fantasy (imagined) potential scenarios of what could happen to them (which generally and more often seemed to be fear associated). Thus, data suggested communicating and not communicating had different effects.

- Temporal and Effect Intersection: Ideas do not seem to happen without duration and trajectory, they seem to have measurable longevity and directional characteristics: for instance, an idea A may last shorter and have a tendency to decrease over time, while an idea B may last longer and tend to increase. Using the two scenarios again, the group that did communicate seemed to have an emotional effect that was short and seemed to decrease, and during which more rational and calm decisions seemed to increase over time. In contrast, the group that did not communicate seemed to impact staff such that emotions sustained high levels for a much longer period and tended to increase toward crescendos/capitulations that seemed emotionally needed, and only after which then more rational decisions seemed to be made.

The above dimensions that will be explored in this dissertation seem to suggest communication and silence are not equivalent constructs, and should be studied as independent things (or as long as until enough evidence is collected to support the null hypothesis and that they are equivalent).

**Reason for Study:** The above discussion was intended to orient the reader to the idea studied, however such content does not necessarily illustrate why study of silence is needed. Readers may have many personal or industrial interest in the topic, and while the personal may be infinite, the industrial uses for a manager, employee or owner may
be more relevant and specific: for instance, training staff to understand why and how information sharing can fail can help with productivity, efficiency, retention, and, potentially, survival. Similarly, knowing how to diagnose a problem is key to understanding which solution to implement or one may otherwise try solutions that merely make problems worse.

For myself, while living and observing my environment in schools, private business, non-profit business, U.S. government and foreign organizations, I was often perplexed and irritated that critical information was not conveyed to the right person or group at the right time. Social and physical barriers, petty infighting, power outages, lack of forethought, lack of training, secrecy, miscommunication, misunderstanding or outright stupidity were causes tossed about in cafeteria conversation or accusatory meetings. Yet, however information was inhibited, the focus was always on why critical information for operations was silenced.

I have wanted to write this dissertation or something like it since my first news job in 1992 at ABC News and through experiences at a CBS owned-and-operated station, NBC/Dateline, Turner broadcasting, the Loudoun Times-Mirror newspaper and several other news organizations. In such contexts, I observed numerous and, what seemed to me then, peculiar reasons why communication broke down in news organizations. Such breakdowns seemed to affect the ability of companies to correct errors or take advantage of successes; however, sometimes silence seemed to help an organization complete a goal due to minimal bickering. In particular, I became very curious about what appeared to be an irony – that people whose jobs were to communicate ideas between publics seemed to be so bad at it with each other (a line I’ve heard from many journalists in numerous news
companies). I wanted to know if my own perceptions were correct, I was overgeneralizing and whether there was something that could help these organizations do a better job of journalism.

**Nature of the First Problem – Studying Non-Action**

If silence is something that does not happen, how can one suggest it exists? The question was posed to me, and there is a simple answer: the question is in fact a logical fallacy of fact; silence is actually something that happens. For example, in an overt example, a criminal may actively refuse to speak during an interrogation. Consider human activity in relation to a bridge: the non-existence of a bridge across a wide and wildly churning river means that people are forced into doing something other than cross with ease. They might need to walk for some distance until the waters are safer to cross (an effect), they might try to build something in order to cross (an effect), or they might possibly ignore the river and simply rationalize that nothing on the other side could be worth getting to (an effect). In any such case, the non-existence of a thing caused something else to happen: maybe not a specific thing, but something nonetheless.

One may argue that the proposition above does not, in fact, suggest that the non-existence of a bridge caused the effects, but rather the existence of the river caused the effects. The problem with such an argument is that if a bridge did exist, then both a bridge and a river would simultaneously exist, but the river would no longer be a cause for action – the bridge cancelled out the variable. Then was the river really the thing which caused an action, or was it the non-existence of a bridge? It is important to remember that when thinking of causes, we humans do not always attribute cause to an existing thing: examples may be American friends in Uzbekistan who complained about
the non-existence of a phone rather than the existence of 20,000 miles of land and sea between them and their families; fellow commuters complaining about the non-existence of a faster and more personalized commuter system rather than the existence of a slow, general, and relatively inefficient bus or light rail system; or people complaining about the non-existence of a certain ethnic restaurant in their town, rather than the existence of spatial separation, lack of broad community desire, and other factors. In each of the prior examples, the focus and possible causal spark for action was the non-existence of a thing rather than its existence.

If non-existence can have a causal relationship with another factor, then not only can non-existence be a cause, but also an effect: a non-action can result in a non-action. Building upon the scenarios above, people may not cross the river due to a non-existing bridge, people may not call family because of the non-existence of a phone, or people may not eat ethnic food because of the non-existence of a restaurant. As such, what causes a non-action effect may be a non-existing thing.

Returning to the original question, things that do not occur can exist in the minds of people as things they wished existed or perceived as missing. If research can elicit those perceived things that should or could exist, then research may suggest that silence exists and narrow infinite possibilities to a finite set of candidate factors.

From a quantitative perspective, one could imagine an infinite set of columns representing concepts and an infinite set of observations in rows. Some of the concepts are one, meaning not occurring, and two, meaning occurring. Every row represents a snapshot of the universe for every second in time. All kinds of statistical tests could be run, and a computer would derive a result having tested all the ones and twos, but most of
the results would be erroneous. Sifting the erroneous from the plausible relationships would seem daunting. That is where qualitative data come into play to provide grounding and basis for grouping concepts. While in the native contexts one can observe factors which seem to be most prominent for the people living and breathing the environment under study. The local people can express through words and gestures whether, in reference to the illustration above, if the river was more important to their decisions and whether they had ever thought of a bridge. It was for this reason that ground level, native observation of environments was needed because future quantitative research needs grounding and needs some initial orientation from which to begin study.

A Narrowed Research Question

Going back to the original catalyst for this dissertation, I saw silence as a problem when people did not communicate critical information within organizations. Pulling out the essential terms from the above statement, we have “silence,” communication, “critical information,” internal (“within”), and “organizations.” One consequence is that knowing how to define “critical information” is rather difficult at any given time or place and depends on whom you talk to. As well, “critical information” may only be one class of all that could be silenced, and therefore limiting in theoretical terms (i.e. the focus is on the nature of silence, and silence can affect more than critical information). As a result, defining the concept of critical information will not be part of the research question in this dissertation; however, research did collect data on instances where people perceived they did not receive critical information (in whichever way they defined it).

Balancing theoretical openness with achievable specificity is the practical issue of a research stream. If this was to be a sequence of research, then strategically the best
expenditure of resources seemed to be to establish a foundation from which to build. I needed a wellspring of qualitative information from which to establish definitions of factors for later individual study. Within the balance, the broadest research question that may be: *What is the nature of silence?*

While silence may be of interest to many types of organizations, journalism presents itself as a particularly interesting initial subject. I personally have much background in the industry and felt suited to spot nuances that an uninitiated person may have not (initiation may also prime me toward conclusions, but that issue is dealt with later). Starting with the broadest question, I limited the initial scope of my research to something achievable in a dissertation – the research question: “*What is the nature of silence in newsrooms?*” By “nature” I mean a qualitative view of factors where the purpose is to find the spectrum of factors and where each unique observation (n=1) is sufficient for identification for later quantitative study.

**The Research Question in the Local Context of Study and in Operation**

To try to help readers contextualize the research question, the following was a rather poignant and illustrative scenario observed during research. In a conversation with a manager about whether I could be allowed to enter a newsroom to do ethnographic-type observations, I learned that the company was undergoing change and discussing budgets. The manager said that if I were allowed to observe for any purpose, I would have to keep secret anything I saw or heard from employees and that the managers have asked the same of their employees. This person added that over the next several weeks, he/she would tell specific supervisors limited information relating to internal change, and that each supervisor would be responsible for telling their staff of about 2-8 people about their
group’s particular changes. Each supervisor would be told different information, and each supervisor would be instructed to keep what they knew secret from other groups. Each supervisor was additionally instructed to tell staff to keep silent about their group’s changes.

I was told the above because no matter what I might discuss, I should be cognizant of their plan to keep group information secret from other groups, and not to assume one person knew what another knew. The managers felt that keeping information separated and compartmentalized within groups was a benefit to the environment because such a tactic would help reduce the amount of informational clutter and, therefore, keep anxiety low about changes. This was a particularly interesting bit of logic, since the people being instructed to keep secrets and compartmentalize information were by trade and culture un-secretive cultivators and disseminators of information.

The above scenario may only be representative of a particular group of managers and may be perceived as an outlier example. However, as mentioned above, there was no concept of outlier because the purpose was to find a full spectrum of possible factors to test later, and, therefore, each unique example was relevant to the entire body of observations.

A Few Points on the Topic of Performing Research

I believe at least three components of research are requisite for study, and they need some explanation because elements are easy to confuse with one another and easily viewed as not explicitly different. These components are the research question, approach, and method. A research question for the purpose of this dissertation is simply a statement of interest about a particular thing happening in nature and provides a pointer
toward a larger line of inquiry and analysis. An approach is actually separate from method and is just as the term suggests: how one approaches or orients oneself to a question and environment. This is like an attitude or tactic for engaging research objects: for instance, one could aggressively yet systematically collect information with adherence to strict definitions, or one could passively yet systematically collect information with definitions that are allowed to change as new data are revealed. One could also ignore personal biases, or acknowledge them and address alternative interpretations. Finally, method is the design for how one systematically collects and analyzes information, hopefully in a way that does not bias collection toward confirmatory material or skew toward confirmatory conclusions.

Approach is singled out only because it has seemed to be a point of miscommunication. Specifically, fears about bias predisposing research toward confirmatory findings are not inherent to research questions or method, but are rather an anxiety more appropriately attributable to approach. Because this research was foundational and exploratory, the approach was more akin to the second example listed above: the researcher should passively engage by simply observing and asking questions as situations allowed, and allow definitions to develop rather than be imposed. Such an approach also acknowledges biases that stem from ignorance or prior interaction and suggest alternative interpretations.

Scope: Because the primary interest in completing this dissertation was to develop theory to help news companies fulfill their journalistic purposes, this dissertation set a boundary to its scope within the specific geography of the newsroom. This was not a study on gatekeeping looking at what stories flow into the newsroom and what is
published, but rather a study of issues related to the management of news production in
the news organization.

The researched news companies were producers of original news content and
therefore similar to other newspapers and news television stations. Aggregators such as
news.ask.com, news.google.com, or most blogs are only redistributors of news, and may
not have similar staffs or similar routines, so this research may not apply to their
particular circumstances.

_Gaps in the Literature_: Locating silence in an existing academic conversation was
not difficult, as it already exists. However, academic literature on silence in
organizations is relatively new and has not been widely studied. In fact, there has been
only one attempt at even remotely codifying a model of silence in organizations
(Morrison & Milliken, 2000), and it is far from well tested or even considered logically
consistent. To date, silence has also not yet been studied as a specific variable in
newsrooms, although new studies may arise.

There have been attempts to review the silence literature (Bowen & Blackmon,
2003; R. P. Clair, 1998; Maria, 2006; Morrison & Milliken, 2000), but none appear to
comprehensively examine consistent theoretical threads, delineate between types of
silence, or attempt to define a relatively complete spectrum of silence factors. As well,
there are at least two other major problems with current research: 1) several definitions
confuse measures of organizational climate with silence (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003;
Morrison & Milliken, 2000), and 2) silence has been defined and operationalized in no
consistent way (Beamish, 2000; Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Huang, Van de Vliert, &
Van der Vegt, 2003; Maria, 2006; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). The result is that current
research does not allow for a precise diagnosis of silence in organizations and is therefore not specific enough to accurately suggest remedies leading to open communication and information sharing.

**Qualitative Approach:** Because much literature on silence is scattered and divergent, the first step toward a research stream seems to require a qualitative foundation that tries to delineate typologies and explore related factors for future study. Two news companies gave approval for access to all employees, and, so as not to prime the sites, neither knew my research question except that there was interest in internal communications. In the tradition of Argyris, Gans, Tuchman and Yin, research was planned to observe and interview enough participants so as to achieve theory saturation: that one stops collecting information when information becomes redundant and no new information appears to be available.

**Analysis and Conclusions**

After organizing and synthesizing 346 unique factor relationships with types of silence, research concludes that the primary relationship of silence to anything or group of things is serendipity. As serendipity goes down, silence goes up, and vice versa. Serendipity means the collective actions of people to provide chances for information sharing. The key concept is chance: people cannot be forced to communicate the right message at the right time; rather, they simply need the chance opportunity among such things as meetings with groups that might not routinely interact, inclusion of diverse perspectives, and lessened physical and policy barriers that differentiate people. While this conclusion might be unwelcome because to some it might not seem like a light switch able to be turned on or off by command and will, but like so many other aspects of
life like love or religious belief it cannot be forced and be true. That said, if a manager wants speed on a project then these data suggest he/she increase the conditions for chance encounters, and if a manager wants more efficiency then increase chances for communication. However, do not apply solutions without first understanding the nature of the problem: like those managers who read articles on increasing communication and apply the recommendations before understanding their own contextual problems, so too may someone find failure when trying to apply types of serendipity without a prognosis.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE DISSERTATION

- The first section will examine existing literature to identify known information, relevant theories and hypotheses and definitions, and will assist with targeting gaps in knowledge.
- The research question and permutations are developed next.
- Methodologies for appropriately collecting and analyzing data will follow.
- Then results are provided in four chapters: ground rules (a priori information), the physical environment, the external social environment and the internal social environment.
  - “Ground rules” will define pre-existing factors that seemed to be important to observed newsrooms.
  - The physical environment results will define and contextualize physical factors such as weather conditions and geography that seemed to affect newsroom behavior.
  - Subsequent results will define and contextualize the external and internal social environments.
• The analysis chapter will move beyond defining factors and context and shift perspective to viewing inter-relationships between all factors and their dimensions.

• The conclusion will suggest possible utility in conjunction with associated research and what future research seems necessary.
CHAPTER 2: USING THEORY TO UNDERSTAND SILENCE

Although numerous articulations of qualitative research suggest that assumptions and prior expectations cannot be avoided, qualitative research should attempt to allow themes to emerge naturally from notes rather than from preconceived categories (Creswell, 1997; Hansen, Cottle, Negrine, & Newbold, 1998; Lindlof, 1995). No articulations of qualitative research, however, suggest that one should attempt to be a *tabula rosa*; otherwise, one would not know whether one’s research would add to existing knowledge or what questions might help to aid understanding of a particular topic. As a result, it is important to understand prior assessments of a topic prior to research. This can also help prevent falsification, for past researchers may have thought they discovered something when, in fact, they may have simply misidentified what they found. With the above in mind, this section is a literature review that might be conceived as like a guidebook providing a basis from which to begin comparison, assessment and discovery.

A DEFINITION OF SILENCE AND SUGGESTED NATURE

A good place to begin is with what silence is not. Silence is not when members use silence to communicate an idea (R. P. Clair, 1997). For instance, this could be a pregnant pause used to imply some discontent with what someone said, or, perhaps, when a superior sends an e-mail to a subordinate and the subordinate never replies, hoping the superior will understand that the sender should never make that request again. The point within the above scenarios is that this silence was intended to communicate some idea.
Other forms of silence may also appear communicative: for instance, lying appears to be communicative and may allow a person to take advantage of knowledge disparity through deception or subversion (Grover, 1993, 2005; Sims, 2002). In lying, the person does communicate something, but they intentionally provide misleading information. Thus, while the person does communicate, they are silent about the truth. The end result may appear to be communicative – not silent – but it is in fact a form of silence.

This suggests that the measure of theoretical silence is that a potential listener did not receive information. The literature relating to silence suggests that silence occurs when a potential receiver is not provided enough information or any signal sufficient for them to comprehend something.

Currently, no published document could be found that attempted to codify and explicate categories for all forms of silence, and so this dissertation attempts to explore and develop such a typology. Numerous authors have attempted to give their own names to the same phenomena (see Table 1) which makes review arduous; nonetheless, this research attempts to use names if some have been consistently used so as not to add to confusion.

At least four categories for silence seem to have been identified: 1) tactical silence, 2) reflexive silence, 3) structural silence, and 4) ignorant silence (Table 1). Tactical silence appears to be the selective use of silence as the most efficient coping option after becoming aware of something yet having sufficient capacity to communicate. Reflexive silence may be seen as tactical but differs specifically because it is an unconscious choice, such as shyness or instinct toward an immediate threat. Structural
silence is more of a logistical barrier occurring when two people or groups cannot communicate because of environmental barriers such as time differences, lack of requisite technology or insufficient language translation capacity. Courtenay (1916) discussed silence as ignorance, or ignorant silence, because people simply were not aware of something. He laced the term with theologically evil modifiers, but ignorance does not seem inherently bad, given that people may simply lack the tools or vantage to perceive certain things, and are consequently incapable of communicating. What for him was negative were people who keep themselves intentionally ignorant of a thing.

**Antecedents and Consequences**

Instead of listing every identified factor in an exhaustive list, the below discussion will first explore silence research antecedents: the original theories. As a general observation, the grand theories and models on the subject seem focused on fear and futility, possibly from a sense that they perceive silence as a chief barrier to progress and likewise seem to view silence as a qualitatively bad thing. In contrast to these theories, other studies have suggested a much wider variety of antecedents and consequences among various environments. To help readers sort out the literature, please refer to Tables 3-2 and 3-3. The antecedents are grouped by four dominant themes that emerged from a comparison of theory: differentiation, structural and environmental, dominant views, and culture/philosophy.

**Organizational Silence:** Morrison and Millikens’ (2000) paper was not empirical research, but rather analysis with a series of arguments trying to synthesize business literature related to silence within a cohesive set of relationships, which, if present, may predispose an organization toward a climate of silence, or as they called it “organizational
silence.” The following may give the reader a general schema with which to understand the theory’s thirteen propositions: if ideological or social factors differentiate organizational members from each other, and if members perceive external threat or perceive futility of attempting change in a highly stable environment, then the organizational climate should be a rather silent one. For example, if a company has a very homogeneous and exclusive managerial cohort, and subordinates are different demographically, then subordinates may perceive barriers to communication, i.e. they are differentiated from management. The expected result is that subordinates may communicate among themselves, but not with superiors.

The paper’s thirteen propositions describe the relationship between a climate of silence in organizations and the following sets of organizational characteristics:

- *organizational and environmental factors*: cost-control policy or low-munificence\(^1\) environment (i.e. a highly competitive and threatening business context), mature and stable industry, high vertical hierarchical differentiation, external hiring of senior managers, and reliance on contingent, temporary, workers; and

- *management team characteristics*: high proportion of management with a finance or economics background, long average tenure, high power distance and collectivistic cultural background, and high demographic dissimilarity with subordinate staff.

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\(^1\) Low-munificence is a context where, for instance, profit margins may be so low that a company has very little extra resources to use for expansion or other improvements.
If the above factors are present, then management is expected to mistrust employees, have minimal or no formal feedback systems, maintain centralized decision making, rarely seek criticism informally or only from individuals known to share perspectives, and support strong within-level social networks but weak between-level networks. In short, the key antecedents that emerge from Morrison and Milliken are differentiation, threat, and futility. The main effect is a climate of silence. To emphasize, Morrison and Milliken suggest all factors affecting silence are channeled through management: i.e. factors affect management, and then management affects the rest of the organization. The employee, in their view, seems like a purely reactive creature with no capacity to affect silence independently.

**Spiral of Silence**: Noelle-Neumann’s (1974) “spiral of silence” argues that if members of a group believe most of the group share the same view, then whether or not each person actually believes it, the mere perception that a dominant view exists is enough to silence dissenting views over time.\(^2\) Her study measured silence by asking whether individuals would like to discuss their views on an issue with others and when the issue was specifically one that had recently had a known winning and losing

\(^2\) Asking whether a group perceives dominant views of itself may seem like an odd question, since no group can have a distinct culture if it does not have unique attributes; otherwise we would all have the same culture. In fact, research on comprehension suggests that under all cases and within subjects, individuals will perceive dominant beliefs even if technically there are none, e.g. indexing and landscape models in comprehension literature (Mar, 2004; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998). Therefore, dominant views cannot be eliminated, but could be managed.
perspective. In other words, the measurement was a person’s perception of their willingness to discuss a recent decision made in an organization (or nation in her study).

In this case, the reason one view was able to silence other views was because people feared isolation more than being wrong. Dominant views became hegemonic and constrained the characteristics a person and group might have exhibited. The theory makes all the more sense considering Noelle-Neumann grew up in Nazi Germany and observed how dominant views can quash dissenting opinions (Simpson, 1996). In short, her theory suggests that silence is a state in which members who hold minority viewpoints believe they cannot express themselves because they fear being isolated from their larger community.

At least one question immediately arises about the logic of this theory: has Noelle-Neumann only attributed superficial factors in a relationship with silence? Fear of isolation may not be the root cause, but the root of that fear may in fact be survival, if evolutionary biologists are correct that people have evolved to recognize that personal survival is tantamount to group survival (D. S. Wilson & Wilson, 2007). This connection may indicate that uncontrollable instinct is the root rather than one version of its manifestation, as fear of isolation (ostracism). Such a conclusion also presumes that the local culture perceives dissenting viewpoints as threatening and would use isolation as a control tactic, whereas a culture that desired dissenting views would not choose isolation. Subsequent research that has explored the spiral of silence continues to suggest that most cultures do perceive dissent as anti-social (Simpson, 1996); or as the Japanese proverb states, the nail that sticks up gets hammered down.
In summary, spiral of silence theory’s main antecedents for silence are dominant views and fear of isolation, though survival instinct as manifest in an anti-dissent society may be a more comprehensive and root conception of that fear.

**Pedagogy of the Oppressed**: Freire (1970a) discussed a “culture of silence”³ for which macro-economic, social and political pressures shape educational systems and cumulatively conspire to deprive peoples of knowledge useful for pulling themselves out of dire poverty. Friere argues that their state of oppression was created because they were trained to believe that to be successful was to be like their oppressors - those who created dominant and hegemonic views. Because the oppressed saw themselves in relation to the oppressor, they never gained a sense of who they were, and were thus not capable of sharing opinion. In effect, dominant views in society kept those with dissenting views from sharing their views and made them remain separate and uncoordinated, trapped in a constant and downward state. This desire to be like the oppressor came from a fear of freedom: i.e. fear of being separated from a group, which is equivalent to a fear of being ostracized. From this perspective, Friere’s theory sounds almost exactly like spiral of silence, but was made public four years earlier than Noelle-Neumann’s publication.

To give Freire his fair due, his argument was far more specific about the exact nature in which the creators of dominant views were able to disseminate and inculcate their perspectives. In particular, he examined how economics, social differentiation,

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³ Although many references to “culture of silence” in the academic literature as well as on the Internet point to Freire, the first reference may actually be in Charles Courtenay’s (1919) “The Empire of Silence.”
politics, education and intelligence created silence between individuals and groups in order for some to maintain control of a larger population.

Economic systems were used to fund favored (government sanctioned) educational facilities. By doing so, a few people could propagandize an orchestrated set of ideas by funding only those issues they deemed worthy of study. This is similar to budgeting in organizations, which may act to signal positive beliefs about a type of work and people. Of course, most businesses are by default oriented around select types of products, so by definition, funds are used selectively, but if fund dissemination is applied to functions such as health care, family leave and other benefits, we may see that funding selectivity can be used to communicate dominant beliefs to organizational members. Therefore, the theory argues, issues and endeavors not funded through budgeting may become viewed as unmentionable, or people may be so wrapped up in thinking myopically about budgeted issues that they fail to think of and discuss issues not budgeted for.

Social pressures as discussed by Freire seem like structuration functions (e.g. Poole, 1988) whereby demographic variances may differentiate peoples. Differentiation is the perception that there are social barriers that people could not cross. Such social structural barriers may coerce people to act in certain ways without perceived choice and often without their knowing. For instance, in an innocent way, a boy may never talk to a girl who is but a few feet away because he perceives no valid social reason/channel by which he could speak to her, or in a grander scale, whole groups of people may feel they cannot speak to leaders because the group thinks of themselves as unimportant in comparison with the leaders.
Political power was built by creating community members who perceived they did not have power to impose policy. They believed that whatever action they could implement would be futile and were required to work within a system provided for them; thus, they conformed to the will of those with perceived power. Power was also used to not only construct the processes of civic life, but to impose a policy of “massification” that reduced many individuals to a single, manageable and unthinking mob. Those in power taught a population through “banking education,” or a type of education that emphasized rote memory over analytical thought. In organizations, this may occur at any stage during socialization, whether in schools before employment, through mass communication, new employee orientations, surveillance during work, or formal training (e.g. Jablin, 2001; M. W. Kramer & Noland, 1999).

There is at least one other lesson from Freire: if people did not know about a thing, they could not think to discuss it. He suggested, for instance, that oppressors maintained power by keeping knowledge from the oppressed. The result was that the oppressed could only think about what was provided, like pigeons who become obsessed with the crumbs thrown to them – don’t look away, don’t look away.

In summary, a mass of people might be kept ignorant and silenced if an another individual or group could create the impression of dominant views through economics, social differentiation, and education, while further exploiting the dominant views of futility and massification to reinforce the divisions and dominant views already created. The chief antecedent for silence, though, is that enough perception of futility must be attained along with differentiation in order to keep people with dissenting views from communicating. Once a group has established futility and differentiation, then they can
use economics and education to further define dominant views and agendas, and further cast a population into deeper silence and submission. However, none of the above is possible unless people have a fear of ostracism; the fear is not a catalyst but a necessary condition.

**CONTRIBUTIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS**

The following sections explore significant contributions to theory that suggest strong and specific factor relationships with silence and either reveal aspects not described within extent theory or suggest theoretical conclusions are false. For reference during discussion, Tables 2-1, 2-2 and 2-3 are used instead of exhaustively describing every study. The discussion will refer to the studies noted in the tables for the respective contributions, reinforcement of theoretical aspects, or contradictions that weaken or reshape the expectations in theory.

### Table 2-1: Motivations for Silence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tactical: Silence as deception / lying</td>
<td>I lied because I would lose my advantage if I did.</td>
<td>e.g. (Grover, 1993; Sims, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical: Silence from perceived futility</td>
<td>It won't make any difference.</td>
<td>(Bowen &amp; Blackmon, 2003; Freire, 1970b; Morrison &amp; Milliken, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical: Silence caused by perceived fear of being ostracized (fear/pro-social)</td>
<td>They don't want to hear what I have to say.</td>
<td>(Bowen &amp; Blackmon, 2003; Freire, 1970b; Morrison &amp; Milliken, 2000; Noelle-Neumann, 1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub: Silence as a cultural norm (fear)</td>
<td>People don't talk about this, or I can't talk to her because there is no socially acceptable way to introduce myself.</td>
<td>(Freire, 1970b; Noelle-Neumann, 1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub: Silence due to uncertainty (fear)</td>
<td>I'm not sure, so maybe I better wait to say anything.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical: Silence from Abilene Paradox (Uncertainty/no fear)</td>
<td>I didn't say anything because I thought everyone else wanted to go.</td>
<td>(Harvey, 1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical: Silence due to groupthink</td>
<td>I didn't realize anyone needed to know.</td>
<td>(Janis, 1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical: Silence due to perceived inequity (also power and counterpower)</td>
<td>He's too important, and I'm just a low-level fool anyway.</td>
<td>(Juteau, 2003; Pruitt &amp; Kim, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical: Silence caused by pro-social intent</td>
<td>I would like to be friends with him, but don't fear loss</td>
<td>(Van Dyne, Soon, &amp; Botero, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical: Silence as deception/Secrecy</td>
<td>I'm not going to tell him because I hope he fails, or I'm glad I don't have the answer and neither do they so I can continue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2-2: Tested and Hypothesized Relationships between Organizational Features and Non-Communicative Silence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Correlational Relationship</th>
<th>Types of People Affected</th>
<th>Citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior vs. subordinate differentiation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>along demographics (gender, age, income) and supervisory status</td>
<td>Pos.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(Brooks, Daniels, &amp; Hollifield, 2003; Gross, Craft, Cameron, &amp; Antecol, 2002 &amp; Antecol, 2002; Monroe, 2003; Morrison &amp; Miliken, 2000; Zipparo, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational age, size, location or number of employees</td>
<td>Pos.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(Morrison &amp; Miliken, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic heterogeneity (though an inverted U-shaped relationship with increased performance at middle apex, and poor(er) performance at the extreme ends of low and high heterogeneity)</td>
<td>Invert-U</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(Dahlin, Weingart, &amp; Hinds, 2005; Earley &amp; Elaine, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations with heterogeneous Cultures (though, inverted U-shaped relationship)</td>
<td>Invert-U</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(Earley &amp; Elaine, 2000; Huang et al., 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenures of all and between superior and subordinate (approx. 2 years or more)</td>
<td>Pos.</td>
<td>All (Prone to remain silent)</td>
<td>(Gossett, 2001; Morrison &amp; Miliken, 2000; Rothschild &amp; Miethe, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High proportion of management with a finance or economics background</td>
<td>Pos.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(Morrison &amp; Miliken, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office geography – employees grouped with perceptual and/or physical barriers</td>
<td>Pos.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Dominant Views** | | | |
| Existence of dominant views | Pos. | All (Prone to remain silent) | (Freire, 1970b; Mar, 2004; Morrison & Miliken, 2000; Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Rothschild & Miethe, 1999; Zwaan & Radvansky, 1998) |
| Approx. 20 percent threshold above which acceptance may be self-perpetuating (weight of each issue) | Pos. | All | (Rogers, 2003; Schachter, Ouellette, Whittle, & Gerin, 1987) |
| Promotion of the loyal (as signal to others about status quo) | Pos. | All | (Beamish, 2000) |
| Normalization of deviancy | Pos. | All | (Beamish, 2000) |
| Rewarding decision secrecy | Pos. | All | (Argyris, 1974) |

4 The citations listed are not intended to be exhaustive but representative.
Democratic decision making | Pos. | All | (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999)

Ability to participate | Pos. | All | (Rothschild & Miethe, 1999)

**Survival**

*Perception of Being Ostracized*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Pos.</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Source(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future Career Fear</td>
<td>Pos.</td>
<td>Respondents under the age of 25</td>
<td>(Milliken, Morrison, &amp; Hewlin, 2003; Zipparo, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of idea theft (mistrust)</td>
<td>Pos.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(Argyris, 1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of public chastisement</td>
<td>Pos.</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>(Gaziano &amp; Coulson, 1988)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Loyalty/Fear (Code of Silence) | Pos. | All | (Beamish, 2000; Hitz & Weiss, 2004; Trautman, 2000) |

Cost-control policy or low-munificence environment (i.e. highly competitive and threatening) | Pos. | All | (Morrison & Miliken, 2000) |

Any major and life threatening experience | Pos. | All | (Pfau, Haigh, Gettle, Donnelly, & Scott, 2004) |

Uncertainty as to whether their CEO/GM encouraged reporting | Pos. | Females | (Zipparo, 1998) |

National power-distance culture as a moderator of organizational factors | Pos. | All | (Huang et al., 2003) |

**Futility**

Recruitment of less skilled and obedient applicants | Pos. | All | (Beamish, 2000; Friebel & Raith, 2004) |

Lack of support from an immediate supervisor, lack of confidence that their report would be taken seriously | Pos. | Lower income groups | (Casey, Miller, & Johnson, 1997; Zipparo, 1998) |

No perceived legal protections against reprisals | Pos. | Females and non-supervisors | (Callahan & Dworkin, 1994; Zipparo, 1998) |

Absence of formal and anonymous reporting/Confidentiality | Pos. | Females, nonsupervisors, and young respondents (less than 45 years of age) | (Callahan & Collins, 1992; Casey et al., 1997; Zipparo, 1998) |

Absence of a reporting procedure to someone unknown or a known confidant | Pos. | Non-supervisors and lower income groups | (Casey et al., 1997; Zipparo, 1998) |

High vertical heirarchy | Pos. | All | (Beamish, 2000; Juteau, 2003; Morrison & Miliken, 2000) |

Designed competition and a star system | Pos. | All | (Argyris, 1974) |

Mature and stable industry | Pos. | All | (Morrison & Miliken, 2000) |

Centralized decision making | Pos. | All | (Gaziano & Coulson, 1988; Morrison & Miliken, 2000) |

**Factors Not Discussed by Existing Grand Theories**

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Although democratic decision making and participation seem like they allow for greater speaking opportunity, the outcome was both factors increase a need for consensus and dominant view creation, and therefore a context with a heightened perception of dominant views that inhibits minority view. Ironically, the outcome is opposite the desired intent.
 Restricted communication time (Futility/Environmental Factor?) | Pos. | All | (Argyris, 1974)
 Weather – high heat, extreme cold (Futility/Environmental Factor?) | Pos. | All | Bell & Baron, 1976 in Pruitt, 2004
 Mundane topics? (Futility?) | Pos. | All | (Waldron & Krone, 1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome of Silence in Organizations</th>
<th>Citation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low performance (economic / task completion)</td>
<td>(Morrison &amp; Milliken, 2000; Ryan, 1991; Scott et al., 1999; Srivastava, Bartol, &amp; Locke, 2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduces innovation</td>
<td>(Edmondson, 2003; Nemeth, 1997; Ryan, 1991; Vakola &amp; Bouradas, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduces job satisfaction and commitment</td>
<td>(Huang, Vliert, &amp; Vet, 2005; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, &amp; Mainous lli, 1988; Vakola &amp; Bouradas, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibits organizational learning</td>
<td>(Argyris, 1974; Morrison &amp; Milliken, 2000; Perlow &amp; Williams, 2003; Shaw, 1981)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May allow illegal practices to continue</td>
<td>(Beamish, 2000; Callahan &amp; Dworkin, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustains oppression</td>
<td>(Bowen &amp; Blackmon, 2003; Freire, 1970b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhibits or destroys change management programs</td>
<td>(Argyris, 1974; Beer &amp; Nohria, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages passivity and learned helplessness</td>
<td>(Freire, 1970b; Premeaux, Huang, &amp; Bedeian, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for intolerant workplaces of invisible identities</td>
<td>(Bowen &amp; Blackmon, 2003; J. A. Clair, Beatty, &amp; MacLean, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reinforces management mistrust resulting in centralized decision making and increased scrutiny</td>
<td>(Bird, 1996; Morrison &amp; Milliken, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability systems become dysfunctional</td>
<td>(Bird, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral concerns overlooked and stress increases</td>
<td>(Bird, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral development is impeded</td>
<td>(Bird, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics are marginalized and confused</td>
<td>(Bird, 1996)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers who rarely seeks criticism informally or only from individuals known to share perspectives</td>
<td>(Morrison &amp; Milliken, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within-level communication with strong social networks but weak between-level social networks</td>
<td>(Morrison &amp; Milliken, 2000)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Motivations for Silence

silence is motivated by fear, futility, or pro-social intent. Fear, in this case, is due to an expectation of retaliation, or otherwise stated, fear of engaging in a conflict that a person expects to lose. Futility was a sense that no matter what was said, there would be no change or that the amount of conflict required was not worth the effort. Pro-social silence was when members were motivated by the desire for praise by colleagues and superiors. Juteau (2003), in discussing social differentiation, said silence could be motivated from a perceived status inequity. Harvey’s (1974) Abilene Paradox suggested that people choose to remain silent because of uncertainty mixed with pro-social intent, which leads people to suppress their desires in deference to others. Janis’ (1982) groupthink argued that people remain silent because they transfer responsibility to a group and falsely assume the group is making the right choice. As one can see, there are many different reasons for tactical silence beyond fear or futility.

Regarding Van Dyne et al’s (2003) pro-social motivation, questions appear as to whether pro-social, as defined by them, should be entirely included without modification. If pro-social silence is chosen by an employee, then by definition the individual does not feel they cannot speak. However, if they felt they had no choice, then that might be an instance of fear that was then not pro-social silence, but simply a sub-category of fear.

**Issues Prone to Being Silenced**

In terms of issues that people may remain silent about, no theory or empirical study reviewed suggested that all issues are silenced in any given context. For instance, the underlying assumption in Morrison and Milliken (2000) was that silenced speech must be information deemed important enough to be useful or dangerous – i.e. silence instilled by fear or a sense of futility. In other words, they focused on value-added
information connoting *change and perceived potential for conflict*, not casual banter about the weather or after-work activities. Studies of whistleblowing⁶ suggest that *illegal or unethical activities* are the primary topics people would be afraid to voice internally (Callahan & Collins, 1992; Callahan & Dworkin, 1994; Miethe & Rothschild, 1994; Near & Miceli, 1985). A later study by Milliken, Morrison and Hewlin (2003) suggested that such information may be anything, *positive or negative*, that connotes a need for change, including illegal and unethical issues. This could be desired changes in the activity of a supervisor, internal policies, process improvements, etc. There was at least one case in the studies reviewed that was not change-related, but instead was a fear of being ostracized: some members with *invisible social identities* may remain silent because of perceived dominant views of *social undesirability* such as diseases or sexuality (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; J. A. Clair et al., 2005). Other invisible social identities included beliefs, values, relationships, or preferences if individuals or groups perceived themselves in a minority status (Deutsch, 1991).

Therefore, a definition of non-communicative silence should potentially encompass issues relating to *change, illegal or unethical acts*, and issues regarding *social*

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⁶ Some may argue that whistleblowing normally looks at individual level motivations for speech, and that such studies appeared not to be relevant to organizational-level research. The logic for inclusion is that if a class of persons (keynote: plural) across many organizations seem to be motivated to seek external means of communication regarding only a select few types of issues, then clearly those people did not feel they could speak about such issues internally. Therefore, those issues that could not be brought up internally are likely issues that people may remain silent about.
One question that comes to mind is that if people are prone to being quiet about change and social undesirability, are those same issues withheld from news coverage? Of course, the internal question is whether such issues may also affect operations.

**Competitive culture**

One particular concern with Morrison and Millikens’ (2000) paper is that it seems biased toward viewing silence pressures as principally top-down, and seems to almost entirely exclude the possibility that silence could rise natively from subordinate staff. One study (Argyris, 1974) presented an alternative view. The researcher spent three years ethnographically studying a large newspaper as a participant observer and developed arguments for why and how organizational learning occurred in a news media environment. For one year he was an observer during a diagnosis phase, and then for two years he attempted the implementation of an organizational change program. Argyris observed that the general culture of the newsroom was so competitive that 67 percent of

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7 Organizational change and non-social desirability both challenge a status quo, and, therefore, both suggest that if they were known, they are in conflict with the status quo. In a cyclical logic, then, both still may imply one type of very broad issue: change. However, a person’s intent to remain silent about non-socially desirable issues does not seem to inherently suggest they want their organization/group to change if they would let it be known.

8 Morrison and Milliken have made attempts to fill this gap, but that study only looked at one aspect – type of issue – and did not add to the literature because their findings were redundant of previous research on Spiral of Silence (the final conclusion was that employees feared isolation, which is the exact conclusion of Freire (1968) and Noelle-Newman (1974)).
interviewees said others “spoke just to hear themselves speak” or “to impress their boss;” they weren’t listening or expressing constructive statements for the group. Additionally, 74 percent said groups were poor places to explore new ideas and think out loud because of the lack of responsiveness or fear from others stealing ideas. The root cause seemed to be the personal reward of getting more interesting stories, which would get reporters front page coverage, and developed into a star system whereby only a few reporters were able to get most of the good stories.

Argyris also suggested that because most employees were well educated and predisposed to competition, they seemed to crave difficult and intellectually challenging material. Therefore, the extremely competitive context of a newsroom seemed to be created by a homogeneously highly educated workforce and a reward system that allowed few to claim a large portion of printed space.

Although the reward system may seem to support the theory that silence pressure is top-down, Argyris emphasized that the men and women in the reporter ranks were so competitive that even above the lure of the star system the silence between them was among peers, not top down. However, competitive culture as a potential cause of silence may not necessarily be correct or generalizable. Competitive cultures do not necessarily exhibit silence, as some groups that are highly competitive may also have high performance and innovation (Goncalo & Staw, 2006). Argyris’ findings merely seem to suggest that if competitive culture exists, it may be a support structure in which silence may exist if some other variable(s) are simultaneously present in an organization. One suggestion may be that if competitive tendencies are blended with performance benchmarks for knowledge acquisition (i.e. finding news), then knowledge sharing may
run counter to perceptions of individual success measures. However, could the presence of teams instead of individuals’ performance circumvent silence, or would it merely create silence between teams such that organizationally silence as a norm still exists?

**The Inverted “U”**

Dahlin (2005) and Earley (2000) both argued that if a group contained either total homogeneity or heterogeneity, performance was lower than if the group had a profile somewhere between the two extremes. In other words, the relationship resembles an inverted “U” shape with poor productivity at either extreme and a golden mean in between. The homogeneous groups seemed to exhibit greater groupthink, whereas the heterogeneous group had linguistic and social barriers (definitional assumptions, uncertainty about interpersonal conduct, etc.). Their inverted-U adds to theory, since none of the other theories suggested similar contexts.

**CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN RESEARCH**

**Organizational maturity**

Another factor related to silence pertains to mature and stable industries. Argyris (1974) observed that organization age (i.e. maturity), size (number of employees), and location did not matter in the newspaper he studied. In contrast, Morrison and Milliken (2000) argued that maturity and cultural variation (geographically diverse) organizations would be prone to silence. Given that the studies contradict each other, then silence possibly has no relationship to organizational age or location. However, since both studies were weak sources of generalizable data, these factors should not be excluded because they have not been sufficiently explored.
Of course, at least one other interpretation is possible: if one encounters a situation where all sub-categories of a variable relate strongly with another variable, then the higher probability is that the main variable is simply the corollary. In this case, if both mature and young organizations relate to silence, then maybe all organizations relate with silence, or, more likely, organizational age has nothing to do with silence unless age interacts with other factors that ultimately contribute to silence.

**National Culture and Philosophy**

In terms of culture and philosophy – specifically collectivism and individualism – several authors have argued that collectivistic and high power distance philosophies (for example, China and Japan) should relate with silence\(^9\) (Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). In contrast, Argyris (1974) argued that individualism contributed to silence because it related to competitive tendencies among a highly educated workforce in a newsroom. Therefore, if silence relates with both collectivistic and individualistic orientations, then some other variable must be influencing silence; again, this situation seems analogous to what was discussed about mature and young organizations. Collectivism and individualism might be excluded as a factor influencing silence. However, in keeping with differentiation as an antecedent and the inverted-U, silence may increase in extremely homogeneous or heterogeneous contexts.

**Careerists Versus Contingent Hires**


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\(^9\) Also termed as indirection and avoidance in Pruitt and Kim (2004)
that externally hired senior managers (people who did not start in and rise through the organization) and a high proportion of contingent workers (non-careerists) relate to silence. Again, if silence appears to be influenced by both careerists and contingents, something other than employment type might be a factor relating to silence.

**Benefits of Extreme Silence**

Friebel and Raith wrote, “We show that depending on the parameters of the model, it can be optimal to prohibit communication entirely” (Friebel & Raith, 2004). Theory related to silence usually suggests that silence is qualitatively bad in all cases and prevents positive social impacts. However, the model described by Freibel and Raith, which is game theory, differs. In this case, the authors argue that if subordinates and superiors require the same basic qualifications, superiors may be easily replaceable by cheaper and younger applicants. If superiors realize this threat, they may be motivated to intentionally hire less skilled and less productive subordinates, and thus create a downward spiral whereupon each level of an organization is filled with less skilled and less productive individuals – not a good scenario. In one case of their model, they argued that if superiors are intentionally kept blind and deaf to the skills and productivity of subordinates, then by chance at least some equally or more productive subordinates may be hired. Of course, horribly unproductive employees could also be hired and promoted. So, Freibel and Raith seem to suggest that if silence existed as a general shroud over the whole organization, skill and productivity diversity should be higher throughout the organization. In other words, as communications *inefficiency* and *opacity* engulf an organization, the organization may have greater levels of skill and productivity diversity.
Game theory offers an intriguing approach, but its practical usage in research seems limited. It certainly seems likely that more skill and productivity diversity could occur in a blind selection process, but such a context assumes that an organization would choose hiring blindness, which may be neither desirable nor legal. Organizations that cut out managers seem to opt for recruitment agencies or human resource professionals whose jobs are to maintain high and consistent levels of productivity. Additionally, from another perspective, Friebel and Raith’s hypothesis could be a reflection of normal hiring practice. “You are overqualified,” a phrase known by many job searchers, is an assumption that the act of hiring the right person for the right job is an attempt to match skill and productivity with a position and in successive levels; otherwise, would not the discussion simply shift to vertical and horizontal organizations – i.e. that vertical hierarchy assumes lower to higher skills and horizontal assumes less skill diversity (with the caveat of being within position types/tracks)? Hence, even if one observed more skill and productivity diversity, could one claim that silence may have caused the outcome, or was the organization simply a vertical hierarchy?

SYNTHESIS OF THEORIES

The various themes explored in the two primary theories and hypothesis of spiral of silence, pedagogy of the oppressed and organizational silence are: differentiation, threat (to an entire organization), futility, dominant views, and fear of isolation (possibly survival instinct). Threat and fear of isolation both deal with survival issues but at sociological and psychological levels, and, therefore, if survival is a key factor regardless of population scale, then perhaps studies dealing with survival should all fall under one category: survival. The other themes do not appear as definitional equivalents at a
construct level and therefore may remain as independent categorical factors. In an effort to organize these numerous studies, the above four themes/categories were used for presentation in Table 2, as well as an added category as a catchall for those that do not conform to theoretically suggested categories.

Although the researchers argue that their theories have different factor mixtures, curiously all three assume the same effect: that silence would envelope whole groups like a dark shroud. However, in contrast, there are myriad studies examining a range of effects manifesting at greater and smaller scales and among particular groups (see Table 3). In addition to the apparently singular outcome proposed by these theories, none actually defines what a climate is in operational terms. Most notably, they do not define what threshold constitutes a climate of silence. For example, if only one percent of members perceive their organization as being silent, could one argue that the entire organization is dominated by a climate of silence? What about five percent or 100 percent? As well, if members only perceive one issue out of 100 as being silenced, would the entire organization be silent? What if in one organization people discuss 20 different topics and in another, 200 different topics – would a comparative lack of discussion topics indicate some degree of silence?

A climate of silence, therefore, requires some stipulation of threshold. At least two dimensions of climate seem minimally necessary as operational definitions – strength and breadth. Here strength may be the number of members who mutually perceive that dissent is undesirable, and breadth may be the number of issues that members mutually perceive as unmentionable. The key problem is defining sufficient; in other words, what level of strength and breadth represents a threshold at which a climate
of silence could be said to exist? This is a wholly unknown relationship, though “diffusion of innovations” theory could be used to argue that a threshold of around 20 percent is required for the perception of a climate of silence to become self-perpetuating towards 100 percent (Rogers, 2003). In other words, the diffusion of innovations theory suggests that there are thresholds at which a population may come to believe that an idea is widely believed.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The earliest formal research on silence seems to concentrate on the macro-social and particularly political problems of the mid-20th century: explanations of Nazi Germany and dictatorships and revolution in Latin America. However, in roughly the same period of the early to mid-1970’s, the inward shift of American researchers to look at America and its institutions seem evocative of similar questions such as the Abilene Paradox (why would people go along with a decision they did not like), and Argyris’ interests in communications and decision errors. The focus was similar to questions about Nazis but instead with an eye on America’s own nationalist problems during the McCarthy era and revelations about judgment errors in Vietnam. The era was rife with glaring and shocking silence narratives, and research on these themes seemed to be unleashed during political thawing in the 1970’s.

While the original drivers of research seem to have been political, research eventually moved into businesses, where researchers studied people as they act in organizations. As researchers looked for areas to build upon, demographic questions of diversity and efficiency measures seemed to surge. From those studies, we learned about the effects of homogeneity and heterogeneity, that dominant beliefs are self-reinforcing
and hard to change, refinement on survival instincts and nuance to ostracism fears, the effects of futility, and how an array of organizational characteristics can impact retention, performance, ethical postulations, and information dissemination failures.

On the whole, the research to date largely treats silence as a pejorative. With few exceptions, like the game theory speculation that blind hiring might yield some positive results, research seems to focus on how people are socially kept apart (differentiation), and how dominant views (overwhelming other topics), survival instincts, futility, and fear drive silence. Such focuses on the negative appear to blind researchers from other possibilities such as neutral and logistical aspects to potentially positive attributes.

Several key features of prior research appear to result in ambiguous findings. Competitive cultures, organizational ages, national cultures, and careerists and contingents all are factors with one study suggesting one group relates with silence, while another study suggests the opposite group relates with silence. As a result, if both conditions can be met, it seems likely that either some other factor is an underlying corollary or cause, or the concepts themselves, as they were operationally implemented during study, misidentified the key factor.

The largest gap in prior research seems to be the lack of any definition about how to define “climate.” None of the prior researchers provided a model that identified the levels and mix of factors that could be said to define a “climate of silence.” Analysis of prior research suggests that some elements of diffusion of innovations theory could be incorporated, and that at least some stipulations about what constitutes breadth and depth of silence are required to establish even a cursory baseline.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature suggests factors that seem to influence whether people are silent or not, but the only work somewhat directly related to silence in newsrooms is Argyris’ *Behind the Front Page* (1974). Other literature was developed within business studies about industrial corporations unassociated with news, or within macro-social political perspectives about broad national publics not of or in the U.S., or was a mix of intra-organizational observations and conclusions from psychological to sociological. The result has been a high degree of difficulty pinpointing relevant factors to newsrooms in the U.S. and has left many questions unanswered by theory. The holes in theory, as suggested in the introduction, were one of the main reasons why this study focused on foundational qualitative research on the question: *What is the nature of silence in newsrooms?*

Initial research questions were broad starting points, rather than static and exclusive. Because this was foundational qualitative research, one should keep in mind that these questions were not like in a quantitative survey where each one is frozen: in this research, the questions were allowed to breathe and evolve as new information was revealed. If having instead elected to set questions that could not be modified as new information or revelations came to light, then research would have presumed to know how people at the sites defined and understood the concepts explored. Since this research did not want to make these assumptions, it was important that it keep the research questions flexible and viewed them as starting points, not final products.
STARTING POINTS

The following sections were starting points. They melded suggestions from literature and personal observation about the nature of silence. As noted above, these were purely initial thoughts as to observing silence, but each successive observation would broaden and enrich the detail of questioning.

The literature, particularly the three major theories discussed earlier, has primarily viewed silence negatively and as a barrier to positive change. However, members of newsrooms may not think of silence in negatively. Moreover, when they imagine examples with which to explain moments of silence, what associations do they conceive of? Such thoughts about silence prompted the following open questions:

What meaning(s) do newsroom employees attribute to silence – in other words, how do they define it?

- Are there particular motivations employees use for silence?
- What do they associate as causes for why they remained silent about something in different situations?

- Are there particular issues newsroom employees would rather not discuss?

If there are issues considered “unmentionable,” how could people come to know what they are?

- How can something be unmentionable and yet many people know about the unmentionable thing?
- Are many ideas conveyed such that total silence is actually a myth?
- Was something discussable but then became unmentionable? What is the process for a thing to become unmentionable?
The following two broad questions attempted to get at the utility of silence, and to explore the positive, neutral and negative effects of silence, which may also cyclically affect people’s decisions for using it. These questions were developed as a reaction to the hole left unfilled by the theories when they failed to define operationally a “climate of silence.” My thinking was that if people discussed the utility of silence, they may reveal factors that influence the climate and mood of individuals or associated groups.

**What emotions did they feel when they were silent about something?**

- What emotions did they attribute to silence in general?
- How would they describe the mood of their local group, department and organization about communication?

**How do employees perceive the effect on themselves and others when silence is used?**

- Do they attribute cause to themselves or others?
- If an individual is the receiver of silence or the transmitter, does he or she perceive silence differently from either role?

Since literature referred to structuration not just in terms of social boundary but physical boundary, this next question was intended to explore those characteristics.

**Are there particular contexts in which employees seem to reserve or reveal thought?**

- Do they prefer to speak among large groups or small groups, or are they indifferent to group size?
- Are there certain spaces that seem to affect people into silence?

Questions about the problem of ignorance and whether newsrooms have systems for managing ignorance (i.e. revealing unknowns), were the root of the next and last
broad question. From another perspective, this question asked whether there were particular reasons why people may not seek out an answer.

**How did newsroom members manage the unknown?**

- If there were issues in the past that people knew they did not have an answer to, what had they done to answer them or what did they perceive had prevented knowing?

The above questions, as said, were starting points. By encouraging me to view different factors from different perspectives, they helped lessen the impact of biases. However, research was in no way bound to them. If a member of the newsroom mentioned some aspect not considered above, then questions would follow his or her line of thought and discussion based on that person’s view. As a result, the final list of questions was as varied as the unique factor observations captured in my notebooks. In other words, as in many everyday conversations, discussion followed every tangent or odd comment, discussion was as open as possible, and notes were taken on everything that seemed relevant. Even a discussion about beer could lead to a memory a newsroom member had about an interaction with a supervisor. No conversational thread was ignored. Each and every conversation was useful, even if only to be a social basis for gaining trust among members so that at a later point they would be honest and relaxed instead of guarded.
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

The primary difficulty in conducting research on silence is that it is something people may not observe or be able to comment on while being part of an environment. It is something that people may be consciously keeping secret and may not normally (or ever) discuss, and it is something that may be so fleeting or even common as not to warrant comment or recognition. Such difficulties are but a few of the myriad problems of trying to collect information about something that is inherently hidden.

Qualitative research, particularly ethnographic methods, are most appropriate for exploring such concepts because they allow a ground-level vantage from which to observe what is independent of participants’ own perceptions; it also allows for access to sensitive participant perceptions through “talk and interviews” and contextual documents (Hansen et al., 1998). Furthermore, because no study to date has explored newsrooms from a silence orientation, it is important for this study to explore the widest possible array of potential factors and patterns, which may only be available through the information-rich and extensive process of ethnography (Lindlof, 1995).

Toward a working framework for engaging ethnographic research, this research followed Fetterman’s (1989) sequence: 1) gaining entry; 2) creating a research trail; 3) analyzing data; and 4) verifying findings.

GAINING ENTRY

This research intended to investigate multiple sites, but narrowed the field of potential sites to those in the Seattle-Tacoma market area. The geographic limitation helped control for cultural variation, including communication habits. For instance,
observed in public and private contexts the term “Northwest nice” (aka “Northwest ice”) meant a local style of generally appearing hospitable and non-confrontational despite actually not wanting to encourage friendships or wanting to opine what they actually feel. To control for such factors and provide practical limits on scope, research required focus in one geographic area.

In order to determine whether this research was possible, three companies were contacted and I stated my interest in their organizations because my research hoped to discover how news media companies’ internal communication systems operated, and they were provided assurances that collected information would not single out any particular company because results would be provided in aggregate and with company and employee names kept anonymous. Additionally, research would require visitation to each site for at least two weeks, all seven days for most hours so as to gain a sense of normative organizational behaviors, and return a second time for follow-up questions, to observe changes over time, and to validate ideas. Two companies were contacted in particular because they were suggested to by Dr. George Kennedy (committee member with contacts in the Northwest) and because both had executives with ties to the University of Missouri. A third company was contacted because a colleague had contacts with senior management. I stopped seeking further companies because there were a limited number of original content news producers in the specified geographic area. Two companies, both newspapers, agreed to allow access to their staffs and facilities. The third, a TV company, denied access because of a general policy to refuse any access to researchers.
A RESEARCH TRAIL

Ethnographic research seems similar to what a new employee might do upon first entry – use surveillance and targeted discussions to learn about the environment; in other words, in order to understand the nature of communication, one should know what members native to the site would have access to and knowledge of (Hansen et al., 1998). Therefore, research sought what an employee could have access to, such as documents, observation, talk, and interviews.

Upon gaining access to facilities, inquiries were made about permission to have a desk in the company’s newsroom so that observations could be made of normal activity without myself, the researcher, appearing like some suspicious and lurking character. While at site, the first week of visitation was spent simply observing the environment without seeking intentional contact. This tactic was supposed to allow people to grow comfortable with my presence and build trust through casual contact and answering any questions about myself or the research. I also attended new employee orientation programs and explored documents during this time so as to gain a familiarization with what communication was available to employees. Such materials were key to understanding early employee development because they were intended to help socialize them, educate them on policies, and anything else that independent of collegial interaction might help them learn about their environment. Through this process I also learned which people may have frequent and direct information-sharing potential within the newsroom, such as managers for operations or circulation, and I began scheduling meetings for the second week.
During the second week, interviews were held with participants in the newsroom and further discovered more potential sources through which newsroom employees sought to gain information about their jobs and organizational issues. Effectively, this was the time to learn about things one could not readily observe without interacting with people. Such discussion uncovered who talks to whom about what (as much as possible), and when one could see that someone seemed to be holding back a statement, they were asked what was on their mind.

Even though this qualitative research was about exploration and the allowance of conversation to take paths natural to the participant (unstructured dialogue), Yin’s (2003) suggestions for consistency between interviews (structured dialogue/fixed questions) was employed to allow for some comparisons and to trace group understanding and meaning-making. In order to have some consistency, I used five common questions. Each of the five questions directly related to aspects of the broad research questions and provided a starting point for discussion, particularly if someone was shy or protective by nature. These questions were not developed before entering the sites: they were developed after some initial discussions from which I learned styles of language and what concepts were familiar and analogous to the concepts being explored. The questions were:

- What is the top issue or issues for this organization?
- What is your personal top issue or issues in the organization and outside?
- What do you wish was talked about more and what less?
- Are there any elephants, per se, in the organization (note: sometimes people interpreted this as “what is stupid to say”)?
- Is there anything you keep secret and why?
Equally, research needed to know who people’s sources of information were internally, whom they communicated with most often, whom they communicated with if they had a sensitive issue, and what method they communicated with (face-to-face, email, instant messaging, etc.).

The other purpose of the five questions was to understand if some issues were silenced and others not at various levels. For instance, some issues may be known across a whole organization, while others may be known only among larger and smaller divisions or only among individuals. If there were issues that appeared concentrated among divisions or individuals, then those issues were explored for why and how such issues did not migrate to other divisions in the organization.

**PERFORMANCE AND RESEARCH OPERATION**

The first wave of visits consisted of two-week visits for seven days a week at each site. These were performed between October 15, 2007, and November 18, 2007, and were immediately back-to-back. The second wave was of one-week visits at each site and occurred from February 24, 2008, to March 14, 2008. Hours were generally from around 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., with a few days starting early at 6 a.m. and some days ending later, around 2 a.m. The second wave was useful for observing changes that had occurred since the first visit and confirming prior notes with managers and staff for greater validity.

Total notes accumulated to 291 handwritten and typed notes that were entered into a tablet PC carried around at all times. Notes also consisted of seven audio recordings, 1.05 Gb of text (email and documents), presentations (publicity PDF’s, Microsoft PowerPoint Presentations), images, and some paper documents such as brochures or
information provided at new employee orientations. All materials were only those available on the internal websites with permissions to all staff in the newsrooms, and examples were retained for future reference. The materials were always maintained in an encrypted partition on my tablet PC that required a password. No materials or notes from one organization were ever shared with the other organization (I was tested a few times when some senior managers asked for information), and my computer was locked with a password if it had to be left at my desk.

Both sites provided me with a desk and chair situated in the newsroom. They also provided an Internet connection and access to their intranet. The intranet access was critical so that data could be collected on what types of broad internal statements were made, and both sites’ intranet materials were very useful for historical contextualization because they both had rather good archives available. At one site, the company even provided a company email address so that data could be collected on internal communications sent out over email broadcasts. The combination of the two aspects – desk space among staff and the local computer access – as well as attendance at staff meetings allowed me to hear and experience all the organizational-wide communications, and allowed some frequent exposure to sub-organization groups such as the editorial or features teams.

During observations notes were taken and later confirmed with individuals about the meaning of statements or observations in order to maintain validity. Checks for validity were primarily reserved for the second wave of visits because logistically I was engaged in note taking for the entire time in the first wave and did not have time for
much review during the work day or afterwards (since research was performed physically on site for most of the waking hours).

*Perceptual Bias:* One option when conducting research is for a researcher to admit to having biases so as to acknowledge potential skew in the data, and use that recognition to consciously consider alternative interpretations. Alternatively, a researcher can claim he or she went into the research setting without any biases. In either extreme scenario, bias cannot be eliminated. This research was performed under the belief that one must admit their biases and used that knowledge to find compensatory techniques.

When observing, for instance, I knew I have a personal and positive view of journalists who are sarcastic muckrakers – they simply seem more interesting conversationalists than entertainment junkies. As a result, I may perceive a contrarian character more positively than, perhaps, someone whose orientation is about maintaining positive, happy relationships. Recognizing this potential bias, I made a conscious effort to try to look at things from others’ perspectives. Since the purpose of good science is to seek the closest approximation of truth, then admitting one’s biases is an essential and foundational basis for all good science.

I also used other means to identify biases. For example, after performing a series of observations, a table was created of major concepts and on which days those observations were made, see Table 4-1:
Table 4-1: Observations by Day of Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row Labels</th>
<th>Day of the Week</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIATOR</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIER - SOCIAL</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICY</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIER - CULTURAL</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPACITY - DECISION COST &amp; BENEFIT</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIER - TIME/CULTURE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIER - TECHNOLOGY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBIGUITY</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COORDINATION</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERATOR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIER - LEARNING PROCESS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGO</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPACITY - REDUCTION IN CONVERSATION RESOURCES</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIER - INTERIOR DESIGN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPACITY - RESOURCES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECURITY GROUPS</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSUMPTION</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIER - TIME/RESOURCES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIONALIZATION</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARRIER - SELF CONFIDENCE</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPACITY - FINANCIAL RESOURCE</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>DUAL</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPACITY - COMMUNICATION RESOURCE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VALUE SETTING</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>TOPIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONTRARIAN</td>
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<td>DECODIFICATION</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>CAPACITY - MENTAL RESOURCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>CONTAGION - NEGATIVE</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon seeing the results of Table 4.1, for whatever reason, observations during the primary work days of Monday through Friday were recorded the fewest on Thursdays (Day 5 of each week). Similarly, a large number of particular observations classified as
Mediators and Barriers were made rather than an even distribution of other concepts. The table helped me consider whether I was fixated on particular concepts and should remember to open my mind to other concepts, and what the reason(s) may be for so few observations on Thursdays, as well as the possibility that there may be something about me (maybe note taking exhaustion) or something inherent in the environment that was causing a low number of observations. In any case, the use of self-analytical techniques helped mitigate bias with self-corrections and observational refinements.

VERIFICATION OF FINDINGS

Although one may have confidence in their conclusions, Creswell (1997) suggests a researcher should always confer with participants to discover whether these conclusions ring true or whether some aspect seems completely wrong. As stated above, once I had a chance to review notes, I confirmed interpretations of observations with people at the sites.

Despite suggestions that face validity requires direct quotes so as to afford the readers a chance to make their own interpretations, the sensitive nature of some issues such as secrets meant that quotes could not always be used. In many cases, content was too specific to quote because it would identify the speaker or the exact content of a secret, which may be considered proprietary to an organization. Given such constraints on direct quotes, some circumstances required representative statements or summarization about a conversation as a type and context rather than direct quotes.
DATA ANALYSIS

Since this dissertation is principally an exploratory research project, I initially depended on transitive relation during induction (Yin, 2003). Simply, this is the age-old system of reviewing all notes, trying to find any consistencies and patterns in them, and seeking as many unique factors as possible in a constant cycling through notes.

However, as I delved into the data, I found there was too much to make the above technique effective or reasonable. I remembered the goal – basically, to find pattern – so I tried to isolate observations into a spreadsheet, and then tried to categorize the major and minor themes within each observation. The attempt at categorization with a linear and cascading set of macro to micro concepts -- like a hierarchical tree with kingdom, family, etc. -- failed in my view because many concepts could be used at varying levels from macro and micro. For instance, the concept of ambiguity could be at the most macro level, encompassing a broad range of other topics, and then later be at a micro-level concept, as a sub-concept with a long string of other concepts that seemed to encompass it. The degree of complexity was such that I finally felt that complexity itself was illustrative of the story of silence, and this made me think that possibly any variable was a complex thing that had a network of interactions simultaneously dependent, independent, mediating, and moderating. I abandoned the idea of a linear and cascading set of factors and realized that the dynamical system I was actually looking at was an ecosystem of factors where factors played differing roles at different times and did not always need the same level of intensity to make an impact. In fact, these were non-linear and multi-dimensional factors that needed an analysis technique that could handle their variety.
Upon searching for a more robust analysis technique, I found that network analysis was possibly the most helpful tool to sorting and revealing pattern among complex systems. Thus, I used a simple tool – Gephi 0.7 – and Microsoft Excel (for calculating node weights) to visualize the network of relationships and assist with analysis. The relationships were developed by taking four levels of factors based on most-to-least important for any given context, and then recombining all four-level groups into pairs of terms: C1 & C2, C1 & C3… or C2 & C3, C2 & C4, C3 & C4, and so on. In other words, this was a Cartesian product desired to produce the maximum number of potential unique paired relationships. The result of recombination was two major views (see Tables 10-4 and 10-5, Chapter 10): 1) with all nodes related to silence, and 2) because silence was redundant, all nodes minus the silence node. The visualizations assisted in indicating which concepts had greater breadth of relationships and to what. They also provided a way to help identify clusters of concepts that were redundant, imputable concepts (or otherwise framed, “central themes”), and areas where I may have had a particular bias for observation, as well as helped me rethink conclusions.

Conclusions were drawn when sufficient evidence between multiple observances warranted some confidence that a pattern was observed or a unique factor isolated. This process was very much in line with Lindlof (1995), who said researchers cannot approach analysis without any assumptions or prior expectations, but that ethnographers should allow themes to follow from the notes rather than fit preconceived categories.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

An exploratory and qualitative method that may be considered quasi-ethnographic was employed for this dissertation. Because the purpose was to find a spectrum of factors related to silence, a ground-level technique such as a quasi-ethnographic method seemed most appropriate. Following on the traditions of other ethnographic research, I sought to gain entry to sites, develop a research trail, analyze data, and verify observations with people at sites. For analysis, I found that traditional techniques were not effective in revealing the full and very complex ecosystem of factors, and I employed network analysis to assist with revealing pattern.

Sites were visited in a first wave of one two-week visit for seven days a week to each of the two sites (total of four, seven-day weeks), and then a second wave of visits for one week to each site. Notes were typed and hand-written onto a tablet PC, where all files were encrypted with a password. Both sites provided desk space and intranet access to their organizations’ staff communications, and one site provided me with a company email address so that I could see company-wide messages.
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS - GROUND RULES

This chapter explores the impact of factors brought into the observed newsrooms by individual employees: in other words, factors that seemed to be directly related to newsroom members’ behavior, but that were learned habits and knowledge by members before they entered the newsrooms. These data reflect that we would expect people to enter organizations with many experiences that shaped their outlook over previous years of their lives. Such factors are also, as a consequence, so pervasive and potentially common to the normal existence of humans that could, arguably, constitute all the observed factors relating to silence. As such, these basic elements may suggest that there is nothing unique about humans in newsrooms versus humans in other work environments. However, as will be discussed after this chapter, data suggest there were some factors that seemed particularly important to the nature of silence in newsrooms.

We all show up at a new work place with past experience that informs how we perceive and interact with new information. For instance, a person’s experience in a family causes them to develop expectations about hierarchy, power dominance vs. sharing, and how contexts of submission operate. Such expectations may influence that person’s expectations of others outside the family experience (e.g. family systems theory, hierarchical development, etc. (e.g. family systems theory, hierarchical development, etc. Lederer, 1968; Minuchin, 1974; Rio, 2009). In other words, a person develops his or her own culture through life experiences, and this culture is a set of expected (shared) modes for communicating and acting.
One example of this at the visited newsrooms was that everyone spoken with stated or implied that promotion should result in a physical space that was larger than the space they previously held or had some other feature that was qualitatively better, such as a window. People also believed that the individual who received a promotion should have more autonomy, which was connected to an ability to have a say or greater say in organization policy, and that his or her salary should be greater than in the prior position. Such assumptions were independent of a particular organization, department, team, or individual observed (and from anecdotal evidence outside these contexts, equivalent perceptions of promotion appear to be widespread in the U.S.). Therefore, expectations about promotion appeared to be a collection of values that preceded newsroom members’ experiences in a particular organization. In terms of silence, such an assumption impacted communication by imposing a chilling effect whereby some employees in lower hierarchies viewed saying things that displeased superiors as a strategically poor choice: for instance a reporter said, “Don’t tell [editor] … I’d like to think I still have a future here.”

This chapter highlights some key attitudes and assumptions that staff brought with them when they joined the organizations and that appeared to relate with reasons why people maintained silence in newsrooms. I am trying to mitigate the weakness of some research, which seems to take a snapshot of time at a particular place without considering the influence of prior experiences. The results can be conclusions that seem peculiar when, on second look, longstanding social values seemed like rather obvious alternate hypotheses to explain X or Y. By attempting to sift through past, present, and expected (future) histories, isolation of unique factors seemed more feasible and accurate.
The Most Prominent Local Ground Rule: “Northwest Nice”

This factor, “Northwest Nice” or sometimes called “Northwest Ice,” presented itself in the first meeting held at the newsrooms when the person asked without any prompting, “So, what do you think of the ‘Northwest Nice’?”

Newsroom members at both locations explained that people in the Northwest had a historical and cultural habit of being courteous and “nice” to acquaintances and friends and will almost never directly say anything negative. However, despite such outward and friendly expressions people said, for example, that locals will not invite friends or neighbors over to their house, will rarely commit to dinners or weekend gatherings unless the invitation comes the same day or 24-48 hours prior, and, in other ways, seemed to generally hold exceptionally private lives. So, the idea of Northwest nice is that people are seemingly very friendly, but are actually emotionally frigid and withhold honest and open commitment to another person.

One local said she had not heard the term “Northwest Nice” until one day, several years into her marriage to an out-of-towner, when her husband mentioned all the above. She said, “I realized he was right, I really did do all that … I never really noticed it because it seemed like just normal life.”

The way non-locals perceived the social distance was interesting. An interpretation from non-locals was that people felt locals were so egocentric that they were always waiting for something better to come along until the last moment. Another interesting hypothesis was that what was commonly misinterpreted as liberalism and inclusive tolerance in the Northwest was actually the result of no one wanting anyone else telling them what they could or could not do – even to a fault where really severe,
anti-social eccentrics seemed to be left unchecked without any comment. The argument was that ego was so strong that it actually had a seemingly paradoxical effect of appearing like tolerance.

Inside the newsroom, discerning whether there was any impact on silence from Northwest nice was difficult in the context of competing social pressures: for example, many of the people who worked in the newsroom were not locals. Many had grown up and worked for much of their lives in other states and cities. As well, the owners or publishers in some cases were locals by birth, but because of frequent travel, business, and living experience in other states, viewing them as completely local was equally incorrect. Adding to those issues, another competing factor is the business type itself: a communications company in which information has to be shared and people are culturally trained toward telling stories. The Northwest nice was also something that was commonly discussed in personal but not professional contexts. So, Northwest nice might be a seemingly strong cultural foundation tending people toward silence, but there are enough competing cultural orientations inside these newsrooms that data suggests the impact was potentially negligible.

**Geographic Isolation**

One statement, in particular, stuck with me: a person mentioned that the nearest major city was Minneapolis, and that reminded the speaker of just how isolated Seattle was from the rest of America. There are many intriguing aspects about what was said related to that statement, and the following are a few of those: a) Residents of Portland, Boise, etc., might be annoyed to be told they weren’t considered sufficient in scale to be the next major city, b) the assertion demonstrates how arrogant some could be about their
own city, and c) for the explicit purpose of this dissertation, that assertion implied that perceived geographic isolation had an impact on blindness but also bonding among those perceiving themselves as isolated. Considering blindness, e.g. selective perception, and bonding, data suggest that bonding can assist with reinforcing blindness, and ultimately the two lay a foundation for differentiation from other groups. This echoes the common wisdom that Culture X cannot understand Culture Y, nor vice versa, because of their respective outlooks.

**Self-Selection Bias**

Possibly the most important aspect of newsroom culture (and possibly all subcultures), is that the population being researched may not be a perfect representation of all of greater society (Readership Institute, 2000). People who like journalism may be inherently different than people who like electrical engineering. Cultures that may have a consolidation of like-minded people may have a structural barrier that limits the potential range of diverse viewpoints. Logistically, therefore, if a group has a limited range of viewpoints, then the group may be blind to alternative viewpoints – thus, silence.

**Differentiation Part 1: Local vs. Distributed Cultural Origins**

Differentiation is when some factor separates two or more groups from each other if even on a very subtle level. In the newsrooms those who worked within local cultural expectations of interaction were differentiated from those who did not. This type of differentiation is but one version of many, but the key aspect of this factor was that any form of differentiation seemed to relate with silence. However, this is not to suggest that differentiation was only related with silence because differences can lead to productive conversations and the introduction of new ideas. Staff had grown up in New Jersey,
California, Virginia, various regions of Washington state, and other places; gone to journalism school in Missouri, Kansas, New York, Florida, and other places; previously worked in San Francisco, Hawaii, Virginia, Alaska, Kansas, and other locales. However, while “Meet the Staff” bio pages on the various Northwest newspaper websites revealed the above information, it also showed that the largest cultural group comprised those born and raised in the Northwest – at least, that was my impression.

A key cultural aspect to discuss is whether there is a general newsroom culture applicable to all newspapers, or if there are significant local variations – i.e. what has greater impact on organizational behavior: professional or geographic acculturation? Participants in this research often seemed to emphasize their initial training experiences as the source of their understanding about expectations of when to speak and not, what body language invites or rejects, what is insulting and what isn’t, and so forth, rather than the culture they moved to. For example, one reporter came from her first “real job” at another newspaper in another state, and the reporter said the degree of expected inclusion at the current newsroom in the Northwest was almost shocking in contrast with the prior newsroom. Another reporter expressed the following, which was very similar to what a few others had to say:

“Here they want to talk a lot, have meetings to discuss what the group should do, invite each other to go have drinks – it’s like they want everybody to be friends. I’m just not there yet. I don’t know if I want to be friends with everybody. I like coming to work, doing what I need to do, and then go home … In my previous office in [city] we never went out together – I mean, in a way that place was almost too cold and divided between work and home, but in a way, I kind of liked it. I know they want me to be pals here, and I’ve opened up some, but I’m not sure I want to go as far as they want me to go.”
This reporter’s colleagues (when not in listening range) also acknowledged that she had a different style of interacting; they said the reporter was extremely low in her communication, but had been creeping slowly to becoming more open – with limits. Even though the reporter may have been acclimating to the local culture a bit, the reporter and a few other employees said they were actually quieter than they would have otherwise been (without the pressure to be inclusive) as a way to signal to the others that they wanted to be left more alone.

In sum, the above describes why non-local and pre-entry (to these newsrooms) experiences and perceived differentiation between individuals and groups or between groups can influence staff’s willingness to speak. Additionally, such reactions to local culture seems that, as with contagion, if people or groups feel they have enough things to keep quiet about, then they may withhold information about other issues that have nothing to do with their particular concerns. In the extreme, they may become conditioned to not communicating.

**Differentiation Part 2: Security Groups – Bonding and Blindness**

There are, of course, many ways in which people differentiate between each other: race, gender, wealth, class, education, etc. Such aspects of identity and cultural experience are factors that preceded each employee’s entry to these newsrooms. In particular, such issues seemed to cause differentiation that stood out above many other possibilities in my observations. Specifically, such factors seemed related to differentiation because they supported the formation of *security groups*: a collection of members who have a shared confidence/trust in each other (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead,
2001; Tan & Tan, 2000; Various, 2001; Voci, 2006). In research, some researchers seemed to gravitate toward race, for instance, and a sense of security as being synonymous with shared demographic characteristics – i.e. the game where one is asked if “you had to choose” in a given situation between yourself and three people, whom would you trust. However, when observing people at the sites, one had to keep in mind that multiple exposure relationships reveal much more nuanced dynamics that can assist security group formation along just about any perceived shared identity. Several people in the photo departments seemed to feel loyalty to the other photographers, even though they weren’t really friends. Two reporters said they became friends almost as a consequence of being stuck together on a number of projects over ten years. Two other reporters said they had grown to share lots of personal opinions and gossip just because they sat next to each other.

My reasons for identifying security groups as a potentially strong factor relating to silence stems from multiple observations:

- Several years prior to my research, another set of researchers from a university came to one of the sites’ newsrooms to study communication patterns. A staffer said, “It was really funny; these researchers came in actually wearing lab coats, and they said they wanted to study how we communicated. They stood at different points around us and took notes on who we talked to. We thought this was the silliest thing ever, so we intentionally started talking to people we normally never talk to!”

- In terms of internal and external interaction, possibly the most clear example was:
A meeting occurred one morning, and five minutes after the meeting ended, an employee’s spouse called from another organization (different company and different location across town) asking about something discussed in the meeting.

The scenario seemed amazing: the call’s timing meant that the spouse knew when the meeting ended, that the spouse had to have had at least one other connection to the organization, that the original disseminator trusted the spouse well enough to share, and the disseminator had to feel there was a social need or utility to communicate.

- A senior manager whispered into the ear of a subordinate during a staff meeting. Later, the manager said the whisper was about a finance issue that the manager viewed as sensitive to people’s perception of the company’s well-being.

- The employees working at a nearby coffee house said they had a sort of game in which they kept a list of newspaper staff they hated: bad tippers, for instance, and also journalists they felt did not have the best ethics. For example, one waiter overheard a whole conversation about why an article did not go to print because of a conflict of interest. The employees at the coffee shop said they also overheard mundane stories like newspaper staff who talked about how they were waiting to tell management they were retiring. “You’d be amazed at what people talk about while waiting in line to buy coffee,” one coffee-shop employee said.
• Outside of the work environment, some employees talked about frustrations at work and about managers making “erratic” decisions.

Each of the above examples details situations of trust and perceived security and the fluidity of group formation: newsroom staff who did not normally speak with each other and not part of pre-existing security groups formed a temporary bond in order to play a joke on researchers, a security group was established between internal staff and external social group members such as a spouse, hierarchical structure and trust allowed for promotion and was reinforced by managerial needs for discretion, coffee house staff formed workplace bonds and reinforcing bonds through shared games and secret knowledge, and employees developed friendships they may not have formed unless by chance of meeting in the newsroom and forming friendships strong enough to share frustrations about other newsroom staff.

This type of differentiation produced by security groups appeared as a major player in the factors involved with silence. Such a need to form a security group suggests that individuals had been affected by some experience that motivated them to seek a security group, and forming such a group by definition includes some people but excludes other people, which in turn created silence among the excluded. Suffice to say, personal observation from Muron, Mongolia, to Independence, Missouri, people have exhibited a need – or desire – for small group interaction in which to test thoughts or reveal frustrations with a select cohort where they felt safe to say whatever they wanted. For whatever reason and however they are formed, security groups exist and create pockets of conversation that can be inter- and intra-hierarchical.
Furthermore, of all the various ways people differentiate one another and form security groups, data suggest that in the Northwest the topic of class did not come up often in comparison with other regions (note, do not confuse wealth with class – people who perceive and/or are perceived by others as being part of a particular class may or may not actually have wealth – examples are “poor blue blood” or “new money”). When class did come up in conversation, people would only reference attributes of wealth or discuss another’s background in hushed whispers. This seemed to contrast with experiences with media members on the East Coast (New York and DC), who frequently discussed class. While past experiences on the East Coast may have primed observations during this research, and so the topic is merely hinted at because it seemed to stand out noticeably as something not occurring that had occurred in other geographic areas.

**Management as a Continuation of the Promotion Chain Rather than a Separate Category**

Newsroom members mentioned their assumption that promotion within any journalism organization should involve gradually moving from staff to management, and that movement was perceived as a hierarchical and vertical rise (i.e. qualitatively superior). Some perceived that promotion meant greater autonomy but had no desire for being part of management. In these cases, however, such desire was articulated as personal choice, yet it was still understood that ultimately ascension to management seemed like the “natural” progression.

Data suggest that such impressions of promotion expectations from practitioner to manager are not unique to journalism (Harlan, 1989). Whether these newspapers were purveyors of such a social policy or not people entering these organizations held to the
expectation. In relation to silence, the interactive role between promotion expectations and desires for positive and personal image management (i.e. hopes of succession) may result in hesitation or full silence about particular issues.

When asked what the expectations were for promotion, the universal reply was that if one worked hard and moved upward to higher hierarchical levels, then maybe one would become a manager. This assumed that a hierarchy existed and that a practitioner could become a manager. The obvious point with this is that gifted practitioners are not necessarily gifted managers. Both managers and staff noted this point with comments like:

“Hopefully, after working hard as a grunt for upteen billion years, you can become a manager, have more autonomy, make broader decisions, take longer lunches, and travel to conferences where you hear things you don't tell anybody about back at shop. Yeah, I'd like that.”

Or, “Oh, everyone knows a good reporter makes a bad manager, but what else are you going to do with them when they’re old and you need their history?”

The silence-related result was that people could see someone they perceived as a peer now paid more to do a job for which the person might have no talent. The result was that sometimes staff rejected a manager and communicated little as a result. For example:

“We’ve had many managing editors before this one, and two before the guy was great. He had a good sense of humor, knew how to work the personalities – great. Then came [manager] – he was cold, distant, communicated little, wasn’t a people person, did OK, but was nothing like [prior manager]… They all worked up from reporters to editors to managers.”
While it may seem that jealousy was the speaker’s motive, the main issue appeared to be simply that the skilled practitioner was not good at managerial activities, which caused other workers to alienate the manager. Another consequence seemed to be that managers who were practitioners with a long tenure had so many years of indoctrination to a particular understanding of their news product that they were sometimes not open or perceptually capable of viewing alternatives.

One variation from the classical theme of staying in one organization and rising over one’s entire career was the notion of mobility: a significant portion of the participants seemed to assume that in order to be promoted into higher positions, they needed to physically move to another organization. Such an intersection of factors (mobility and promotion) is not uncommon across industries, but should at least be noted as a contingency in any assessment for several reasons: 1) if people move frequently between and/or continually to different organizations, then their nurtured perception of culture may become more organization independent; 2) identity may become more with an industry than an organization; and 3) expectations of promotion and other cultural features may be expected to be industry wide, rather than organization specific.

The relationship with silence was that managers lacking managerial skill sometimes exhibited striking insecurities that, in part, resulted in silence. In addition, staffs that disrespected unskilled managers seemed loathe to communicate with them, and as with other discussions in this dissertation, cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity led to their own varieties of potential silence (i.e. blindness with homogeneity, or hesitation in heterogeneity).
Ostracism

Fear of ostracism is a basic survival instinct and social conditioning that cannot be ignored (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). Ostracism is not unique to journalism environments, and it must be considered as a basic function of human life. This makes it directly applicable to my research. Newsroom members said things such as, “There are some of us who are targeted. Absolutely, they tell things to some people, but they always leave me out, always … it just makes me furious, those girls just can’t let it go.”

Considering that ostracism has a long research stream behind it, ostracism has been observed many times in many different contexts, and was observed during this research, perhaps it is data suggest that ostracism may play a role in newsrooms and probably all other types of organizations.

Limitations for Cognitive Capacities Such as Concentration and Evaluation

People can only focus – i.e. maintain a conscious thought about a single thing – for a relatively short period of time. Research into student attention, for instance, suggests that most seem to have general attention for about 15 to 20 minutes, and depending on techniques with sensory changes may be able to extend that to about 45 minutes (A. F. Kramer, Wiegmann, & Kirlik, 2006; Lachter, Forster, & Ruthruff, 2004; K. Wilson & Korn, 2007).

Body language during morning meetings seemed to be full of leg shifting and seat adjusting after about 20-30 minutes, and if someone started saying anything redundant, people seemed to generally try to keep quiet, not necessarily because they agreed, but because they seemed to just want the conversation to stop. For instance, someone may lean over and say, “I wish he’d shut up … it’s the same thing over and over.” These
observations all suggested limits – at least in terms of cognitive capacity – that people
could manage. If people cannot focus on what someone is saying or lose interest in what
someone is saying, they are not hearing. Silence requires a sender and receiver, and if the
receiver isn’t hearing, then silence is occurring.

In terms of limits to evaluation, in journalism the most prominent industry-
specific assumption may revolve around “the reader” or “the viewer” – an imaginary
character that publishers, editors, reporters, photographers, and others seemed to imbue
with all their assumptions of what the average news consumer wanted to purchase in a
news product. Academic researchers have termed this character and assumption of
readers or viewers by a very esoteric and obscure name: the imaginary interlocutor (De
Sola Pool, 1959). While researchers may have claimed that the concept is relatively new,
references to “the people,” “the masses,” “the proletariat,” “my subjects,” etc., have been
written about for thousands of years. Whether one wants to point to research about
stereotyping, memory capacity, scales of social organizations and population sizes, or
millennia of stories from world cultures that focus on groups rather than individuals,
apparently humans find stereotypes useful for understanding and coping with a greater
society around them. All of this suggests that there are current and past limitations on
newsroom members’ cognitive ability for analyzing large population sets, and that they
have employed coping methods. Once someone starts to limit the degree of detail used to
discuss a concept, some aspects of the concept become lost and silenced.

Silence, therefore, may happen when someone stops paying attention or uses
stereotypes that blind speakers to significant nuances.
The Factor of Gender: Men and Women – The Fun We Have With Each Other as 
Same but Different

Male: “Among us boys, let me tell ya…”

Female: “This is girl talk, I think you should find somewhere else to study 
communication.”

Discussion among men and women about men and women appears endless. What 
also appears endless is that the two groups often have different communication patterns.
Short of discussing endless research and thousands of years of lay theory, the key concept 
from this point is that every person spoken with in the newsrooms believed there were 
differences between the sexes.

Where such a factor plays out in silence may seem confined to personal issues, 
but in terms of mission-critical information, there were also times when gender played a 
role. For instance, once a male editor and male reporter spoke to each other about a 
story. During the conversation, the reporter told the editor he could not reveal his 
sources. The two were standing up on one side of a partition wall; on the other side was 
the editor’s desk. A female editor was sitting in the male editor’s seat looking up. She 
suddenly bent her face down to hide it, and she made a kind-of snide, “I can’t believe you 
said that” facial expression. After the two males left, she said, “Oh, wasn’t it obvious 
how sexist he was?!” I thought to myself that I could not in any way see how what they 
had said was sexist; in fact, I had not written any of it down because it seemed so routine 
to me. I asked her to humor my stupidity and explain why it was sexist. She said, “Did 
you notice that their backs were to me and never acknowledged my existence – well, I’m 
the lead editor on the story. I should be included in the discussion. Now they’re off
talking in private, and I have no idea what they are saying.” Later, the editor said that the reporter was talking with him because the reporter had felt a need to elevate an issue due to perceived sensitivities. Secondarily, the reporter felt anxious about having too many “ears” hearing the details. Knowing afterward that she was supposed to be part of the story discussion, perhaps one could understand her perception that the males’ body language seemed exclusionary (but then again, maybe she primed me to perceive potential sexism by simply suggesting that sexism existed).

Moments such as the above demonstrated that my gender orientation could possibly blind me from seeing sexism as the event happened, but it is also important to note that the gender orientation of the participants in my research also affected their perceptions of what happened around them: perhaps the female editor in the above example perceived sexism because of her gender (or just her as an individual). Regardless of what actually caused the resulting interpretation by her, she perceived the communication as gender related. Therefore, gender somehow played a role in the interaction, and possibly the silence that resulted (her withholding speech from the men and/or the secrecy between the men and the female). One may argue that she did communicate by making a face, but she intentionally hid her face and she did not tell anyone about the incident other than me. However, she knew that this research would not share any information with anybody else during research; as a result, the organization never learned about the incident, which may have been mission critical.

**The Factor of Fear**

In a newsroom setting, if a person was afraid of something, common wisdom among newsroom members was that he or she should hide from the thing or use some
technique to neutralize it (such as deception and/or some other pathway toward ultimately eliminating the thing). Truth was not seen as something one should convey to that thing which was feared (unless truth could be used to dispense with the thing, but such a tactic seemed to be a last ditch option – not the first). Every staffer listed “fear” as a first or major component as to why they might be silent. Maybe speakers couched the idea as “a mean boss,” or “people don’t want to lose their jobs,” or “I might not get promoted,” but the root concept seemed to be fear.

Similarly, most theories about silence seem to focus on fear: spiral of silence is about the fear of ostracism, organizational silence emphasizes fear (threat) from competition, and so forth. In the broadest of meanings about fear, it might be perceived as a simple and elementary factor with hundreds of manifestations. Fear is also a general feeling and instinct most people, if not all people, learn before starting employment. Naturally, this fear can affect communication and cause silence.

**The Factor of Futility**

The second thing many people mention as related to silence is futility: “If nothing I do matters, then why say anything at all? The only thing that might happen is the risk of being seen as a troublemaker.” Whether true or myth, the preceding phrase was uttered nearly verbatim by several people at both sites visited. The speaker felt futility and said nothing about an idea they had: therefore, silence appeared to have a relationship with futility.

**Tactical Behavior**

In no way can proactive maneuvers be ruled out as a cause for silence. People predisposed and/or nurtured for competition employ silence to influence others.
However, competition did not appear to be the only reason for these tactics, since pro-social intent came into play as well – not trying to push someone’s buttons, letting something go, etc. People were observed with grins staring at others, sometimes opening their mouths just a little bit before closing them, turning their heads away and raising their eyebrows while shaking their head a little side to side – but all the while keeping their mouths closed. In other cases, people were observed withholding body language and verbal comment until after a meeting, when they mumbled profanity while walking down a hallway and out of sight and hearing by most others. Data suggests that most or all newsroom members had some type of social tactical experience that involved staying silent before they entered employment at these sites. As a result, these people seemed to continue to utilize such tactical behavior in these organizations as well.

*Good ‘Ole Fashioned Propriety*

Propriety is a loaded and powerful concept. It assumes so many factors that it can be hard to define in any given context. In a general way, however, propriety can be considered the embodiment of all the accumulated cultural expectations of when not to act and when to act. While propriety may be nearly impossible to dissect, it was a constant spoken and unspoken force among newsroom staffs. Because of propriety, people had certain default understandings of hierarchy or how to interact in meetings – it was like a Robert’s Rules of Order that people kept with them at all times, and I, the researcher, used every moment to gauge situations. One person said,

“You know, there are the standard *don’ts* in polite conversation: politics, religion, money … Just to let you know about one of the elephants – a while back there was a really heated race, and the Democrat [candidate] won, and when it was announced, everybody started cheering. Later [a manager] basically told us all to shut up because we’re supposed to be
politically neutral. What a load of bull – come-on, we’re in the ‘Soviet of Washington’ for cryin’ out loud.”

While it would be impossible in the scope of this dissertation to outline every detail of propriety in these contexts, it is important to mention them at least in a cursory manner because the concepts seemed important to this research in many settings. Data also suggest that this research on silence is – in part – very much overlapping with many of the ideas about propriety. Obviously, if people perceive that there are rules for when to speak or when not to speak, then by definition, at times they will withhold information – thus, silence.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The factors described in this chapter detailed what data suggest to be pre-employment factors that were directly related with silence. These include local cultural traditions, geographic isolation, self-selection biases, promotional expectations, knowledge of ostracism, cognitive limits to attention and evaluation, gender, fears, futility, and tactical behavior.

While these factors may be deeply important to silence, the factors do not appear to be native to journalism. As the classic joke goes, if you stand across from a children’s playground for five minutes, you will see the panorama of human behaviors displayed

10 “Soviet of Washington” was a statement made by the Postmaster General in 1936 referring to the levels of communist activity spreading across the U.S. (for more info see reference: http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/index.shtml).
with brutal clarity. Data suggest every one of the factors in this chapter could have been witnessed similarly on any playground, or in almost any genre of company.

With these “ground rules” in place, the subsequent chapter will begin to discuss attributes that were specific to the observed newsrooms. For instance, a police band radio is not common ambient noise to be heard in other offices, and rarely ever does one find in other contexts the sight of Pulitzer Prize medals, the smell of newspaper ink, and banter about syntax, swearing, politics, sports and book reviews.
CHAPTER 6: RESULTS - THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Literature on the physical environment (workspaces) has been researched rather extensively (i.e. Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Becker, 1995; Virginia, 2002); however, no research seemed to specifically deal with journalism. As research has suggested, humans do not exist and interact in a shapeless space: we buy and sell houses to a great extent because of appearance and location, we choose to go somewhere based on the weather, and our mood is often reactive to patterns and intensity of light. We shape and are shaped by the physical world. The physical world can be defined in both spatial and temporal terms.

Since the newsrooms visited had spatial and temporal dimensions as well as cultural interpretations of both, certain physical aspects appeared to have direct impacts on silence. For instance, one site spent tens of thousands of dollars on cubicle walls that were as high as a standing person, and within weeks of their construction, members of the newsroom said they took them all down because nobody could communicate with each other effectively. The walls themselves, people said, created observable silences that inhibited or imposed irritating inefficiencies that created silence. Cultural perceptions surrounding space was equally interesting: spaces developed monikers like “the containment facility” for reporting staff, and “the fishbowl” for a main newsroom’s glass walled meeting room. Such terminology seemed to suggest real and psychological differentiation between spaces, and as with other forms of differentiation, once people are separated psychologically, silence may become a factor.
Work space (i.e. the production areas of the newsroom) was not limited to just walls and space names. Weather was another factor. The Northwest is famous for its never-ending grey skies and drizzling rain. Locals and newcomers alike joked about suicide and sometimes felt real depression after three months with only a few “sun breaks” tossed in. In fact, “sun breaks” was such a common term that daily TV newscasts, radio, and newspapers used the term on what seemed a daily basis – i.e. “maybe we’ll get a few sun breaks.” People observed in the newsrooms sometimes saw the sun gently cast shadows inside and they noticeably looked toward windows with excitement similar to what people in other geographic regions might express during a surprise snow fall. People would even sometimes go to the windows, perch on a sill, close their eyes, and face the sun with a subtle grin.

The key relevance of the physical environment to this dissertation is that environment was observed to have direct impact on silence. Depressed people did not speak much, people spatially divided did not communicate much, and neither did people whose time variations during work rotations kept them apart, even if they sat at the same desk.

THE ENVIRONMENTS

VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

First Impression

Playful was my first impression of both sites. In both locations, there were differences in the entryways, halls, carpets, and other spaces, but when I was walking among managers’ and staffs’ desks in the newsroom, there was a nearly universal set of
images: most desks looked messy with papers were strewn out everywhere, there were photographs of family, kids, and pets, and most areas seemed to have some form of comedic relief in desk art. “Desk art” refers to odd cartoon clips stuck to interior cubicle walls and objects such as figurines on desks or stuck on top of cubicle walls, or whole areas where multiple employees hung Christmas ornaments from the ceiling, kept three life-size stuffed animals at a meeting table, and ornate stacked cardboard coffee cup protectors were arranged into tubes that twisted and rose all the way into the ceiling.

The highest density of toys and random playful things seemed always to be in the sports areas. After that, desk art appeared to concentrate around the features reporters (“features” are generally items that are not about daily events, such as cooking or arts reviews). As a function of job role rather than self-initiated, the writers dealing with product reviews such as movies and music had a lot of promotional materials flowing from their areas.

In all, the feeling of playfulness at both locations was strong and reverberated with the nature of everyone’s banter, which was often punchy, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes witty, and sometimes said with wry grins, which seemed to insinuate a kind of insider amazement with a twist of superiority. For example, one might hear a photographer or reporter say something like, “The public is such a bunch of idiots. Seriously, I’ve never met someone who actually voted for that idiot! Who are these people?!"

One comic cartoon on a cube wall showed a reporter peeking out from a desk and a caption that said it was safe again for news reporters to report the truth (the reference was after the second Gulf War in Iraq). There were so many other things: a printout that
had a WWII image of a happy-go-lucky army man with a coffee mug and a headline that read, “How About A Nice Cup of Shut The Fuck Up;” a desk with dozens of Hot Wheels toy cars; and a row of old steel file drawers with over 50 snow globes on top.

At many offices in different industries there were one or two people typecast as eccentrics with lots of odd desk paraphernalia, but, in contrast, nearly everyone at these newsrooms, including managers and senior staff, would have been classified as eccentrics. One particular favorite of the items observed was a miniature grotto of sorts with all kinds of religious icons piled into a small space: a nun toy that had sparks that could shoot out of her mouth, a thumbs-up Jesus, books like “Are You Ready for the Rapture,” a rubber ducky-like tub toy in the shape of the Buddha with a cell phone and a cup of coffee, and many others.

Although these sites for this dissertation were newspapers, one should remember that such desk art should in no way be seen as universal to all media types or locations. Among experiences at TV and radio and particularly at TV stations, desk art often displayed photos of individuals of local and national fame, and often those affiliated with entertainment – i.e. celebrity worship. However, even such a statement should be viewed with caution because local versus national TV have significant variation as well – not to mention magazine shows. Equally, the culture of the Northwest may have also been a factor. To assist future research, the above observation should be noted in that it may not be generalizable to journalism, but might be generalized to subcategories of journalism like newspapers versus news radio.¹¹

¹¹ I did not collect information at TV stations or radio news for this research. However, the reason I, as an observer and analyzer, can form ideas and conceive of hypotheses is because I have past experience from
Desk art was interesting and relevant to my research on silence because it seemed to suggest the nature of intellectual interest, role models, and emotional reward (i.e. reasons for working in the industry), which in turn could help explain individuals’ orientation and group culture. Observations that lead me to the above conclusion were the many (50+) instances of politically oriented cartoons, joking references to truth in mock newspapers, collected paraphernalia like identification badges from political party conferences, and individual awards (plaques, framed letters, etc.) for best stories as deemed by the perceived impact of exposing corruption or otherwise unknown social problems. However, while individuals received awards for a variety of other content, neither company created posters for great arts reviews or science writing. Therefore, my perception of the environment was that cultural identification with journalism for most was social and political as opposed to content such as entertainment.

If one traces all of the above to silence, one should understand the playful cacophony of the observed newsrooms in order to understand why silence in such a context seems antithetical. Most of the journalists seemed extroverted, and even the introverted ones seemed to show their wry wit through desk arts and columns (i.e. a person can communicate and receive feedback to a wide public through many vehicles in excess of verbal speech). People seemed to love ideas, have no compunction about the irreverent, and did not seem shy about sharing their opinions. Later, when discussing which to compare. Such experiences are invaluable as they help to observe what may appear to be out-of-place, and, thus, past experience can inform novel and original observations or biased blindness. In either case, excluding knowledge whether through literature or personal experience is counter to scientific enquiry.
social and verbal behaviors, observations will describe a flip side to such an open and free-thinking image when coupled with an environment in which conservative-minded folks felt reticent to communicate.

**Morning Meeting Rooms (aka “Budget Meetings”)**

For both time and space, nothing seems more iconic than a space designated to morning meetings (aka budget meetings, where “budget” referred to allocation of physical space on the printed page, not to money accounting). At these meetings, reporters, editors, and managers planned the day’s lead stories: articles, photographs, and graphics that were ready to be published and what was important news. They also assessed how much text they would allow for each story, discussed any general administration issues, and discussed logistics if necessary.

One site had a space that could not be termed a room, yet was well defined: it had a long Formica-type table that could sit six people on each side, dry-erase boards with lists of stories, a cardboard tri-fold a couple feet high with clipped-on front pages from competitors’ newspapers, and 20 or so chairs. On one side there were high partition walls, and on the opposing side was a lower, waist-high boundary forming the backside of two manager’s desks. At this site, if one were to stand at virtually any point in the news production area, no partition was higher than seated head height such that one could see almost everyone else in the newsroom – this was also true from the vantage of the meeting area. Across the hall from the news area, however, the advertising and production employees had cubicle/partition walls higher than seated head height. The effect was that from the meeting room, all of news looked open, while 20 feet away was a
wall of cubes that felt like a symbol that a different culture existed on the other side of the hall.

The other site had a meeting room termed the “fishbowl,” in part because all the walls were glass. In the morning one staffer would tape copies of their company’s newspaper front page and main sections to the side facing the main newsroom, which partially blocked the view. A dry-erase board was at one end, and a computer screen at the other, where the online homepage and sections might be shown. Of particular note, the copy of the newspaper that was taped up each morning was a copy pulled from production before it would have gone to the final preparation for the delivery trucks. The fact that the copy was pulled at that stage is very important because sometimes advertising such as stickers or inserts are added in that last stage, meaning that the copies these managers and staff saw and discussed was not the same as what the general public saw. The result, therefore, is that managers and staff may make judgments and base corrective action without actually knowing what to correct or if corrections might cause unintended errors. Similarly to the other site’s budget meeting area, from most areas of the newsroom, the meeting space was viewable.

Of special note, while both sites shared many of the same attributes, one location intentionally showed their front page next to other newspapers in the geographic region, while the other did not on almost any of the days observed. The site that showed competitors often had people state something to the effect of being humble: for instance, several people made comments like, “We are viewed by some employees as a stepping stone to the bigger papers.” In contrast, the other paper, which only showed its own front page, had people who said things like, “We are the best paper in the region, and you have
to go pretty far until you hit a city with something of our caliber.” Others at the same paper said, “You might say some people view us as a link in a promotional chain to national papers like the New York Times.”

What the above scenarios suggested was that while both sites had meeting rooms intentionally designed to offer a sense of symbolic transparency (no walls, or glass walls), the choices of objects shown inside reflected and reinforced cultural beliefs. Some of the visual choices, such as showing or not showing competitors’ products, also began to suggest that silence can have many other layers than just in speech. This logic transfers such thoughts to a number of other possible analyses, such as aspects of the theories of group think and spiral of silence.

*Entryways and Lobbies*

While many facets of the sites were unique to each and not observable by the public, entryways and lobbies were particularly interesting because they gave visitors their first impressions. One site had a rather dark entryway, with guards being the first thing one saw. There were linoleum flooring, counters that felt like they were from the late 1970s to early 1980s, and only a few seats available by the front. Behind the guard desk was a glass merchandise box table with company emblazoned goods and an attendant willing to sign someone up for a subscription. The other site had a large glass, sculptural chandelier, and ceilings maybe 75 feet high. On the whole, it was exceptionally open and felt naturally lit all the way up the escalators, as far as one could see. There was a waiting area with dozens of seats and meeting rooms to the right. To hone the contrast, one entryway felt confined and uninviting, while the other was open, bright, and welcoming.
Despite the difference, both offices utilized some form of cultural propaganda. In one context, after passing the guard area one walked down a curved hallway where to the left was a lower space leading toward an auditorium where there was a series of huge posters portraying great moments in company history: awards for uncovering political scandal, etc. In another context, company slogans were draped from the ceiling, stating values of the organization.

Further into the hallways of both facilities, displays of local culture popped out with photos of individuals that often had a comedic spin. One group of staff had photos of all the members and which department they belonged – it looked like a yearbook page but with headshots grouped by department. One or more “class clowns,” had put up pictures of something or someone other than themselves. Below one photo was the person’s name (note, a male name), but the photo was of a female entertainment celebrity. Another group of staff had a large corkboard dedicated to what type of dog each person might be. In both locations, mock newspaper front pages were taped or pinned to columns or walls with satirical headlines and stories about a former or current employee.

**Photography Department**

The photography department spaces at both sites appeared dark and uninviting. The ceiling lights were turned off, and only computer screens provided a soft and dim glow. Meanwhile every other area had ceiling lights – some were brighter than others, but they were turned on. The photographers said they turned off the lights because “it helped with picture quality. The glare sometimes really gets annoying.” However, the
graphics department could equally argue the same thing, yet they had their ceiling lights on.

The effect of darkness in the photo department was separation between it and the non-photo employees. One non-photo employee responded to my question about why the lights were off in the photo department by saying, “Well, I don’t know, but you know, I really hadn’t thought about the lights.” When photographers spoke about their work habits and environment, they mentioned the following:

- “We really try to stay out of the office as much as possible. If I didn’t need to come in every three days or so to archive my shots, then I probably would never be here unless I had to for staff meetings.”

- After walking around to a back room, a photographer was sitting there who said, “I like to work back here so I’m not bothered by anybody.” (Note, while a reader may suspect the photographer was telling me to go away, the photographer continued to talk and told me all kinds of stories about other photographers: relationships, how they call each other while on the road, history of the department, and perception of changes in the newsroom. Therefore, one may conclude he was more referring to a general desire during normal work conditions.)

- An editor (not-photo) replied to similar questions by saying, “Photo culture is very elusive and egotistical.”

Ultimately, the reasons why the ceiling lights were off may not necessarily be due entirely to aesthetics and the relationship between a dark boundary and silence may be
indirect – there are too many other variables to account for. However, it seems that dark places are usually uninviting and could discourage a person from entering the dark space.

**AUDIO ENVIRONMENT**

The zones for writers and editors dealing with spot news (unplanned and often urgent events like fires or crimes) always had the mild crackle and interspersing voices of police band radios. Similarly, there was usually at least one TV news broadcast with the volume all the way down, but if something interesting popped up, then someone would turn up the volume. Such was true for both environments. The functioning TVs were almost always nearest editors (I mention “functioning” because there were also broken TVs that people did not move away).

There was also a constant background rumble of telephone calls, printers, typing, walking, and passerby banter. Except for Saturday and Sunday mornings at 7 a.m. and the after-hours shifts after 8 p.m., there was rarely a quiet period. In fact, no observation was made when no one was around in the newsroom except on a couple of Sunday mornings, but even then a janitor or logistics person was somewhere, creating just enough of a sound to make the environment feel like a perpetually charged space. By “charged” there was a sense of energy and activity, even if totally unrelated to news. For example, one evening there were no news staff around nor advertising, but two cleaning people were making their way around. They were giggling ever so subtly and yet clearly communicating to each other in whispers while not looking at each other at all. At a certain point when they looked like they were moving from one space to another, I walked up and asked quietly what all the fun was about. One of the cleaners said they had a boss who thought they were lazy and was trying to be sneaky by following them
around the office while hiding behind walls or jumping from cubicle to cubicle. They had noticed the boss for the past 30 minutes trying to hide, and they were having fun playing a game of spot-the-boss by whispering back and forth about where the boss was. Sure enough, they suggested I glance behind a certain place as I stepped away from them, and I noticed there was the hint of a foot beneath a cubicle wall where there was an inch of space between the wall and floor. Such occurrences were what made these offices always feel alive even when the newsroom staffs were not there.

The above details described a general ambient context: police band radios, office equipment, people talking, laughter, whispers, and others. Those sounds did not seem to relate with silence, I think, because they were relatively normal in the context. However, there were exceptions such as a particularly loud typist or situations where talking was heard by a group of people who wanted privacy might ask a group to move away. In particular, there were two other aspects that seemed notable regarding the audio environment: technology and conversation contagion. However, one should keep in mind that all the above noise may have been simultaneously occurring.

**Technology:** Electronic technology often had a hum that could be disturbing. Fluorescent lights beginning to fail made atrocious hums that verged on cricket chirping. People either avoided the irritating sounds, obstinately stuck by them despite an increasing anger they expressed through facial contortions, or turned the source off and found alternatives that reshaped the space. However, while turning off a ceiling light might have temporarily fixed a noise problem, a noisy computer presented a more difficult problem because it was needed for work.
The effect of a frustrating sound seemed to be silence where silence occurred because by definition there was no one around to communicate, or because people were so fixated on the disturbance that they could not seem to think of anything to say, or it made the person act angry, which then made other people avoid the angry person. This was a subtle aspect of silence, but it could be important.

**Contagion:** As has been observed before in other contexts (Hatfield, 1998), the mere existence of some speech in these sites’ newsrooms seemed to perpetuate more and more, until a crescendo peaked and came back to a normative level. This was the concept of contagion: conversation, independent of content, seemed to elicit more conversation. In multiple intra-organizational spaces and among both organizations, there were moments when one pair of people started to talk and laugh or have some form of emotion in their speech, and suddenly others, perhaps sensing an open point in time, started bantering as well. The pair that started conversation might be talking about personal life, but this could lead other pairs or groups to talk about a professional issue; the unassociated nature of that content was what seemed to suggest that the contagion for communication was prompted by the vocal noise level alone. Interestingly, the reverse was also true: as one group or pair broke from conversation, the noise level would go down, and one could discernibly hear and see the remaining pair(s) suddenly move in closer to each other or start to whisper until their line of conversation stopped.

This contagion of conversation was related to silence because it worked both to create a social space (allowance) to talk, but also created a social pressure to stop. This can be further seen in comments from a new employee: during a meeting the person noticed (as the person said later) that the room seemed oddly quiet, and he was not sure if
he should speak or if there was something else going on. Essentially, the employee had confusion about his place and sub-currents, so the employee chose to remain silent – i.e. the variables of *ambiguity* and *silence* in the context of contagion.

**SCENT ENVIRONMENT**

Smells and silence seemed conceptually similar to audio and silence because both senses seemed often to cause irritation or contagion. The most common observation was the lunch waft. Sometimes hot soups emanated rich garlic, or microwaved chili delivered a pungent kick of spice into the air. In either scenario, one could see the trail of scent when a succession of noses might twitch and sniffing was heard, followed by raised heads and eyes in the direction of the scent. If a scent was particularly noticeable, usually someone might say something like, “I guess its lunch time!”

Scent is a fairly obvious thing once considered: if something smells horrible, people exclaim and communicate and/or move away; if something smells good, people seem to communicate more and remain in conversational distance. Therefore, smells that may generally be considered irritating may stop conversation because people move away if possible, or some people may temporarily or permanently avoid someone. However, some people found cause from scent, like contagion, to start talking, which did sometimes lead to work conversation unrelated to the good or bad smell.

In a way, smells seemed to be a variable that did not act independently: if people already disliked a person, then offending smells reinforced the agitation and brought about comments like, “Jesus, does he always have to bring the worst stuff for lunch? I swear.” The reason why some people reacted in any particular manner seemed to be their prior interaction, and the smells provided a catalyst for invoking the memories. For
instance, with the statement above, I sensed the person already had a minor agitation with
the person beforehand.

**TACTILE ENVIRONMENT**

While loud, piercing sounds or pungent smells may seem likely to disperse people
or cause them to avoid certain areas, the sense of touch was one of the last things
considered. Basically, unless the ground was not level or one’s hand stuck to left-over
residue from food spillage, touch rarely seemed to stand out. However, newsroom
members seemed very aware of and eager to talk about keyboards and computer mouses,
particularly because there was never a day without some reference or observation that
carpal tunnel was affecting someone. Or people might jest that they were getting carpal
tunnel. The wired, ball-type mouses collected an odd gummy build-up of oils and dirt
that slowly made them stop working. When people tried to remove this scum, they often
acted a little like they were cleaning off excrement.

If a mouse or keyboard felt uncomfortable or was malfunctioning, people would
sometimes comment that their finger(s) went a little numb. Similar complaints also were
raised about a sandy mouse wheel slider or repetitious use of laptop button pointers. The
impact of the touch was just enough to irritate some people, and if enough people had
computers that had poor touch, they seemed to resent their computers and passed on this
impression of low quality to organizational perception – i.e. “The stupid company won’t
spend money on decent equipment.”

The combined concepts of poor quality causing comment about medical pain and
potentially building a sense of negative organizational identity, the impact of such touch
combined factors seemed to move beyond simple organizational perception and into the

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realm of behavioral change. However, it was not all negative. One particular tactile example involved sports putty. The material looked like silly putty except it came in different densities that were harder or easier to pull and knead. One person had this stuff in a small plastic jar and would periodically play with it and leave it out. Often other people walking by would stop and play with the stuff and find something to talk about with its owner. The stuff seemed to have its own contagion effect similar to laughing or yawning, and it was all started by one person who brought the material in for personal use. Even if people did not borrow it or get their own, many people loved to discuss it as they walked by the owner’s desk. Different people were attracted to it for a number of reasons, from wanting to exercise their hands to the desire for touch that seemed like a kinetic distraction they argued helped with stress. Some just seemed to find the twisting and pulling action addictive.

The simple glob of putty suggests another type of factor – the anomaly. Simply because it was a curiosity and something associated with play, people always had a smile in relation to it. Its very existence caused people to want to talk about it, and, as a consequence, led to conversation. Several people discussed serendipity: had they not stopped and talked about it, they would not have relaxed and discussed other topics, which afterwards they said they were glad to have done because they learned something new that seemed like it would have never come up in another context. While play may seem like a cheap trick and or un-intellectual childish diversion and waste to office productivity, the introduction of such objects actually seemed to facilitate interaction and conversation. By contrast a lack of “conversation items” like the putty seemed create a less conversant atmosphere: basically, I rarely saw someone unintentionally stop by a
desk with little or no desk art, but I frequently saw people unintentionally stop at desks where there was desk art.

**TASTE ENVIRONMENT**

No one in this research licked their desktops. However, silence seemed to be an outcome in the context of meals and time of day when eating occurs. For instance, when the food at the sites’ cafeterias was horrible, then instead of people collecting and conversing in a neutral location with people they might not otherwise interact with, they left the office with established small groups or by themselves to get food elsewhere. This factor certainly had geographic limiters, such as distance to other food options, which could prompt more people to bring their lunches rather than eat meals out. In terms of conversing with normally disassociated people, on numerous occasions while waiting for food myself or observing others, people in line would sometimes find themselves standing next to someone they had not seen for a while and would start a conversation. Some of the conversations were banal like talking about the weather, but sometimes people would ask about issues going on in one another’s departments. Such serendipitous conversation was counter-silence. The opposite was silence, as described above, where people seemed to stay with normally associated people or not interact at all.

The sociology of the lunchroom was that if food quality was mediocre then mostly older employees in the 50 plus range appeared to consist of the dominant population who might visit the lunchroom, whereas younger employees appeared to either bring their lunch or leave. Food quality, therefore, seemed to be the main limiting factor, for even though age or distance-to-alternatives could both infer alternative
hypotheses, quality seemed to be the main factor behind whether all ages might accept
greater distances or effort to bring in lunch.

There were at least four confounding factors that seemed to influence a tipping
point for whether someone would leave or bring lunch – economics, diet, location, and
light. Some people nearly always brought lunch because it was cheaper. Some people
wanted to control their diets. Some wanted to get personal time, and lunch outside
provided that distance. Also, since many people worked deep within interior spaces and
possibly because the Northwest is dark for what seems like nine months of the year, some
people seemed attracted to spaces that had large windows on a first and potentially higher
floor (i.e. not in a basement cafeteria).

**Cafeteria Descriptions**: One site had a lunchroom in the basement with hot
catered food. Natural light was limited, and the bulbs were the same overhead florescent
lights elsewhere in the building. To get there, one had to go through minimally lighted
hallways, and there were usually only a few people there. The space also seemed
unattractive to employees who were on the lower salary scales, since the prices were not
cheap.

The other site had a lunchroom on the first floor with large open windows across
one whole side, a full kitchen to prepare food on demand, some kind of food available for
purchase for most of the working day, a sense of design to the seating and food assembly
area, and a wide range of staff with a mix of ages and departments. As well, managers
and staff appeared to use the space for informal and formal meetings throughout the day.

**Food Quality**: While food quality and taste appeared to be a significant factor,
there were so many contingencies from visual factors to socialization appeal that
separating out primary factors was difficult. However, the sole reason food quality seemed to stand out was because that was what people mentioned most as to whether they went or did not go to their respective office’s cafeteria.

To sum up: serendipity seems to be a powerful aspect of communication, and if variables push people away from interacting, then serendipity has fewer chances, and silence may result.

INTERNAL SENSE: COMFORT PERCEPTION

Many aspects of the above were not things that people discussed unless asked. While the senses were generally discussed as sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste, there was also another related concept: comfort. Does one see, hear, touch, smell, or taste a virus or pollution? In many ways we do, but people generally did not discuss these topics in terms of the classic senses; instead they said “I feel ill,” “I feel like a weight is on me,” or “the air feels thick.” In other words, staffs did not speak directly about particular senses but rather in terms of comfort that insinuated a particular sense. However, if there was one type of personal information everyone seemed happy to discuss with anyone else, it was comfort. At meetings, in casual banter, or lunchroom chats, people mentioned upset stomachs, congestion, humidity, burning eyes, stagnant air, dehydration, bloating, soreness, cramping, headaches, dryness, allergies, and other comfort-type terms in relation to their work environments.

While comfort was a frequent topic, in terms of business-critical information flow, the less people were comfortable, the more people appeared focused more on non-work problems than on work. In other words, discomfort seemed to lead to communication about non-work topics and resulted in some silence about work topics.
While such a context where people discussed non-work related issues sounds like serendipity, it did not seem to provide the same positive opportunities for work-related communication that other serendipitous situations did. One suspicion is that if people are uncomfortable and constantly complaining, then they may link discomfort, negative thoughts, and work together: again, a scenario that does not seem conducive to sharing production information.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The essence off all the above is this: if an office has no allowance for personal space expression (e.g. desk art), visually cold and sterile work spaces, disturbing sounds, terrible smells, uncomfortable tools, and poor food options, then people are probably not going to be talkative or have chances for positive serendipity. While the above may seem like common sense, there were subtle and not-so-subtle observations at the sites that indicated that intelligent managers and staff sometimes did not take into consideration some of these aspects when considering communication and organizational behavior: for instance, buying high cubicle walls that were later torn down, not subsidizing quality food, or rationalizing that finances did not permit new purchases to replace faulty equipment. Such examples suggest a lack of common sense in relation to the effect on senses and how they relate to silence.
CHAPTER 7: RESULTS - THE EXTERNAL SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

This chapter discusses those external factors which seemed most related to silence by people inside the newsrooms. To differentiate these observations from those in the Ground Rules chapter, these data are not about general human and logistical factors that affected participants’ behavior independent of context; rather, these data are about factors that seemed to have a direct relationship with news production. For instance, experiences with hierarchy and gender behavior during childhood at home broadly affect people in many professions, while in contrast, monetization problems for the news industry affect primarily the news industry. Monetization, therefore, has a more direct relationship with news production, but not necessarily a greater impact.

*Perceived Shared Experience*

News staff sometimes associated fears with external factors rather than those of a particular organization. In other words, sometimes people did not attribute the fear (or blame fear on) internal dynamics but rather by external. For example, managers and staff said the following made them fearful, “uncomfortable,” or depressed: industry news blogs like Romenesko, mass media comments about the state of newspapers (like jokes in sitcoms about dead newspapers), or other feedback signals, like precipitously falling stock prices. The result was that fear about jobs was felt locally, but often spoken about as a shared experience industry-wide. As a result, several managers said similarly to what one had to say, “We have a finance problem, we have a problem with readership
lifestyle changes, but it isn’t that we’re doing a bad job – the whole industry is facing a monetization change.”

When fear became externalized, blame was rationalized, as one can see in the statement above. Such rationalization appeared to allow for numerous types of silence, such as blindness and ignorance (as a result of blindness). For example, in a meeting with single-copy staff who reported sales from non-subscription purchases like coin boxes, the single-copy staff said on multiple occasions, “These sales changes are entirely reader lifestyle changes – you are doing great, the product looks great, the articles are great – it just comes down to consumer behavior.” Such statements seemed to suggest, at least superficially, that such a speaker was potentially blind to the product appearance and writing quality.

Another effect of the rationalization seemed to be that companies had not purchased recent data on readers, in some cases, for over five years. The lack of purchasing was in part monetary (cost of data), in part frustration with data because no matter what they did they could not see a positive effect, and in part rationalization that data did not change enough that research wouldn’t help them anyway. Further, when they had done reader focus groups they only conducted research with current subscribers (i.e. no discussions with lost readers). In short, the managers did not have good data in order to make valid assessments, and the methods and data they did use were in some cases nearly purposefully designed to give management a false portrait of problems. In some cases executives designed their own studies citing budget constraints, and ended up developing self-confirmatory research designs.
External pressures impacting the newsroom, though, were not always finance based. For instance, a human resources employee said the greater national trends for employee lawsuits meant that “Managers really fear employee complaints [EEO (Equal Employment Office) filings] that are sex [gender] or race in nature.” Such fears, appear to be a catalyst for insular and defensive posturing by managers, and helped reinforce an “us vs. them” generalization. Such defensiveness meant that some managers did not feel free to comment about certain individuals or to confront behavior that, while having no relationship to the gender or race of the individual, needed to be stopped or, on a subtle level, might make the manager hesitate. The human resources employee said there were not examples that could be provided because of obvious legal reasons. I suspect that the external pressures around EEO (i.e. lawsuits and related political correctness theme) may have been heightened because of the economic issues; for instance one manager said, “They really thought after the freeze [pay freeze] that we targeted individuals, but in reality it was a uniform action across staff.” The remainder of the manager’s comment seemed to suggest that the economic pressures heightened many if not all other differentiations.

**MONETIZATION: How to Make Money in the New Environment**

Let’s say that fear was the root, generalizable concept that drove silence in some contexts. Fear is sometimes generalized and undefined – i.e. one cannot point at something tangible – and the fear seems to exist almost exclusiveness because one cannot point to a specific threat, which means the ambiguity is frightening. However, if there was a Maslow’s Pyramid toward self-actualization for organizations, the primary needs for sustenance and safety would probably be the same for organizations as for individual
people. For these organizations there was one singular and overarching topic that
overwhelmed thought, creativity and dozens of rational thought processes – monetization
of the “new journalism.” Monetization included topics such as how to deal with “legacy
equipment” like multi-million dollar printing machines and associated real estate, and
how to actually get people to pay for the online news product. Morning budget meetings,
strategic business planning sessions, and even daily lunch discussions were frequently
fixated on the topic.

For newsroom members monetization meant, on the most basic level, making
money over the Internet. But they knew it was also much more complicated, involving
also the whole scope of profitability including costly assets and production routines.
Managers expressed, for instance,

“Well, we have to figure out how to convert from legacy equipment and
real estate for printing machines and operators, to the online venue. So,
the legacy resources are on a maintenance only funding scheme, while
online is expanding – of course, how do you expand if you have legacy
resources draining your capital for expansion?”

Basically, almost everyone was concerned with how to keep the monies coming in
to support the business while trying to convert from a paper and ink business to digital.
They had lots of capital locked up in hard assets like printers (legacy technology) that
could not just be turned off because even when off they still cost money in loan
repayments. However, as has been discussed in innumerable industry and research
articles and public forums, media companies cannot seem to find a way to charge readers
for online content, and advertisers cannot be charged enough on one website to support
all business needs.
Monetization, as an external force on internal silence, may appear to fit a variation of Spiral of Silence theory because the topic seemed to siphon off so many mental and time resources that it caused other topics to be essentially overwhelmed, and the communications context seemed like a zero-sum scenario. For example, several staff expressed similar sentiments to these, “We used to talk about journalism values, but now all we talk about is the financial budget.” Or, “The 800 pound gorilla is technology. The idea of the journalist is under attack, and it’s never stared straight at. We’ve tried to have these discussions, but they just get shot down.”

While Spiral of Silence suggests that people would feel pressure not to speak about something because a single topic was so pervasive and accepted, these news staffs never felt compelled to be silent for fear of ostracism because the concept of monetization was not a perceived value judgment. To consider alternatives for situational identification, this phenomenon probably should not be classified as a type of groupthink, since no one relinquished responsibility, or the Abilene Paradox, since no one could agree or disagree because no decision was made. In the simplest form, this was silence caused by inadequate resource limitations – a purely logistical effect equivalent to social and capital allocation mentioned earlier.

However, while one might argue that a logistical relationship may exist between the pervasiveness of a single topic of discussion and decreasing levels of topic diversity (i.e. zero sum), this simple explanation does not address potential causation. There were some related discussions that may suggest relationship to causal factors: what did readers want and were willing to pay for (problem confusion, i.e. perhaps the problem wasn’t payment method but rather product characteristics); difficulty understanding whether
readers changed or journalists changed – i.e. “lifestyle changes” stated by a single copy manager (*orientation confusion*); “who will own us,” several employees said during discussions of finances (*hyper-fantasization*); and how to deal with attrition, retention, and recruitment while managers feared the newspaper being a “sinking ship” (*self-confidence/ego adjustment*). The above series of unknowns to newsroom members seemed to enhance their fixation on the monetization topic. However, the above do not satisfactorily account for the full scope of causes manifesting as topic fixation. Rather, there may be broad categories of causes for topic fixation perhaps stated as *threat ambiguity*.

Some examples of comments related to that ambiguity included: “Who will own us,” “We normally move glacially, but lately decisions feel erratic,” “I asked an editor what his feelings were about the future, and he said his sense of certainty went from six months to three months, and really had very hard time thinking about six months to a year.” In terms of why “threat” may be perceived (besides overall financial viability), one person said, “The future doesn’t include drivers and trucks – just online services. That’s a big employee and union population that will feel pain and anger.”

If the above statements are coupled with observations of managers intentionally trying to blind teams from each other and overt statements of confusion about how to deal with legacy equipment and online expansion, then the concepts of threat and ambiguity have a sufficient relationship with each other. Additionally, because threat ambiguity seemed to cause chaotic behavior and fixation, silence resulted selectively from non-monetization related issues: in sum, crisis -> threat ambiguity -> fixation -> silence (selective).
When a manager was asked about what the catalyst or catalysts were for what appeared to be many recent changes, the manager said managers and staff finally had a collective moment when they realized things were not going to get any better. The manager said that as they watched the stock price go down, they originally thought it might just be cyclical, but as the days passed and newspaper stocks kept going down from highs of 70 to 8 or 60 to 14, a kind of shock set in. Ultimately, the manager suggested, when the shock became so huge, everyone had to “forget the monster staring at us” and try to do something. Although the manager mentioned stock prices, managers who oversaw or were involved with *single copy* (sales from curbside machines or coffee shops) mentioned during meetings that sales had gone down and kept going down even when controlling for seasonal averages. In sum, public sentiment suggested by low interest in newspapers’ stock prices, combined with chatter overheard between employees about single copy and subscription, seemed to collectively drive and feed conversation about future employment prospects. Such discussion by some employees was additionally laced with irritation about continued pay freezes and *unfilled seats* (i.e. positions where someone had left, and no replacement had been hired).

I originally sensed a relationship between the shock of lower economic figures (i.e. *threat and fear*) and silence as *groupthink*. However, that hypothesis began to wane when contrasted to another set of managers who faced the same threat and fear, yet reacted with greater information-seeking, introspection, and ease in admitting they were making mistakes.
One group of managers seemed to share a sentiment said by one manager, “I don’t have a problem with admitting ignorance when confronted by something totally new” (this was not a reference to online, but a reference to monetization and transformation). In contrast, a different cohort stated directly, “Managers must be positive and show they are capable leaders so as to give the troops a sense of security.” Staffs affiliated with the “capable leaders” said, “Communication is still all one way, they [managers] don’t seem to want any input upstream.”

Even though shock and awe resulted in two different reactions which may suggest shock-and-awe had no relationship with the two manager groups’ reactions, there could be an alternative interpretation. A key factor between the two groups may be *formal management training*. The managers in the insular group were dominated by people who had become managers by ascension after significant service time, but did not arrive on site with formal management training. In contrast, the more open group had management who attended formal, full-time higher education programs emphasizing management issues. So, the two different groups had two different pre-existing orientations prior to a factor which caused their different cultures to become more pronounced. The shock-and-awe factor appeared to be the factor and catalyst that caused the divergence of cultures toward a kind of hardening. In other words, shock-and-awe did not appear to have a relationship to the exact outcomes, but did appear to have a relationship with the broader concept of cultural hardening. Essentially, this is not a new concept, but rather equivalent to the fight-or-flight theory.

If, as in the example above, managers with greater formal education appeared to exhibit greater self-confidence, calm, and openness, then, possibly, silence may have a
stronger relationship in organizations with managers who have not received formal management training.

**READER FIXATION – USE OF STEREOTYPES**

While the broad range of organizational members appeared to fixate on monetization, a primary concept of monetization discussions was on the imaginary interlocutor (De Sola Pool, 1959) – i.e. a generalized idea of the news reader. For theoretical purposes the imaginary interlocutor was too limiting to be locked down to just a news centric conception of the more encompassing concept of stereotype. That was because observations suggested people used stereotypes for a range of similar rationalizations: for example, staff referring to “the management,” managers speaking about “employees,” or technology staff talking about “users.” However, the particular frequency and intensity of the reader in discourse was a particularly strong force that was singularly important to newsroom members. Imaginings about the reader often discussed the character in terms of “lifestyle choices,” as cited earlier. What blame was placed on the staffs’ present woes (i.e. monetization) seemed to be aimed at reader lifestyles that were not conducive to paper as a physical object – the act of receiving, ability to ingest information on-the-go, rushed work environments, etc.

This aspect seemed to blind managers and staff from re-conceptualizing what their product could be or even that their journalistic product – separate from the physical paper based form – may be totally useless. In short, the use of a stereotyped and singular concept of the “reader” seemed to be a kind of encompassing character on which people could focus their anger. This point was not explicitly articulated by the newsroom members; the evidence is that no observation was made where one person said they
needed to reconceive what a journalist was and what they produce. What was heard was, “the idea of the journalist is under attack” – a defensive statement, not a contemplative assessment that the current concept of the journalist might be in need of evolution. Also in the context were observations of the term “the reader” evoked every day; for instance, one groups’ favorite reference to the reader was that, “as we learned before, placement on the homepage or subsections sometimes doesn’t matter. If it is weird and interesting they will find it.” Another speaker responded, “So, is death from horse sex still the number one article?!” Laughter. Other speakers said things like, “We know the reader. We speak with people on the street. We interview politicians, policemen, and sources. So, it’s not like we don’t have a feedback system to hear what the reader wants.” In another context a designated person would review reader calls and complaints, and after summarizing recent calls, one of the members said, “Same old, same old.”

In sum, fixation in general – whether about monetization or the reader – seems to distract newsroom members (i.e. cause blindness) from looking at a larger ecosystem of issues or reconsidering their whole organizational schema. Data suggest if conversation could be engineered to remove icons of ill-will (i.e. the reader), or at least moderate the use of stereotypes, planning discussions could be much more revealing and silence may be reduced.

**EXITLESS CONTEXTS: WHEN THERE IS NOWHERE ELSE TO GO**

Imagine for a moment that you are in a town where only one newspaper remains, all your family are nearby, your spouse has an enjoyable job, your kids are in school, and you have spent the entirety of your working career in journalism with maybe 10 years left until potential retirement. Basically, there are no other places to work in your field, and
career change so late in the game seems frightening. One person mentioned all the above, and continued by saying, “…punch the clock, keep your trap shut, and hope you make it to the end before this place collapses.”

The feeling of being boxed into a context – of having no exit – was not something exclusive to those with greater tenure. While younger staffs were more willing to accept the idea of moving, this exitless sensation was uttered by all groups. For younger employees, the problem seemed more to stem from a perception that the entire journalism business was going down in flames and that only a few organizations would be left. In some cases, the words “Worth working for” were added, as several young journalists seemed to feel that “community papers did not have enough prestige” to warrant their college journalism degrees and education loans. Simultaneously, there were rumors, facts, and folk tales being discussed that in no subtle way made the fears seem very real: other papers had in fact closed, and one or two people had found jobs at nearby papers, but some people said many former coworkers who were laid off or left willingly during hiring and pay freezes had left the industry to work in PR or to entirely different industries.

The above set of “no alternatives” perceptions was able to make some participants silent – quite literally – as was expressed in the above quote “punch the clock, keep your trap shut.” Such newsroom members seemed to avoid conflicts and would not propose anything new nor offer observation during meetings or even casually one-on-one. However, such reactions to exitless contexts were not universal among the newsroom members, as will be discussed next.
SAFETY IN A SINKING SHIP: The Flip Side to Exitless Situations

Although many worried that they would lose their jobs, there was also a secondary impact from the perception that newspapers were failing and staffs were declining locally: a seemingly paradoxical perception of greater job security. Two people in two different groups said almost the same thing: “Well, you know, somebody has to do journalism in society. It can’t disappear, and I’m now one of the few left. So, now the company needs me. So, my feelings about job security are actually pretty good – who else is going to join a sinking ship?”

While some people’s personal role may have shifted to something less desirable, pay may have been frozen, and job satisfaction may have decreased, some still felt a degree of certainty about their position status. Such comments were in direct contrast to some literature that suggested role changes and industry uncertainty result in lower job security sentiment (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Some staff said that threat and fear was no longer a viable tactic for managers and the context actually empowered them to take a more vocal role in the organization: “Since we’re one of the few now … now they have to listen to me!”

I suspect that laced within such statements above are concepts of ownership, autonomy, responsibility, empowerment, confidence, self-consciousness, pressure, creativity, entrepreneurship, organizational citizenship, and survival. All of those factors seemed to result in less silence. Therefore, the inverse may also result in more silence, as suggested in the previous section. However, the exercise of discussing this peculiar effect of less silence potentially reveals factors more responsible for increasing or decreasing silence. In the previous section fear and collective depression may have
seemed like the core factors, but perhaps a lack of perceived ownership or autonomy had more to do with staffs’ perceptions than they seemed to believe.

**Over-Qualification**

One manager said that a couple of unanticipated effects resulted from the sinking ship phenomena because over-qualified people had in some cases become a majority: the result either created silence if tensions/egos ran high enough or increased communication if everyone felt like peers. The manager said that in the context of smaller newspapers failing the unemployed young staff seemed to move to other cities or change industries, but more senior staff suddenly found themselves unemployed and felt caught in a weak position to change careers. The remaining news companies who hired because of normal attrition, found themselves looking at those senior staffers’ resumes and hiring them. The result was that in some scenarios tensions ran high and egos confrontational because, as the manager said, “They had all been equal to each other and equal with us [management]” in terms of experience and stature. The manager added that communication can either go quiet or unyieldingly argumentative.

I suspect this period of over-qualified staffing is a function of the industry conversion process and not necessarily an enduring factor. With attrition and retirement, then this factor should fade making it less of an enduring factor for silence in newsrooms. However, the next time the news industry (and possibly others) faces a period of consolidation then this dynamic should be considered.
EXTERNAL INDUSTRY NEWS SOURCES AND COLLECTIVE DEPRESSION:

THE ROMENESKO FACTOR

When asking newsroom members where they sought news on the newspaper industry, members said they read the Romenesko email service, a popular blog for journalists. Journals such as *Columbia Journalism Review* or *Editor & Publisher* were often left languishing in mail boxes and on coffee tables, and most people said they had not looked at industry magazines for a long time. One person said, “Industry mags? Hmm. I can’t remember the last time I looked at one. I learn about our business and competition from reading other newspapers.”

However, one of the more entertaining discussions was about management’s perspectives on the Romenesko news service and their own organization’s morale. Romenesko was described by some managers as having a significant and negative impact on company morale. In particular, some managers believed that Romenesko was doing more harm than good because they felt it was so constantly negative about the current and future prospects of the industry. They said there was an absolute direct correlation between the amount of negative information piped around by Romenesko and the morale in their local organization and others they visited. In contrast, the same people would also paint their newspapers in heroic terms and argue that their coverage of negative issues about their community had mostly a net positive affect on their community. In other words, their statements seem hypocritical: at once suggesting that qualitatively bad news about them could only be viewed as damaging, but that their company’s qualitatively bad portrayal of their community from political scandal to police abuse, was always for the greater good with positive outcomes. In contrast to managers, staff said,
“[A manager] has such a hang-up about Romenesko because he felt like he was betrayed in an article. Look, we don’t need Romenesko to know our industry is in the shit. All we have to do is look around and see empty chairs, see our pay freeze for years, hiring go to nil, and hear [publisher] bitch about [a contract] that [publisher] uses as some kind of distraction for all [the publisher’s] faults.”

Romenesko had affected some of the managers so much that they felt they could no longer say things publicly among their staff and have found themselves censoring things they would have previously said for fear of being published in Romenesko. One manager said that before email and Romenesko, most dissemination was face-to-face. As email became used for everything, the managers became complacent and comfortable with what they said in email. However, Romenesko returned them to conveying sensitive issues only orally, so there was no written record.

I suspect such silence might be conceptualized as tactical due to fear of uncertainty, since they did not seem to fear what they said, but were afraid of their words in an uncontrolled context. Although the topic of email fear and blogs was nothing new, interviews suggested that among some managers Romenesko pushed them to high, self-monitoring levels. For example several managers mentioned similar one manager’s perspective, “There are many things I just won’t say in email because I don’t want it quotable. I leave those to face-to-face.”

In sum, industry discussion forums like Romenesko may influence silence by making some people hesitant, or may limit communication because of a perceived need to limit it to face-to-face communication (which is hard because time is limited).
EXTERNAL COMMUNITY FEEDBACK - CLOSED LOOP SCENARIOS

Another way communication systems like Romenesko may affect newsrooms was that it represented journalists’ conversation among themselves through an industry forum, and such a conversation makes possible a closed-loop scenario: in other words, if community members are only talking to themselves then no new information is entering the conversation. Some said they only read their and competitors’ products which seemed to reinforce the idea of a closed loop. The combination appeared to be a form of silence as the closed-loop conversation may create myopia. Staff and managers seemed to be unable to find solutions not just for monetization or product development, but also unable to find new products. They discussed reintroducing previously used ideas or combining those that existed. Equally, as mentioned earlier, the single copy teams opined that the news staff were doing great but that the reader was changing, and such comments seemed freeze staffs behavior rather than prompt them to ask the basic question: if the reader is changing then why aren’t we changing to meet readers’ needs? How can one fail and succeed at the same goal simultaneously?

Data suggest that in the mix of the above, some newsroom members took on a sense of ownership of the larger community: “We are [community]” or “We are ambassadors for [community].” Some staff also said they felt an urge to say only nice things, to only bring up big (obvious) issues to fix, or to focus on a few branded topics for stories (i.e. “we write about coffee, planes, computers, rain, trees and outdoor sports”). In short, some saw themselves as ambassadors of their city, and as such would only choose stories that showed the branded image the city wanted to convey. In other words, they were led to self-censorship and rationalized blindness. If some felt strong enough
about being ambassadors for the larger community, then would those same staff also transfer the same self-censorship and blindness to internal operations? Silence at the organizational level was then possible, and given the lack of certain financial and product outcomes, then the above closed-loop contexts were defined one more factor that created some silence at the organization as a whole.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined factors that seemed to have been coming from external sources and related to silence. Factors were in the categories of differentiation (social, spatial, temporal), negativity contagion (public feedback, economic feedback, industry news feedback, and references in other media), generalized representations of readers, and divergent reactions to perceived collapse.

Anti-silence factors appeared to include reactions to collapse (sinking ship and shock and awe), a, perhaps temporary, scenario with a concentration of older employees with similar skill levels, security groups (as aspect of differentiation), and new technologies allowing for multiple-role individuals (worker, parent, spouse, etc…) to feel comfortable with managing those roles.
CHAPTER 8: RESULTS - THE INTERNAL SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

This chapter will define and contextualize the internal social environment factors that seemed to be newsroom specific. In contrast to the external factors discussed in the previous chapter, these factors appeared to be originating within the internal environment.

*NEO – The First Place to Learn to Keep One’s Mouth Shut*

“NEO” meant New Employee Orientation. The sessions were very interesting because the whole purpose was to orient new employees’ minds to the culture of the organization: for instance, how great it was in history and daily production and how important it was to the community served. In just one of many ego-boosting statements, a trainer said, “We’re really in the same league as the Washington Post and New York Times.”

Once past the propaganda arguing that the organization was great and so are the employees, then the trainers started to help mold individuals into the internal culture of the organization. Activities seemed to reinforce new employees’ places in hierarchy during the act of filling out forms for emergency contact sheets and medical documentation. They were often required to state who their supervisor was: in others words, they were training their memory for their chain-of-command and reinforcing obedience (while the forms have a practical purpose, there are incidental effects such as cultural reinforcement). Similarly, they learned expectations for conformity through such things as dress codes, or to be homogenized with a staff ID number and badge. However,
while events seemed to reinforce homogeneity, new employees gained specific identity in an organizational sub-culture when given equipment or asked about which department one was joining: in other words, they were learning how to differentiate each other.

One should not overstate the impact of orientation or imply that those observed were put through some extreme military or cultist indoctrination. While orientation might be the first or one of few early places to form organizational identity and to learn about what to and not to speak about, these orientations were but one of the many layers of contexts and learning experiences that seemed to codify identity and relationship to the organization.

The orientations were also another place where silence could be encouraged. Because everyone seemed to want to be viewed positively – particularly on their first day or as a relative newcomer – no one wanted to voice negative ideas for fear of being viewed negatively. Such dissenting views might be to contradict the trainer in that the organization might not be the greatest in the area, or to bring up rumors about the financial solvency of the company. While such things may seem obvious as normal propriety that is exactly the point – new employee orientations were contexts were such things were not said. There was the obvious disincentive to state negative things so as to appear happy to colleagues, but like the first-said-first-freeze-phenomenon the

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12 This was when someone in a group discussion makes a statement, and that statement frames the remainder of the conversation. For example, in the Abilene Paradox a person states they want to do something, and everyone else verbally agrees simply because – in part – someone sounded like they wanted a to do a thing, no other alternative seemed better, and, perhaps, no one else wanted to put forth the effort of debating an alternative (i.e. waste time, maybe cause conflict, etc…).
orientation seemed to provide a mental scaffold that limited thought to selective ranges and excluded others, thus possibly blinding employees.

In sum, the environment of NEOs seemed to encourage silence, reinforced what to be silent about, encouraged subordination and obedience that may lead to silence, and engineered blindness as yet another form of silence (one cannot communicate what they do not know or aren’t conscious of).

SOCIAL BARRIERS: STRUCTURAL (TIME & SPACE) AND CULTURAL

Policies and Legal

These two factors were basically prima-facie: policies both organizationally and legally derived require silence about some things. For instance, a supervisor cannot share personal medical information with co-workers without an employee giving permission. However, medical issues are only one of many issues, and other issues are more operationally pertinent in their relationship with silence.

For example, a manager worked for one of the news companies, but handled business aspects of the company and a separate company that shared certain resources. Even though he knew of issues at both locations that may impact the efficiency of one or both, he could not legally tell either location about the issue. There were, of course, conditions where the manager said he could make recommendations about courses of action; however, the mandates were cast and had to be upheld. Several people felt that such legal boundaries created artificial blindness between the groups and were unintended consequences of the original agreements, but as with many things, the pros and cons were hard to divide. Another example dealt with unions: “We [free agents]
know different things [from union employees].” The comment dealt with what types of information managers could share with different contractual types of employees.

Besides the clear aspect that there are legal requirements for silence among select groups, the key aspect for silence in terms of an organizational behavior, is that the policies establish defined groups that then have a conscious boundary from which to differentiate each other. In other words, this is yet another context where “us vs. them” scenarios could manifest and lead to information hoarding by any one group or confusion about what could be spoken about. For example, one employee expressed a sentiment that seemed to be shared by many because of differences in union versus non-union and staff versus management, “We can’t talk about personal, political, legal or union issues. Everything is so interlaced with work that we’re not sure what we can talk about.” In a way, that statement was similar to the idea of the chilling effect due to a law’s overly-broad wording.

Looking at another observation dealing with informal policies, one group of managers was explicitly told by its superior that the managers should be sensitive and know their employees’ personal lives, but the senior also said they should never let employees know about their personal lives. In this scenario, there was mandated silence in one direction, and the informal policy created a social division that perceptually reinforced difference and potentially superiority. At the very least, it introduced the ideas of “employee” and “threat” together which may have created low or no communication about a number of other issues unrelated to the actual directive.

Direct commands were not limited to managers, though; some staff were told to keep quiet when visitors were in budget meetings (and elsewhere). Informal policies also
abounded, such as when one group of managers removed all references to former employees from newsroom columns and walls (i.e. goodbye posters and mock newspapers). Furthermore, as a researcher I was told not to stir the mood or discuss anything about recent layoffs or feelings about departing employees.\textsuperscript{13}

In sum, some legal and informal policies required silence. Some policies were also ambiguous, which seemed to cause a chilling effect on speech even about unrelated matters. Other policies affected differentiation between groups and appeared to cause silence. If enough policies requiring or manifesting silence are implemented, data suggest a culture of silence could be created.

\textbf{Routines that Cause Isolation –Time as Silo}

Daily routines, episodic routines, satellite offices, and rotations: such things are examples of \textit{time as a structural barrier}. They played out in more than just the obvious such as daily routines for reporters and photographers out on assignment (i.e. they are not in the newsroom) or production sequences defining when certain editors and layout artists were or were not in the office. Once time was able to create such a barrier, then groups and individuals could be in a social silo isolated (to a degree) from others.

One key scenario in which timing was related to a silo and resulted in silence was scheduling new employee orientations and training. In part because new employees were so infrequent, training and orientation sessions were arranged maybe once every three to

\textsuperscript{13}Note: while I was not a permanent member of the social space at the newspaper, “outsiders” do play a part in the communication space: i.e. discussing ideas that might not be natively discussed, interjecting personal information that might be gossiped about, acting as a potential threat which inhibits free conversation, etc. As a result, my experience is also part of the newsroom experience.
six months depending on when human resources felt they had enough people to warrant a class. In one circumstance, an employee was waiting for orientation both times I visited – first in September, and later in February. When observations were completed in February, the person still had not received a clearly defined orientation or specific job training. The same employee said colleagues gave a few minutes here and there, but six months into the job, the person still was discovering basic company resources that all could have been covered in a morning session.

The result of such perceived disorganization and lack of communication made the individual feel somewhat isolated and unsure of whom to talk to. The isolation seemed to discourage organizational identification but also seemed to make the employee timid because they were hoping they had not done something they should not or vice versa, but did not know it. The person’s primary fear was being caught not doing something, and thus being blamed despite not having been told what to do. As a result, in addition to factors of isolation and organizational identity, the person had fear and ambiguity to contend with: the employee’s story was not a portrait of a confident person equipped and empowered by the organization to be creative and proactive.

While the above was an example of an individual in a silo, two groups caught in timing silos were the sports and photography departments. Sports, surprisingly, was like an independent mini-paper unto itself with very little identification with the broader newspaper staff. Sports staff had different hours, different social dynamics, different cultural values, and isolated office spaces. In some cases sports staff also seemed to be less worried about the larger newspaper’s financial situations because some seemed to
feel that even if the larger paper died away, there would still be dollars out there for a sports product of some form online or in print. A sports editor said,

“Honestly, this whole paper could die, but we would still find a funding source. No one else can cover all the junior high, high-school and college sports that we do, and people crave our material.” He continued, “Sports is really like a second newspaper being packaged with news.”

Similar the sports staff photographers were on routines that kept them out of the office for the majority of their time, but they made up a peculiar cohort in the organizations because they often covered both sports and news. This meant that while routines may have kept them isolated from life in the office, they had opportunities to interact with and learn from both sports and news departments. The combination of those factors meant that photographers were to some degree in a silo by virtue of being out of the newsroom context, but they may have been more interconnected by hearing about information from a broad range of departments. As a result, photographers seemed isolated only to certain topics. One photographer said, “I have no idea what kind of politics are going on in the office, but honestly I don’t care. I like being out of the office as much as possible.”

As can be seen in these examples, in multiple contexts, the factors of timing, information isolation, and differentiated physical presence appeared to affect silence by keeping people apart and lowering chances for information sharing and serendipity.

**Role focus and Coordination**

Role focus is a basic organizational requirement and logical function: if people are confused and aren’t sure what to communicate, or if they should communicate at all, or if they do not know what they are supposed to be doing, then they may not communicate at
all or only communicate their ambiguity. In other words, a person without a goal cannot
achieve. In this case “goal” may be defined as duty or job description and include a set
of specified tasks required for completion. “Achievement” may be defined as the
completion of a task.

An example is the new employee mentioned earlier who wasn’t told the basic
tenets of operations and had confusion about his role and how he should perform work
and administrative tasks. However, the confusion was not limited to new employees.
Everyone seemed to have some confusion: for instance, an editor and reporter going back
and forth about who was going out to cover a story. One said “I thought he said he could
cover it. Who’s covering it?” In a different context, an editor said,

“Yeah, that went to print. Couldn’t stop it in time. Somebody forgot to
delete the note – somebody thought they checked. It happens. See, we put
these notes to each other during layout, but there’s no good place to put
production notes in this system – the new system is supposed to have
basically stickies so this kind of crap doesn’t happen.”

Ultimately, role ambiguity was a constant source of potential conflict: in some situations
two individuals or groups performed redundant work and were angry at each other, in
another context someone forgot to send a meeting invitation to one person and meeting
participants asked where the person was, etc.

In short, silence seems to have a relationship with the degree of role focus any
given person or group has. In the above examples, data suggest one could also articulate
a central theme of lack of coordination. This is because coordination is required for a
group to have focus, and the act of coordination could be seen as the process of defining
focus. In other words, if there are coordination problems, then there may also be role
focus problems, and both may be seen as signals for identifying whether silence was occurring.

The Unknown and the Ambiguous, and Their Relationship to Fantasy and Fear

In a broad sense, anything unknown is silent because a communicator does not know and therefore is not able to communicate about an unknown thing. The nature of unknown in this section is the way in which people phrased and seemed to think of the ambiguity associated with unknowns.

One group of managers said during the second observation period, “Don’t stir the mood. Since you left, some layoffs occurred. The hiring freeze is still on. Basically, no one is happy right now.” Meanwhile, an employee said, “Hey you’re back – do you know something we don’t?” Another employee asked, “What’s going on? Can you say something?” Some managers expressed ambiguity about what employee’s may do or think, and the above statements were examples that suggested fear was a partial motivator – i.e. suspicious curiosity about my return and perception that a lack of happiness was the current organizational mood.

Then in a related situation a group of managers took down posters about former employees (humorous going-away documents like mock newspapers). A manager said, “We felt that having memorabilia about former employees was a detriment to the mood, so one night we took them all down.” Several employees said similarly, “…Like we don’t have memories?” or “They [the memorabilia] made us laugh - they were happy memories about friends.” Removal of the posters seemed a cynical and perturbing act: 

cynical in that to employees the act seemed like a “pathetic” attempt at image reconstruction, and perturbing because it further reinforced the social separation between
employees and management, adding to a sense of exclusion and paternalism. Equally, the manager’s actions seemed to be a result of fantasizing about employees’ perceptions due to their lack of knowledge (ambiguity) and fear.

Ambiguity also interacted with change fatigue in that people discussed fears of escalation. While fear of escalation may sound like general fear of fantasy and imaginings about what may happen, the nature of speech seemed more to indicate fear/annoyance that an escalation in the number of changes may occur. For example, one person said, “They’re [managers] not giving new products enough time to catch on. We’ve created whole new sections, worked hard on it, gave it our all, and then they can it just because numbers didn’t seem to go up in only a couple months.” Another person said, “At this point, they can’t ask us to do any more work per person. I think we’ve hit peak and gone past. I hope that will sink in.”

To elaborate on the above outcomes as a result of ambiguity, fear and fantasy, the outcomes of cynicism and annoyance seemed dependent on the interplay of repeated exposure (i.e. “change fatigue”) as a mediator. Most people were excited about change if it was for a perceived better future, but the nature of changes had become, in many participants’ minds, so frequent (i.e. “erratic”) that changes were perceived as qualitatively negative actions. In other words, ambiguity, fear and fantasy appeared to be things that could have varied results depending on the perception of change that may be equivalent to the rate of change (i.e. change fatigue leading to negativity).

The above example was in a context that was inter-hierarchical, but intra-hierarchical contexts can, of course, happen, too. For example, there was a particular controversy when a site’s ombudsman published some material about discussions some
people felt were entirely internal matters or should be construed as internal. They said they had not known that such discussion might be for public dissemination through the newspaper and website: in other words, trust breakdowns occurred. One might argue that there was no ambiguity because the threat was known, however the participant’s phrasing was more about whether everyone was in agreement about how to act, i.e. rules of the game: “There’s no way any of us expected [ombudsman] to use what people said in confidence and during office discussions. [Ombudsman] knew better.” So, while the behavior was perceived as a violation of mutually understood rules, now some were cautious because the rules were known but they were not sure all were following the rules: “That whole episode, I think, is over, but there are a few who are still reactive … They [newsroom staff] make a show of shutting up when [ombudsman] walks by.”

In contrast, among a different group of people, ambiguity and unknowns did not seem to have a relationship to fear because mood among the group was not fearful. In this context, active questioning about unknowns and unimpassioned discourse about ambiguity seemed the norm. This observation was based on a collection of impressions: a senior manager was comfortable with posing broad questions about what the paper could do, and subordinate managers asked for suggestions openly because they felt, “If I had the solution I wouldn’t be here because I’d be richer than Murdoch. So what’s the shame in admitting I don’t have a solution when every other paper in America doesn’t have a solution?” As well, in meetings at the same site people seemed generally happy and able to joke without the mood seeming feigned. At a supervisors’ meeting, issues about funding, hiring and administrative actions were all on the agenda, and despite hearing about an executive editor who left with a degree of clamor at another newspaper,
loss of FTE’s (i.e. full-time employees), and no money for interns that year, peoples’ body language was generally relaxed. They were leaning back in their chairs, had unemotional if not bored facial expressions, etc. There was only one person who shook his head and whose face grimaced a bit, but that reaction was during a point that seemed rather banal: a discussion about four mandatory classes for supervisors.

In sum, ambiguity and unknowns when mediated by a negative (fearful) mood seemed to result in extremes of fantasizing and action. As the line goes, fear fed on itself; however, the reaction did not appear linear – rather, like gravity, it seemed squared.

**Managing Morale: Divergent Reactions to Negativism**

The irony regarding some manager’s handling of staff stress and confidence was mirrored by attempts to manage morale: some of the very things managers said they were intentionally doing to bolster morale appeared to be some of the very things staff said demoralized them.

As mentioned in the introduction, one group of managers preferred to release as little information as they could so as not to worry the staff. The managers told their subordinate supervisors to keep what they heard to themselves, and to instruct their staffs keep information to themselves as well. Conversations with several managers suggested several motivators for the tactic; as one manager said, “We are concerned with the mood around here.” And another, “We’re worried about retention and recruitment.”

Invariably, staff said such commands (to keep information secret) made them very nervous because they had little sense of clarity about what was going on in the organization. As well, rather than calm them down, the restricted communication system made many feel upset and fearful about their personal futures because such secretive
measures encouraged fear and distrust. Several participants added that such directives never stopped them from learning about other departments, but the rumors and leaked conversations took differing lengths of time to reach different individuals and groups. While there was an attempt to engineer *structural silence* via authoritarian policy (or loyalty to management), clearly such structural silence was temporary. However, the diffusion lag revealed that information traveled along lines of social trust (i.e. friendships and spouses, security groups, etc.), which represented a secondary barrier to those outside security groups and larger trust networks. As a result, new employees were often victims. Some comments and observations that reinforced this notion included:

- “Management fear exacerbating fear in the office and so they put on airs of positivism and don’t seek information from staff because they think that would infer management doesn’t know what they’re doing and think that would scare staff even more! In reality staff doesn’t get any sense of progress and fear more because they don’t see any change.”

- “This office is an uncoordinated rabble making choices based on hearsay, assumptions and instinct.”

- “Isn’t it bizarre they would tell us to keep information to ourselves – several people are married and work in different sections, others are dating, and many of us have worked here so long that we have no problem walking up and asking what they were just told.”

- “So, [supervisor] shut his door and you guys talked about something, was there anything interesting going on,” I asked. Employee replied, “I can’t say anything - if you want to know ask [supervisor].”
I noticed that editors started to openly discussing what their jobs were paying and what was available at other newspapers.

I also observed that when talking to various people, some were cognizant of changes in other departments, while others only seemed to know about information specific to their own departments/sections/teams. New employees seemed to have the least complete knowledge.

While the above scenarios suggested one potential reaction to negativism among staff, the above contexts were not universal at both sites and at least one key group self-perception factor seemed important to the shape and tenor of managerial handling. One that seemed to be repeatedly evoked in discussions was peoples’ self-perceived relative standing in society: the managers with the restricted communications scheme frequently referred to themselves as having high social cache and similar to national level news companies, while in contrast open groups routinely characterized themselves as underdogs yet being among the better local media.

In sum, looking at the two differing groups, the data suggest that people with a high self-perception of importance seemed to use silence as a tactic out of fear and ambiguity about staff perceptions, while the more humble people seemed to relate with more open and inclusive management styles.

**Missing Contrarian**

One group of managers maintained as a practice to always have one person play the role of “devil’s advocate,” i.e. a contrarian, at each meeting. The requirement of a
contrarian was an organized and rotating role so that people would not label the person as always negative and so that everyone had the experience.

In contrast, another set of managers never seemed to voice desire for such a character, and in some cases explicitly told one, at least in my presence, to keep his mouth closed because that person had “a history” of contrarian comments (see the section on “Assumption, Mental Capacity and Thresholds” for more details). There was both a perceived enjoyment by some that he voiced such contrarian ideas and a view that such comments could reduce group harmony and happiness. Because managers were of the second view, hierarchy trumped the desires of subordinates, and the contrarian was told to stop.

Silence may be encouraged by an anti-contrarian atmosphere. If a group perceives a contrarian or contrarian role as threatening, then the group seems to choose to silence the contrarian. While in the second example one group of managers silenced a person who seemed to naturally take on the contrarian role that does not presume that they would not have accepted a contrarian if they created a designated and rotating role like the other group of managers.

CAPACITY LIMITATIONS

The following are in the vein of thresholds, where limits to cognitive capacity, time and space forced people into what were effectively structural barriers to communication.

_Excessive Inclusion and the First Said First Freeze Phenomenon_

One of the most discussed ironies mentioned during informal discussion in and out of the research environment was a joke about _consensus decision making_. Many
people felt that having a bunch of people all trying to come to a single, absolute agreement about a thing was annoying at best and, in the frame of group-think, a very bad tool for decision making and information sharing. Consensus decision scenarios were observed in numerous contexts at both sites, and in every context someone mentioned that consensus was a false reality: while everyone might nod and go along with a decision, one or more people after the meetings would invariably say they had not agreed with the decisions, but went along in order to move the process forward. Fighting for an alternative, they said, wasn’t worth it from a cost-benefit perspective, either in terms of social relationships, time, or from a personal goal orientation. Comments heard included:

- “There’s too much consensus building.”
- “Fifty percent of the newsroom has the capacity to shoot down an idea, so that’s too many gates … Manager’s say they have an open door policy, but when you try to suggest things, they say to get back into the hierarchy.”
- “Once a person wanted to leave for three days, and HR [Human Resources] asked section colleagues to consult if it was OK. Seriously, come-on, people felt that was going over-board.”

A consequence of many people entering each consensus meeting with a pre-existing negative impression about such meetings was that many seemed to just want the event to be over quickly. As a result, whatever idea was stated first as a solution seemed to generally be the winning idea, and if anybody came up with a competing idea, many in the group seemed to intimate the suggestion of an alternative was irritating, not because the idea might be bad or that alternatives were proxies for conflict (conflict was viewed
as bad), but simply because people were annoyed that a second suggestion meant they
had to resolve the two merely to maintain social graces, as some suggested, and spend
more time to reach consensus. For instance, people grunted, tilted their heads back
briefly, or grimaced a little. In some cases, someone blurted out, “Can we go home
already? Let’s just go with what [employee] said.” The desirability for the first and only
suggestion seemed to be a kind of first said, first freeze phenomena (for instance, “initial
preferences” or “status quo framing” in (Kelly & Karau, 1999; Samuelson & Zeckhauser,
1988)).

One ironic factor with consensus meetings was that while most seemed to loathe
them, managers seemed to default to such meetings for lack of a perceived better
alternative. The main reason managers seemed to perceive consensus meetings as
qualitatively good was because they feared being disliked, so if they could defray
decision-making to the group, then some managers seemed to think they could be
perceived as trying to make everyone happy, not taking sides, and being inclusive and
thus likeable; as one manager said:

“I know people hate them [consensus decisions], but what alternatives are
there? Plus, I don’t have to always look like the bad guy because the group
made the decision – they can all just be unhappy with each other!”

One facet of the consensus meeting and among security groups was the factor of
scale (previously discussed by Bray, Kerr, & Atkin, 1978; Michaelsen, Watson, & Black,
1989). By scale this means the total number of people involved with any given group.
While Michaelson et al and Bray et al suggested there were no significant impacts on
group communication at a group sizes up to about five, data suggest that scale thresholds
may be smaller in news organizations where production efforts are often specific to only
2 or 3 people. The observations of group size were based on watching group interaction where people exited groups that grew larger than 2 or 3, or when people approached a group, seemed to listen before engagement, and turned away from “huddles” when the group was already at 2 or 3.

As a consequence of all of the above, consensus meetings appeared to be a bundle of paradoxes (or ironies) that seemed like a wonderful social tool, yet were actually destructive, bad for intelligent business decisions, and encouraged rather than discouraged silence.¹⁴

**Assumptions, Mental Capacity and Thresholds for Observation**

As part of the class of factors that could fall under a category of *assumptions* (i.e. assumptive values, assumed knowledge, etc.) are those normative procedures, normative skill sets, or normative interpersonal behaviors that one person or group assumed of another person or group.

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¹⁴ Post-research note: following research, I was in a context that revealed possibly a couple new dimensions that I was previously unaware of and may have observed had I been an integrated and employed member of the newsrooms rather than as observer. I will simply say that managers who stick to consensus meetings may be unaware that consensus meetings also can send contradictory implied policies. For instance, a manager of a group may state that one subgroup is responsible for a task, yet the same manager holds meetings that include other subgroups who have no responsibility or authority of the said task but then tell all those present that they must all agree; thus, the other subgroups are given the perception of inclusion and veto authority while simultaneously being told they have no authority to make decisions. Therefore, some managers seem to be unaware that their attempts at being good and harmonious were in fact the very things that were negating harmony – another irony.
For example, most people in a budget meeting knew there was a visitor in the room who was related to a particular story. Most people assumed, observed later, that everyone knew, but, in fact, one person did not. The one person made an opinionated comment about the story and later be chastised for having said what he said. Another person said after the meeting, “Basically we were told that if a visitor is in the room, keep all opinions to yourself and maybe mention them later. I think [employee] was told to always shut the fuck up since [the person] has a history.” In other words, assumption caused silence on the part of all who knew information, and negative reactions to the failure of information to properly disseminate among all persons caused a secondary a reactive policy of silence.

In another scenario, a librarian said that when he started a colleague gave a cursory introduction, which included only a review of computer and online resources for story background or other research. Six months after he started, one person asked him to find some content from the company archive. The librarian asked where the company archive was, and a colleague pointed to a door ten feet away from the librarian’s desk – inside was an entire room filled with stacks of books and documents about company history. The librarian said, “You know what, honestly, for the first six months I thought that door was for a utility closet or something.” Upon being asked if anybody said why they had not explained the feature earlier, he said, “If they said anything, I think they said because it was so rarely used, nobody thought to even mention it … With our online resources - really it is an odd day when you need anything from there.” This scenario suggests that assumption was possibly one cause for prior colleagues never mentioning the room, because the long story of the closet seemed to suggest that the original person
giving the introduction did know about the closet, but that the knowledge was so infrequent and common that the colleague simply never had enough triggers to cause them to mention it.

Another instance was when a reporter did not know for six to seven months after starting that she could adjust her desk to a better height. While observing the employee particularly because the person looked uncomfortable and hunched over, another employee was walking by, looked at the person and said, “Hey, you know that desk rises up. There is a crank right over here and you can adjust it to whatever is comfortable.” “Huh, well look at that,” the employee said, “I never knew.” When asked how long she had worked at the site and she said for over six months, but often she was at one of the satellite offices. Regardless of frequency at the location described above, she had been there many times and no one before had ever thought to mention the adjustment feature. Similar to the first scenario with the librarian, it appeared that a confluence of assumption of knowledge and infrequent use contributed to colleagues’ failure to mention information.

In another typical scenario, one employee would write an email to another, and the other employee would later complain that the email did not contain enough detail. These situations were also influenced by a perception of assumption: for instance, one employee commented that the other did not say something she should have, but the other claimed the content spoken about was obvious and part of a continuing discussion, and therefore that she assumed the other had to have known the missing information. The conversation seemed to devolve into a comment that there was no way one person could have written every definition and every point possible in the email because of time.
Equally because “as professionals” one or the other should have known the thing under
discussion – i.e. one has to assume a level of understanding, or the company would come
to a halt, as everyone is forced to write whole books just to explain a simple email
message – a logistical impossibility.

The above examples described assumption in the form of common information
but also nuanced by the factor of being infrequently used information. The above
scenarios might also be considered problematic for any general condition where
observation does not trigger memory or motivation to communicate information. The
lack of a trigger presents another aspect to assumption: thresholds. Thresholds were
interesting because the above scenarios illustrate that some people were aware of a
solution (i.e. what the door lead to, or how to adjust the desk). However, something
failed in peoples’ minds to observe and/or act to assist a fellow employee – in other
words, a threshold was not achieved to observe at all or to act. There may be other
factors at play here such as propriety, but the point is that there appears to be a
relationship between assumption and threshold.

There is also an intersection between assumption and mental capacity. People can
only do so much investigation and second-guessing before making a decision, and they
do not have enough time in a day to rethink every decision or re-identify every object (i.e.
logistical limitation). As a result, people have to assume some things that may sometimes
lead to folly, like using stereotypes of people to assess personal safety or another person’s
intelligence. The most important stereotype in the newsroom was the use of “the reader”
(or, imaginary interlocutor) described in the preceding chapter on external social factors.
Feedback Volume and Micromanaging

In the vernacular of one staffer, “I don’t want to say anything to her because I just want her off my back for just five freakin’ minutes – God I can’t think!” Continuing the theme of capacity limitations, most of the limitations intimated in the quote above seemed to revolve around structural limitations and cost-benefit decisions. For example, in broad terms, a person can only speak intelligibly so many words in a nine hour day, and during that time when he/she could be speaking, he/she has many other competing needs for their limited time – such a context is where structure (time and tasks) sets limits for one’s capacity to do (communicate) any one thing. In the above quote, the speaker suggested they needed a contiguous period of time without interruption, and had mental capacity limitations whereby the staffer’s brain could only handle so many tasks simultaneously.

Also imbedded in the quote was recognition of a manager’s frequency of communication (feedback volume), which seemed synonymous with the concept of micromanagement. Feedback volume was defined as the total number of communications (either from a single or multiple speakers that can be envisioned as depth or breadth); direct or inferential (means of communication from one person to another). Note that the inferential, being defined as one person being a conduit for another, suggests that two people were required to send a communication to the receiver rather than one: in other words, operationalized research could count the number of persons related to a single communication rather than a single communication. Each communication may carry different weight (defined as importance to the receiver), but for this discussion we shall simply leave it as total communications by the number of cumulative speakers.
Ultimately, Micromanaging seems defined as a threshold of feedback volume to the extent that communication is perceived as invasive and detrimental to a receiver’s ability to complete a given task.

Feedback volume, micromanaging and silence are related when the feedback volume is characterized as micromanaging, and people withhold information from a manager in an attempt to stave off any feedback from the manager.

*Divergent Reactions: An Insular Group Responding to Resource Limits*

The cultural orientations of some managers were revealed by their underlying assumptions about interaction with staff. The tenor may be best encapsulated by the following statement from a senior manager to a subordinate manager, “Be sensitive, know their personal life – but not yours, and the less they know about you the better.” Such a statement established an informal policy of social differentiation that, in-turn, seemed to form the basis of managerial insulation. At times of stress, that insulation seemed to be heightened to the extent that managers not only physically formed a small and isolated group behind closed doors and sat near each other in meetings, but they also opted to exclude staff from decisions and exclude external expertise in finding solutions to internal problems. This group of managers can be defined as being an *insular group*.

For example, the insular group attempted to develop a new product line-up. To understand what products to develop, they tried to teach themselves how to do formal research and proceeded to organize their own focus groups and perform on-the-street interviews. This same group also tried developing new products among themselves during informal think-tank sessions. When asked if they had sought outside research sources, some responded that research from outside companies was excessively
expensive, and they figured that they as journalists really were, in effect, researchers and could directly apply their skills to collecting substantive data sufficient to answer their questions.

When asked whether they looked at academic sources, the general response was that such material was often far too esoteric, untimely, contextually irrelevant, and geographically unbounded to be of any utility. Additionally, over the years they had worked with numerous research companies such as Belden, Scarborough, and Mori, and bought long-term trend data that gave them a sense of confidence about trends in their particular geographic area. They also felt that since they interacted with the public on a daily basis, that they had a good sense of what the public in their area wanted.

The net result of these assumptions and actions meant that these managers were increasingly discussing issues with a smaller group of people: i.e. themselves alone. They were also almost entirely collecting data from existing subscribers who said they wanted to be part of focus groups. Using current subscribers was self-reinforcing as well because such people were already satisfied enough to have purchased their product. Thus, they were not hearing from staff who may have had alternative views nor were they hearing from customers who disliked the product (i.e. the customers they were trying to learn how to lure back).

In terms of silence, their insular rationalization of a financial resource problem was to exclude alternative perspectives, and thus blind themselves to a limited set of alternatives.
An inclusive management team, in contrast, became less insular. The group began actively seeking ideas from staff while at the same time holding regular planning meetings among themselves. They too said that private research firms were excessive in cost and as a result that they would purchase less, not more, despite their own recognition that more information would be useful while planning. However, the striking difference between the two groups was that while the insular group said including staff would indicate managers were incompetent and would lose the trust and confidence of their staff, this inclusive management team said they fully admitted not knowing what to do. Those managers suggested that since every newspaper they knew of was having similar problems, admitting they did not know what to do was not an admission of personal incompetence.

The inclusive group also said that the strategy of inclusion wasn’t something new: it was a conscious choice from the very instant the new managing editor took the helm long before the current perceived “collapse” begun. Managers redesigned the physical layout of the newsroom to be as open as possible, held frequent meetings (at times so many that there was resistance), and developed an intranet blog about morning budget meetings for view and comment from all staff. Furthermore, most managers were intentionally seated in the main floor area as designed during newsroom reconstruction. One manager said they recognized that genius often seems to come from the most unlikely places, and if they were truly concerned with survival, then the more heads thinking of a solution, the better.
**Staff & Capital Allocation**

Even if funds are available to support a certain number of people, a business only so many funds and so many people. As a result, staff had to be assigned to limited hours per day on some given tasks. This only needs mention because the factor of allocation simultaneously suggests factors of *limitation*, along with *capacity*. The limitation is also something to be *managed* (not fixed), and the limitation means an organization chooses one activity over another, and in so doing may have communicated importance and value *about the allocated activity more than the unallocated activity*.

Communication of value (i.e. cultural importance, company emphasis, etc.) and silence have a relationship for two reasons: 1) resource allocation that people disagree with may cause people to believe their opinion is not being considered and thus it is futile to offer any more opinions, and 2) if something isn’t being considered, then it probably isn’t being discussed. For example, one person said,

“Most people think there is real over-emphasis of the [department], and it just pisses me off that we are spending so much on something the produces so little – we could do so much more with that money. Especially when we’re hurting for cash.”

My sense of the remainder of the conversation was that the individual was annoyed that their department and others like it that produced, in the person’s opinion, more commercial value, weren’t being as funded as needed to help the company be profitable, stay in business, and keep people employed.

Interestingly, there is also an aspect of allocation that relates to capacity limitations for individuals: we cannot hear about everything going on everywhere simultaneously, nor can we communicate our actions everywhere, and, therefore, we cannot be cognizant of all the intersections and redundancy among all activities to find
peak work capacity. In other words, we have natural limitations to our ability to communicate, and therefore something will always be unknown at any given time. Similarly an organization cannot allocate people to all potential products, and thus some products are not made. Equally if something cannot be made, it also isn’t being noticed for its impact on the organization, and, thus again, pockets of silence emerge about the things people cannot all know, and they cannot know about how everything would affect them.

More of Some, Less of Others

One of the more intriguing shifts that occurred during research (2007-2008), was that for the first time in some of their careers, employees in both contexts were asked to do more of only a few specific tasks. In the past 10, 15, 20 or more years, people said they had been asked to do more of everything. Doing more meant taking on multiple job roles, expanding their daily production from articles only for print to print and online, or in some cases taking out their own trash because janitorial services were reduced.

This shift seemed to represent an enormous evolution in mentality, even for some of the newest members who had been working for only about one year. When asked why this was occurring now, staff said that it was because many of them had simply hit their peak limitations. Several said similarly to one reporter, “That was the most interesting meeting in months – I think managers finally realized we can’t do any more work. So, for the first time I can remember, they asked [us] to find different things but not more of everything. That’s a major shift.” Another employee said, “Personally, I think they are finally emphasizing quality over quantity. Errors in the paper and online have become so frequent, that they’ve realized they can’t be any more efficient with the editorial staff.
There just aren’t enough eyeballs looking at copy before it goes out. My alternative theory about quality is that the copy editors are getting younger and less experienced – the old folks are checking out and we can’t get quality in.”

Management groups and individuals seemed to recognize all of the above, but several (6 out of 10 managers) added that they were particularly trying to negotiate the problem of transformation from print to online. As a result, some managers said the impression of focusing on a few tasks rather than on diverse tasks was a reflection of the shift away from an equal emphasis on print and online toward a primarily online emphasis.

This factor (more of some, less of others/workload shifting) may be perceived as a form of time shifting because, logistically, performing work is a function of time regardless of the performance. Therefore, “more of some, less of others” could be viewed as either a variable with increasing or decreasing numbers of workload shifts, or it could be represented by the number of time units allocated to particular types of workload.

The primary reason for discussing the above scenarios was that they seemed like an important concept for these transitioning organizations. The impact on silence was not clear. However, it seemed to demonstrate how a shift from a perceived chaotic period to a focused period gave people a temporary sense of positive forward change and a foundation from which to build. Those two senses seemed to allow people a brief moment when they could feel clarity about the future. My sense is that if people feel confidence they are possibly open to new ideas and are less blind and less silent. In other words, data suggest that if people can orient themselves then they can be more creative.
because they know how to identify important things, but if the world is chaotic then they do not have sense of what things are important because everything is both relevant and irrelevant.

**Increasing Interaction and Star Reintegration**

In part because staff reduction at these sites had been continuing more by means of attrition than buy-outs or layoffs, and because paper size and content offerings had been changed and/or cut, staff had been reduced and moved such that people who before never or rarely interacted began to. As one reporter put it, “There are simply not enough bodies in the office … we are now in a phase of staff reduction by attrition, so we only have staff so long as they sit in their seat.” Slowly, the companies were producing the same product with 40 percent or less people than earlier.

The star system, that Argyris in his 1974 research, was dead, according to several people. One reporter put it this way, “See that guy, he used to work features for years, barely had to produce anything, and now he’s back in [spot news] beat. That just shows you that things are changing, and we’re all eating a shit sandwich.” People who had been writing travel stories were now back writing general assignment content, or long-form reporters doing investigative work were asked to suddenly reintegrate with daily production. Another person said, “We only have stars who think they are stars.” Such quotes suggested people recognized they were gaining equality even if it was a result of decreasing statures. Concurrently, as mentioned above, people realized their community was becoming smaller and more compact. The combination of the two seemed to force once remote people to have to coordinate and communicate – in other words, to decrease silence.
However, according to some who claimed to be former “stars,” “The resentment is palpable.” If one perceives they are resented, they also may perceive themselves as unique, exclusive, and isolated. For those who suggested they were stars, whether they could admit it or not, they did seem to keep quiet and hover more in backgrounds – thus, silence increased. Observations of distancing and conversational hesitancy in body language seemed to communicate “don’t talk to me.” Similarly, speech in groups was often hesitant, meaning former stars seemed often to speak in short statements that were basically yes or no replies, but did little to contribute new ideas (i.e. something that could be “shot down”). In other words, they seemed guarded.

I suspect, though, that like many change related activities, change is often not a permanent state, and therefore the stars may finally break down and fully integrate, or simply exit the situation through retirement or position change. Thus, silence may have a temporary role.

**Greater Inter-Hierarchical Interaction**

As discussed earlier, managers in some cases had begun to actively seek ideas from their staff, and that act of engagement seemed to be a net increase of interaction. To suggest the level of interaction was new, one manager said, “These days something interesting is going on. We started pushing awhile back, but now they are pushing us harder than we can move!” The result, at least from a silence and learning perspective, was that whereas prior to recent engagement communication was primarily top-down, now the interaction was more of a conversation, yielding greater two-party awareness and lower communication barriers.
However, from the perspective of another manager, the push to change was still top-down and possibly suggested there was not more interaction. The manager said,

“The nice thing about having no money and people fearing their jobs is that when managers say ‘do,’ they do. The amount of bickering has really gone down, so when we need to act and do something really dramatic, we can actually do and not have to wait. This is particularly true with the unions because they know if we fail, they have no one to pay them dues.”

Staffs who were subordinate to the above manager said, in general, that they felt excluded, however staff who said they felt they could and should communicate were staff considered team leaders but not managers. As one team leader said, “Oh, yes, as leaders in training we go to meetings not available for others, and yes I believe they want to hear our opinion.” While, others in the same team said they felt communication was all “downstream.”

The increased inter-hierarchical interaction and the team-leaders’ comments of feeling included suggested connotations of empowerment as a pretext to becoming more conversant: that might suggest that as empowerment goes up silence goes down and vice versa. However, some said they spoke less because they were too distracted thinking of the next step in the midst of the failing industry (i.e. disengagement being independent of a manager’s dictatorial or inclusive behavior). Such disengaged employees also seemed silent because they said the magnitude of the industry problem was too great, and they would simply work until someone figured it out (but not them). To trace the concept of “disengagement” to a root construct, the idea deferral of authority may be the root because employees referred to some genius or someone else who would solve their local and industry wide problem – i.e. external motifs with perceived higher social status, or in other words, an external locus of control. Therefore, the above groups’ reactions may
have had causes from an external locus of control. However, alternatively if one argues that group profiles are relatively constant (i.e. a mix of individuals with equivalent characteristics) and the only difference was the behavior of the manager assigned to each group, then possibly, all individual variations aside, everything is dependent on managerial behavior.

In sum, while one perspective may suggest increased inter-hierarchical structure yields more communication, competing factors such as disengagement or managerial behavior and nature of interaction, may ultimately cause more silence.

**Reduction of Influences**

In many of the above sections and chapters the nature of silence was literally about individuals speaking or not speaking, but in this section, “Reduction of Influences,” silence is discussed as the result of decreasing people and resulting decreasing diversity of speech. Attrition literally lowered the number of voices that could have been heard. The collective intelligence of the group was diminishing with fewer potential minds being able to work on tasks. In terms of evidence, there were no comments because they weren’t there to speak. Rather there was an aggregate sense that the spectrum of ideas communicated at any given time was lessening.

To put this in perspective with earlier discussed observations, some people said that being the last ones on “the sinking ship” gave them more empowerment and ability to speak. Therefore, the factor of decreasing staff levels have at least two clashing factors: a) increasing silence due to fewer voices, but b) lowering silence due to a perceived increase in empowerment to make impact. One might argue that the two cancel each other out and if we measure silence by the number of unique ideas shared
then the curve may stay flat. However, obviously, if a group is already at some theoretical peak communication threshold, then the mere fact of reducing people then increases silence whether or not the impact is meaningful.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter defined and contextualized the internal social factors that seemed to be newsroom specific. Silence appeared to be related to *fears, policies, temporal and spatial differentiation, ambiguity, assumptions, reduction in force, learned cultural orientation, and organizational and individual resource limitations*. Those factors seemed amplified by individual and group capacity for fantasizing about what other people may do. In contrast, use of *social tools* for creating safety for *contrarian roles, flattening hierarchies, and reduction in force* appeared to be counter-silence factors.
CHAPTER 9: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS – THE ECOSYSTEM OF RELATED FACTORS

In this chapter, the narrative shifts from discussing factors within unique contexts and analyzes silence-related factors by comparing, contrasting, and relating factors between contexts and within a networked ecosystem of factors.

FINDING STORIES IN DATA

The volume of data collected seemed unmanageable. There are numerous techniques discussed in qualitative research handbooks such as iterative scanning, which can translate to re-reading notes a hundred times and hoping major themes can be sensed by one’s eyes and brain, or such methods as categorization similar to that of creating a codebook in content analysis.

Such techniques did not seem to assist in elucidating patterns for this research. The reason is that the human mind in general and my mind in particular can only manage a few independent thoughts and keep them in memory while trying to compare them. This was a big problem in the face of at least 346 unique and direct factor pairings and 18,906 total potential combinations. Similarly, categorization into hierarchies defied all attempts because factors – as a term/concept – repeatedly could be used as a category with many subsets, or vice-versa with the same terms being a subset of another term as a category. Any attempt to create a linear representation failed to help reveal interdependencies because factors were visually too separate. If one factor was sorted to show all grouped contexts, then all other groupings were scattered. Some other tool was needed for exploring the data to find pattern in order to find major and minor themes.
Non-Linear Factors

When reviewing my research notes, data suggested an obvious conclusion that factors were non-linear in how they interacted within an ecosystem of factors: independent and dependent, moderating and mediating, etc. In other words, all factors varied in their characteristics and were never absolutely one factor type or another.

My original plan to assist myself and readers toward understanding factors was a scientific classification scheme like in the biological sciences with kingdom, phylum, and so on. When reading Aristotle’s *The Organon* on methods for categorization, or when reading modern social science papers, there was a sense that life could be categorized with lists of factors starting out broad and down to things small adding nuance, but all the while able to be categorized in linear typologies. With all these data, however, one undeniable reality was that they could not be categorized in a linear way. An example of my dilemma can be seen in relation to the ignorance concept, which first appeared to be a primary and broad concept:

- Scenario:
  - Even though staff did not say they had inhibitions to suggesting things, during meetings they seemed to want an idea brought up by somebody else first and then they used that first suggestion as a starting point to modify the direction or use a counterpoint to their suggestion. It seemed people wanted someone to toss out an idea, then to assess reaction (if it got destroyed or not) as a way to see if their own idea would be destroyed, and would only speak when they felt they had safety in knowing how others would react to their idea.
• Concepts:
  o Silence, Ignorance, Ambiguity, Certainty, Sure Bet/Safety (not a proxy for emotional fear), Fear, Competitiveness, and Futility

• Assessment:
  o In the scenario, the primary factor appeared to be ignorance because more often the people in the contexts seemed to suggest that not knowing what others thought was why they felt ambiguity and why they did not feel a sense of certainty that their idea would be successful. Therefore, ignorance seemed to prompt silence.
  o However, this context demonstrates where linear categorization could be difficult because while one could say that ignorance might be the first factor and others subordinate whether by importance or dependence, the reality was that many other issues could also be described as most important: for instance, fear or competiveness could equally be argued to be primary and the root cause whether or not people could articulate their inner motivations. Attempts at identifying a primary factor and categorizing a linear scheme from most to least important seemed a poor model to fit. Rather, every factor seemed tethered to a network of other variables in different contexts such that no single factor could be articulable as a primary since each was so dependent on others being concurrently extent.
The difficulty of defining constructs and concepts, can further be seen in the factor of “fear.” It was rarely ever spoken as a primary reason for not communicating. Instead, people seemed motivated – or at least said they were motivated – by wholly different issues such as social relationships, loyalty, lack of equipment, not enough time or the right place, etc. Fear only once seemed to be useful as a construct, but the idea of fear could be seen in several other observations. When mapping all factors from most to least inclusive (construct -> concept -> factor), fear appeared in a number of situations and potentially many different hierarchical levels (see Table 10-1). As a result, attempting to create a simple linear hierarchy was not going to work.

**Table 9-1: Instances of Fear**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INT_EXT</th>
<th>CONSTRUCT</th>
<th>CONCEPT LEVEL 1</th>
<th>CONCEPT LEVEL 2</th>
<th>CONCEPT LEVEL 3</th>
<th>CONCEPT LEVEL 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>Fear-Paradox</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Unknown-Fear</td>
<td>Change Fatigue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Unknown-Fear</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Unknown-Fear</td>
<td>Reaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Unknown-Fear</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Business Intelligence</td>
<td>Fantasy-Fear (What Could Happen)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXT</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Contagion-Negative</td>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXT</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier-Cultural</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Contagion-Negative</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Direct Command</td>
<td>Fantasy-Fear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXT</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Fear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 While one may suspect that loyalty, for instance, might be a proxy for fear, the descriptions by many participants were entirely devoid of fear. In some cases, loyalty seemed more like a desire for rules and structure than fear.
Factors acted neither fully independent nor fully dependent. Rather, as a broad statement, all factors were simply more or less mediators, moderators, independent and dependent – much like people taking a lead in some contexts while being passive in others, sometimes creating a connection between two people, or sometimes making an existing relationship between two people weaker. To truly understand a factor was, in a way, to understand the theory of a factor, or, perhaps stated another way, the general applicability of a factor. Maybe fear and futility are like water and salt: they show up in everything but are not what people notice or comment on. Also, with water or salt even if they have more or less volume, is one necessarily primary to a context? Can one really put into a linear hierarchy that salt always goes before water?

As a result of such experience trying to linearly categorize factors, the technique was abandoned. Instead, the use of network visualization and analysis was employed because it was an inherently non-linear approach. Immediately upon re-conceptualizing factors as networked, patterns of association started to reveal key nodes – see Table 9.2. The table displays each of the key factors identified and the number of relationships they had with other factors. This table shows unique relationships: i.e. each term was counted each time it was associated with a unique different concept. Had multiple observations of the same relationship been included, then the totals would have been significantly higher, but this dissertation is qualitative and focused on the discovery of all related factors to silence, not a quantitative measurement of relational strength.
Much of the above discussion suggests a network of factors all equally weighted, none of them being dominantly independent, dependent, moderating or mediating. However, discussion with newsroom members and examination of my own observations suggested there were clearly some factors that could take on stronger identities than others. In a way, it is as though a single idea can take on different roles in any given environment depending on a threshold of importance/primacy in a context. Imagine water as ice, liquid and steam or “fear” as awe, concern and fright.

However, when considering the concept of threshold, a myriad other dimensions came to mind such as density, gravity or longevity. Was a factor incredibly well defined or was it ambiguous? Was a factor so strong in a context that it captivated peoples’ minds”? Was a factor fleeting and acted as a momentary conversational catalyst, or was it an enduring thought shaping behavior over the course of a day and multiple contexts?
To draw on an analogy to the physical sciences, my observations suggested that each factor had numerous dimensions:

- Interconnectivity (number of relationships to other unique factors)
- Gravity (level of definitional complexity, or perhaps phrased: the number of bounded factors that must all be or not be, a word that means a lot of different ideas or one that means few, or, similar to centrality and density in social network theory, an individual factor where density refers to an entire network)
- Dependence (a scale of independence to dependence, or alternatively phrased: a factor’s ability to be reactive (dependent) or proactive (independent); for example, information sharing might be dependent on wall height.)
- Longevity (the time a factor impacts a context)
- Periodicity (the frequency a factor exists – single instance or repeating, and if repeating, then the frequency)
- Directionality (increasing or decreasing effect)
- Density (degree of definitional clarity: this is not the same as gravity, density is how clear and understandable a factor is, while gravity is wholly different by referring to the sum of related ideas)
- Threshold Profile (required number of dimensions and dimensional scale in order to cause an effect or to be affected)

The idea that factors have dimensions is not new: research in the computer sciences, social networks, and particularly semantic analyses have reported findings on the “Dimensions of Meaning” (i.e. Schutze, 1992). As such, these research streams
examining social and linguistic concepts are not divorced streams and there is much utility to incorporating the dimensional viewpoint into social sciences. Secondly, in many ways, the work done on Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 1962) has to a greater extent answered the question of whether dimensionality exists by articulating that thresholds exist among many phenomena.

_Importance of the Threshold Concept:_ There is a very specific reason why threshold is particular to this research and silence research as a whole: several researchers such as Morrison and Milliken (2000) suggested that silence can occur when there is a “climate of silence.” However, as noted in the literature review, none of the researchers proposed how to empirically assess climate. By looking at threshold an empirical assessment can be made. More discussion and a proposal for assessing climate will be provided in the concluding chapter.

_Unique Combinations from Identified Factors_

To perform some rudimentary network analyses, first a list of all the unique concepts was collected that seemed evident from observations. In a second collection, the top four factors that appeared to exist in any particular context were listed and then were unioned with all pairs in a given row.\(^\text{16}\) With the two collections, the list of nodes

\(^{16}\) A union is a set operation that basically means taking four columns of data, and taking each pair of columns such that one is left with two columns representing all the unique two-factor pairings stacked in one long table of crows. This can be done in SQL by appending all distinct, non-null pairs from all four columns into one table with two columns.
from the unique factors list allowed visualization software to show vectors between the
nodes using the second collection of pairings.

Table 9-3: Partial List of Related Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CULTURAL_VALUES</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL_ORGANIZATION</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLICY</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBIGUITY</td>
<td>IGNORANCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECISION_COST_&amp;_BENEFIT</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CULTURAL_VALUES</td>
<td>TIME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COORDINATION</td>
<td>IGNORANCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
<td>TECHNOLOGY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESOURCE</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING_PROCESS</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBIGUITY</td>
<td>UNKNOWN_-_FEAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSUMPTION</td>
<td>IGNORANCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNICATION</td>
<td>RESOURCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FANTASY</td>
<td>SOCIAL_ORGANIZATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIATOR</td>
<td>SCALE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSTRACISM</td>
<td>SOCIAL_ORGANIZATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMBIGUITY</td>
<td>MEDIATOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSUMPTION</td>
<td>BLINDNESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CULTURAL_VALUES</td>
<td>ELEPHANT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGO</td>
<td>SOCIAL_ORGANIZATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERIOR_DESIGN</td>
<td>STRUCTURE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10-3 displays a selection of some paired factors. Each of the pairs represent
factors that were observed to be related to each other and silence. The term “silence”
itself was excluded because it was redundant and would be with every factor and pairing. In order to illustrate the number of associations and the concentration of certain factors in relation to silence, Tables 10-4 and 10-5 display these graphically with nodes and lines of varying width between each factor.
Table 9-4: Network Graphic of All Observed Factors Related to Silence and Their Relationships to Other Factors
Table 9-5: Network Graphic of Observed Factors Related to Silence without the Silence Node
MAIN STORIES FROM NETWORK ANALYSIS

At least 3 clusters seemed to aggregate conceptually: Structure, Ignorance, and Mental Reconciliation Techniques (MRTs). In the lower, right area of Graph 9.5 the word “STRUCTURE” looms large with its yellow node. The size of the node is intended to suggest the number of variables connected to it. The width of the lines represent the number of times two concepts were observed. Below, the clusters are briefly described, and then more in-depth discussion follows with each cluster detailed:

- **Structure** was a prominent concept with definitional similarities to other neighboring nodes: social organization (by definition, an organization has structure) or cultural values, which imply structure on normative activity or, at least, normative expectation of activity.

- The **ignorance** cluster seemed to form because of the connections and repeated relationship with ambiguity, assumption, and blindness. Again, conceptually those terms are all relatively similar because they refer to some aspect of coping with or causing ignorance.

- **MRT** – this cluster seemed a conceptually similar group made up of nodes titled rationalization, stereotypes, fantasy, ego, and decision cost/benefit [analysis]. They are similar because they are things people do or utilize when they are trying to reconcile one or many deficiencies.

**Structure**

Structural types of factors had three major concepts: social, cultural and technological. While social and cultural types might appear redundant, social factors were oriented around social organizational aspects like hierarchy and policies, and
cultural factors were oriented around expressions of identity. For example, American society has a vertical hierarchy (social organization) but also has completely different languages, visual artifacts, and value systems (culture). In other words, social factors were like infrastructure upon which cultural expressions fill and lay (e.g. skeleton and flesh, frame and motif, etc…).

As an observation, it seemed the reason structure had so many relationships was because most people wanted to communicate and express everything they knew in terms of work-related topics. Therefore, often the only reasons why someone would not or could not communicate was if he/she were barred from sharing due to some kind of barrier or limiter. An example of a barrier is a legal restriction from communicating certain information. An example of a limiter is the number of hours in a workday to communicate a discrete amount of information, or physical limits to conveying information.

Differentiating Structure and Ignorance Factors: Structure and ignorance could be confused as being somewhat interchangeable because a structural factor can impose a barrier that stops information sharing, which in turn makes people ignorant of something. In other words, if something is wholly dependent on another, then possibly the two things are actually the same thing. However, while structure may have been a precursor to silence because it led to ignorance that in-turn resulted in silence, ignorance does not depend on structure to exist. Structural factors are those that shape physical or social space, and therefore are not necessarily barriers to all or barriers at all – they simply shape how information disseminates, which may cause ignorance or may assist communication. These could be physical walls that shape human movement, or a social stigma against a class of people which mean they do not hear about particular topics.
**Ignorance**

This cluster of factors comprises ambiguity, nescience, assumption and blindness. An important note about these was that in a first attempt all nescience observations were identified as ignorance, but after review of the network of factors, the four factors of ambiguity, ignorance, assumption and blindness seemed to share a common attribute of ignorance: a state of not knowing something (as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary). The shared concept seemed to aptly describe conditions with some degree of unknowing: ambiguity was an unknown definition, nescience was not knowing of a thing’s existence, assumption was a coping mechanism that accepted a level of not knowing, and blindness was not knowing as a result of limitations on observation. After a review of definitions, “ignorance” seemed best as the genus and “nescience” as a sub-type (specie) that could correctly define those instances where someone was entirely unknowing of a thing.

In terms of relationships beyond the four factors, ambiguity and blindness appeared to be the most related to non-ignorance factors while nescience and assumption seemed more isolated. It seemed logical that blindness had many relationships because a central theme to most structural factors was that they caused blindness. Ambiguity had less but many relationships to non-ignorance factors, and that also seemed logical because so many things can cause confusion – from company policies to individual-based priming that skewed comprehension. In contrast, nescience and assumption were more individual-based factors, and thus had fewer relationships to factors in the ecosystem at an organizational level.

**Mental Reconciliation Techniques (MRTs)**

A collection of factors also seemed to share a common thread of “mental reconciliation techniques.” This grouping title seemed best because no existing term
seemed to define more clearly the conceptual thread. This grouping idea seemed to be a thread through rationalization, stereotypes, fantasy, ego, decision cost/benefit [analysis], and assumption. The definition for this concept was any act that accepted a satisfactory threshold of knowing, or when a person closed off future adjustment to their knowledge by using some self-reinforcing justification for sustaining his/her understanding. For example, if someone said, “The people who call the customer comment [phone] line are all the same,” then that person would be stereotyping customers and might be satisfied with only knowing a limited amount of information about customers. In contrast, a person might assume a certain thing because of lack of resources but accepts that he/she does not know the true answer and leaves open the possibility that a more accurate answer could be had. In a way, MRT’s are when people are closed to new information, while non-MRT’s are instances when people are open to new information.

**Other Clusters**

While the above three clusters were defined to be major groups, this does not mean that other factors were less important. For instance, data suggests that in the future, quantitative tests will show that several of the less interconnected factors explain more about why instances of silence occur. Therefore, while not elaborating on every single factor a second time, for that was the purpose of results chapters 5-8, a few more clusters need explanation or elaboration.

**Mediators**: two factors did not relate unless a third factor (the mediator) was present. In other words, a mediator explained why a relationship existed and could be synonymous with cause (Baron & Kenny, 1986). However, as this dissertation’s research progressed all factors appeared to be networked, which would have meant that everything was a mediator and that the term mediator was redundant – in either
case, an unnecessary term. Nonetheless, the term was retained because in some contexts, silence was directly related with a concept, but in others a concept seemed to be related to silence only in a tertiary way. For example, a person said, “If an office is small [<15] then everyone has to be invited to socials. However, here [>15] you can invite a few and not feel like you insulted everyone else.” The statement suggested that *scale* (number of coworkers) was an important factor in one’s decision to be silent to some, be silent to all, or to be silent to no one. The concept of scale did not moderate the number of people being invited; it was a sort of on/off switch at a perceived threshold. The factor of scale did not seem to cause silence because the cause appeared to be more about a person’s individual perception of cultural expectation, fear of being disliked (mild ostracism), and, possibly, future career potential when faced with job hunting elsewhere and needing recommendations or social networking. Therefore, the factor appeared to mediate – provide an essential link – between silence and other factors like perception, cultural expectations, etc. For this reason, therefore, the term mediator was retained but re-defined it as *factors that provided a relationship between two variables but did not moderate (regulate) the level of the relationship*.

**Coordination:** This factor was a perfect example of how a small node with seemingly few connections may actually be one of the biggest factors when quantitative testing is performed. From my notes and perception, many instances of silence were related to coordination activities because, as a broad statement, coordination is a difficult task. One has to juggle multiple people and their personalities: it requires mutual agreement about a plan or some other motivational force. Circumstances often seemed likely and almost inevitable that something small or big would be missed in communication. In short, coordination seems to be perfect
context for silence because it is difficult and taps into basic logistical problems of role
identity, assumptions, and other factors (see associations in Graph 9.5).

A few factors seemed to stand out in Graph 9.5. Instances of coordination
were the only contexts that included secrecy (the context in which a reporter refused
to tell an editor the name of a source, and then went into a closed office to hide
information from another editor – see Appendix A for the table of contexts). Another
factor associated with coordination was unsaid standards: those instances where one
person believed a process or cultural value was known to all parties. One other key
concept was deviation: those instances where coordination had been established but
someone deviated from the plan.

**MAIN STORIES USING CONTEXTUAL FINDINGS AND NETWORK ANALYSIS**

This section takes the context-oriented observations presented in Chapters 5
(Ground Rules) through 8 (Internal Social Environment) and melds them with
relationships observed during network analysis above. In particular, the below series
of discussions are intended to demonstrate – like a user guide – how to use the
network analysis and contextual discussions in Chapters 5-8 to create a relatively full
portrait that may greatly assist future research and application.

**Shock and Awe**

As earlier discussed, one of the most notable trends at the sites was the
reference to shock and sudden awareness of the need for immediate change. The
precipitous layoffs of hundreds of employees in the Northwest seemed to coincide
with a cultural hardening and dramatization of pre-existing managerial behavior (if
they were open they became more open, and if silent then more so).
Looking back at observations described in the internal social environment and synthesizing them with network analysis, we see that factors related to layoffs were mood, negativism, negative feedback loop, and resources. With those factors in mind, we can review the network (Graph 9.5) and see, for instance, that the factor of “resources” provides secondary relationships with blindness, communication, time, structure, ego and mental resources. Considering that the observation of cultural hardening was discussed specifically in relation to managers, we can then try to find key factors that related with managers from Chapters 5-8. For example, we find in the network that insecurity (ego) was a key feature; so, we can see that layoffs can be related in the fewest degrees of separation to management through resources and ego. Therefore, the contextual observations and network observations combined suggest that layoffs’ effect on an organization might be most related to organizational and individual (managerial) resources and to organizational and individual (managerial) ego. In sum, the interaction of the above action (layoffs), characters (managers and staff) and characters’ factors (resources and ego) were seen to interact with silence.

The above exercise tracing contextual observations through the network observations and using contextual observations to define the nature of interaction showed how the two can be used as tools for identifying issues in an organization or for considering potentially strong relationships for additional study. The following series of discussions describe which factors and relationships appeared to be the most significant findings, but will not elaborate on tracing factors through the context and network observations.

**Online Cultures Fully Arrive**

The threshold for a whole newsroom to transfer to a dominantly online culture appeared to have been reached and was new for these newsrooms. While online
activities were not new for the sites’ members, structural changes to routines, such as shorter rest periods between duty inflection points with briefer but more frequent mental focus intensification, appear to no longer be reserved for web teams. Such routines have expanded to include the entire newsroom. Such a cultural context raises a question of scale and what happens when such habits become pervasive and take over organizational culture and identity. Since this research suggests that increased structural barriers and higher isolation will result in more silence, then online production culture may create new or replacement structural barriers and isolation that may result in silence. However, smaller staffs and a resulting tighter social network, along with camaraderie developed during hardship (i.e. the “sinking ship”), may buffer against structural silence for a period. If we look to the future when small staffs’ new routines become normative culture and when they find a profitable business plan, the structural barriers may play a more powerful role in the absence of hardship camaraderie.

Planning and Product Development Cycle Times

Faster strategic planning times, increased inter-hierarchical information sharing, smaller staffs, and reduction or elimination of the star system appear to be factors that counter silence because each is an instance where people must communicate more or where social barriers reduce and may allow for greater communication. In contrast, reactionary fear of the unknown related to how staff interprets management speech (increased use of strategic silence), use of crisis as a rationalization for dictatorial relationships (increased strategic silence), and Romenesko (increased ignorant silence, e.g. the closed loop) seem to relate with non-communicative silence.
Promotion Culture

One enduring cultural factor that cannot be ignored is the assumption by some that time served and good deeds performed as a practitioner should result in ascension to management. The insecurities evident in managers from such histories were so palpable that their anxieties came out in some of the most ironic and anti-common sense actions. These insecurities, failures and silence seemed to relate with persons whose job role shifted from practitioner to manager – in other words, from someone not concerned with organizational logistics to someone who is concerned with organizational logistics. In terms of a possible proxy or factor with role shift, role shift may vary with levels of formal management education. However, data warn against making the assumption that management education is a major factor because it has often been left isolated from other key features; such factors include time since the education, and the problem of mental orientation after years performing a different job function and individuals’ elasticity in coping with changed routines. As well, one of the key factors to the promotion by ascension scheme is that it is interlaced with hierarchical and cultural value judgments such as “better” or “smarter.” If management and production paths were viewed as equal parties with different but equal (cultural value) skill sets, then the level of silence would not be as high. Differentiation between groups because of perceived expertise and group identification could also create silence, but the irrational and emotional hyperactivity by insecure persons seemed to be the primary contributing factor.

Closed Loop (Closed Feedback Contexts)

I suspect that much of the dynamics of newsroom culture could be similar to that of other industries in terms of silence, except for at least one facet: the news business is almost by definition a closed loop conversation among journalists.
Journalists read other journalists’ work for surveillance of their industry and for their personal lives, and journalists are not a random population. An employee at IBM can read content about IBM in the news written by someone outside of their culture, but these journalists seemed to primarily read about themselves in their own business and often their own product. The result appeared to be that despite the mythos of journalists hearing from “the public,” observations suggest these sites were cultures in insulated environments echoing a mixture between structural and ignorant silence. Given these sites’ seemingly latent reaction to change and the industry as a whole floundering for a revolution in business monetization, data suggest this closed loop conversation may be a factor industry-wide. Such a factor may inhibit companies’ or the industries’ ability to find solutions.

THE SYNTHESIS OF ANALYSIS

Serendipity. In each of the above sections, one singular concept became strikingly obvious: a group of people cannot be forced to communicate; rather they want to communicate, but they need contexts in which to communicate. Structures (cultural, social and physical), ignorance, MRTs, and logistical and resource limitations all prevented or limited chance encounters. Those chance encounters seemed to be the unifying thread because the contexts and native environments suggested that during shock and awe, shifting routines, individual aspirations, or surveillance activities, people did not always know what to say. But once they are in a context with enough interaction and allowance for speech, the critical information would be shared – often by what seemed to be total chance. Therefore, as opportunities for serendipity go up, then silence will reduce and more will be communicated.
Structures like walls, propriety or malfunctioning phones do not actively force people to be quiet; they limit people’s ability to communicate. Ignorance wasn’t about stupidity or the inability to think and communicate; instead ambiguity, ignorance, assumption and blindness limited the chances for conversation and information sharing. Mental Reconciliation Techniques like rationalization, stereotypes, fantasy, ego, decision cost/benefit [analysis], and assumption were responses to biological and temporal limitations in life that reduced chances for engagement with ideas or motivate people to engage and have chance discussions.

All the observations from network analysis reiterated “chance” and “probability.” The context of shock and awe demonstrated how people feel motivated to seek out each other to find a solution. Shifting routines with new cultural adaptations suggested that systems that cause isolation relate to silence; essentially, the systems inhibited people’s ability to interact. In contrast, ground rules, the physical environment, and external and internal social environments all seemed to reverberate a desire by people to communicate and who resented limitations to their speech. Again, the thread seemed to be that people want “chances” to speak.

Some contexts, though, did not fit a serendipity hypothesis. There are clearly some contexts that are almost tautologies: a policy might state that someone cannot speak and, as a result, the person did not speak, and possibly did not want to speak for numerous reasons. Some people may truly fear being fired, so they refrain from certain kinds of speech. However, the contexts where people at the sites wanted to speak and were not forced, but were merely inhibited because of some indifferent barrier or limiter, seemed to be the significant majority of contexts where silence was observed.
The word “chance” seemed to occur so often that when looking at the whole ecosystem of factors, there were large clusters of ideas that assisted or inhibited serendipity.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The re-orientation of my view of the data from linear to non-linear was a new perspective that helped break open unique contexts and revealed how a particular factor played out in multiple contexts. It then helped reveal richer definitions and – in a way – mini-theories about each factor in relation to a whole organization, rather than isolated phenomena.

One of the outcomes of that approach was that finding factors is only part of the problem for research, because the other part was how one might actually operationalize hypotheses and collect data. Particularly important to silence is the problem of organizational climate, and by using data to examine the multi-dimensional understanding of factors, data suggest we can assess climate by looking at the breadth of factors related to silence and their collective threshold, interconnectivity, gravity, dependence, longevity, periodicity, directionality, and density. In other words, if we could develop a periodic table of factors that describe factors and their nature of relating in particular contexts, then a systematic and generalized model could be developed.

The analyses of data lead to a need to use network analysis on a basic level in order to visualize factors and assist with grouping, redundancies, and threads. In particular, structure, ignorance, mental reconciliation techniques, mediators and coordination appeared to be unique clusters made comprehensible by network analysis, but difficult to discover by other means such as permutations of categorization.
I examined the factors in contexts and demonstrated how network analysis, factor definitions, and contexts could be used together to derive potential outcomes and areas for quantitative research. Main stories were examined using network analysis that seemed like particularly strong forces shaping the way silence and silence-related factors were evolving at the sites. Contexts for silence seemed to play out within the shock and awe of financial problems at newspapers, the organization-wide integration of online behaviors, faster cycle-times for product development, the culture of promotion as a result of ascension by practitioners, and a potential closed-loop environment for information sharing within the sites and possibly the industry as a whole.

In conclusion, when stepping back and trying to view the entire ecosystem of factors, the concept of chance seemed to echo so much that most of the factors and relationships relating to silence could be stated as such: when factors encouraging serendipity go up, silence appears to go down, and vice versa.
CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

This chapter will provide a summary, suggest possible use of findings in conjunction with associated research, describe what future research seems necessary, and discuss this study’s research limitations.

In lieu of ubiquitous, simultaneous and perfect communication, silence has been and continues to be an inherent component of life. Thus, we are confronted with a phenomenon we manage rather than solve. Silence is a term that encompasses a broad range of reasons why people do not communicate or fail to communicate; such as, secrecy, ignorance, resource limitations, physical barriers, fear, strategy, policies, and personalities.

Catalysts

Probably the leading motivation for doing this research was to find ways for an organization’s members to communicate mission-critical information to the right person at the right time. My accumulated years of casual observation suggested the analysis of silence was a more fruitful area of concern than trying to find ways of eliciting information: in other words, what shut people up was frequently more important than what made them speak. Equally, time and again people read books on “learning cultures” and “positive speaking,” and used the reading in their contexts to no avail. They never considered a prognosis before trying a cure.

Journalism specific literature that even remotely related to silence was early on discussed within the learning research track: the idea that organizational members can learn and nurture an environment that promotes learning - in other words, information sharing in a constructive manner. Chris Argyris (1974) was particularly interested in such issues, and focused on why members didn’t learn, why they weren’t taught, why
instruction wasn’t communicated despite communicating. In all there were strong threads of investigation into why communication and learning did not happen – in effect, silence.

### The Concept of Silence

Before and concurrent with Argyris (1974), researchers had studied closed communication in the forms of “pedagogy of the oppressed,” “spiral of silence,” or, for instance, “group think”/”Abilene paradox” (Freire, 1970a; Harvey, 1974; Janis, 1982; Noelle-Neumann, 1974). The research taught that people can become acculturated to being subordinate and silent, that a critical mass of a single opinion within a group can crush dissent due to a fear of ostracism, and that, alternatively, people can, without fearing ostracism, fear and yet feel a euphoric desire for inclusion that can inhibit critical thinking and result in non-communication of dissent.

Most important, we learned from early research that non-action can be recorded and can be supported as a cause. While such a conclusion might seem less than illuminating, in doctoral classes or nightly news the idea of showing causality for non-action has seemed disregarded or counter-intuitive. However, often this concept is simple to track and record: for instance, one can witness a person hear about something, observe the receiver discuss with the teller, note the receiver’s verbalized or written conscious strategy to withhold information from another person or group, and then follow the receiver into a space where the receiver does not communicate the information chosen not to share. Each step can be recorded, motivations captured, and outcomes observed. This was done for research on the spiral of silence, this was done in research on Diffusion of Innovations (Rogers, 1962), and it was done for my research.
Past to Present

Past literature was predominately focused on the human aspects of silence and generally oriented toward negative attributes (i.e. pedagogy of the oppressed, spiral of silence, group think/Abilene paradox, organizational silence, etc…). However, the research conducted for this dissertation demonstrated that much of silence is unintentional, not malicious, not exclusively a result of human-to-human interaction, and not necessarily qualitatively bad.

Silence was often found to be unintentional: people could only be cognizant of so many things at any particular time, or because they were focused on a single task, they simply weren’t oriented to recall unrelated information. Many times it was also not malicious: if people were unintentional, they were not malicious. Neither were they malicious when reading social mood and therefore chose to opt for another time or never to communicate. Silence was not always human-to-human: the first and most obvious impacts on silence were the physical layout of the space, external and internal weather, technology, food, office proximity to convenience businesses, and so forth. Silence also did not appear qualitatively bad: in some instances, keeping quiet was a useful and positively perceived social tactic for getting things done.

Factors relating with silence proposed by the earliest research have in several cases dissipated, however silence or selective types of silence still exist. In the past, from both site members’ and Argyris’ (1974) perspectives, some of the social constructions like a star system and demographics seemed to explain an overall silent and competitive culture. The modern context seemed to provide numerous conditions that manifested greater interaction and flattened hierarchies (no star system), yet did not necessarily facilitate greater communication. Therefore, something else must have been happening if previously identified factors were removed, and a silence
effect still occurs. Looking at past to present one can see a number of macro
operational changes to the sites as well as the industry. The old technology of paper
and printing forced its own daily schedule that allowed a fixed beginning and end
over the course of a working day. The online technology of the present shifted the
concept of all-day production to recurring production and the concept of intra-day
updates. Such routines have meant less autonomy, more social interaction due to
coordination demands, and increased communications complexity and difficulty with
video, audio, text, animated graphics, and links, which require coordination and
human interaction. However, while interaction might have gone up, the greater
frequency of production appears to sometimes result in less ability to coordinate,
ponder, or have chance encounters, which results in silence. In sum, the suggestion of
the above is that operational and social dynamics may change over time and
previously identified factors may fade away, but silence still finds a way to have an
effect no matter what the technology and no matter what the culture.

The Research Question, Method and Results

The research question was: What is the nature of silence in newsrooms?

Because the catalyst for this dissertation was curiosity to examine why critical
information is sometimes not communicated to relevant parties in an organization, the
focus was on “silence” that did not convey operational information. The choice to
study this in newsrooms resulted from the newsroom’s particular role in society and
my personal familiarity with the context. The decision to examine the “nature of
silence” was to develop a qualitative base of information from which to serve future
examination rather than focus quantitatively on a narrow set of suspected
relationships.
In chapter three, different ways of perceiving the research question were discussed as a means to examine dimensions of the silence. Participants’ schema were considered with conceptual relationships separate from any past conception from literature. From the vantage of a procedural (i.e., logistical) viewpoint, data were considered for emotional attributes, discussion diverged from the individual dimension to explore the social conceptualization, data were explored for relationships with time and space, and considered the most complete state of silence as being everything that is unknown. The vantages, though, were merely starting points with which to open my perspective to any potential definition and factor relationships that may be observed. The method seemed necessary because if one approached the sites with pre-conceived ideas for what it is, one may blind oneself from observing what members and the environment suggest was one or many definitions of silence. In other words, the various perspectives on the research question were a means to open my approach and method to engaging site members. This was done so that members could define silence on their individual and social terms rather than an external party imposing *a priori* definitions and assumptions of relationship with factors. In the course of studying those dimensions, observations were made to test whether silence differed significantly from communication and, if so, to find all the factors which might relate with silence.

*Methods:* During observations – a first round of two weeks at each location, seven days a week, and then a second round several months later of one week at each location – total observations included 212 unique contexts and 346 unique factor pairs that related to silence. Sites’ managements allowed access to all staff and conversations were held with reporters, editors, managing editors, publishers, research specialist, janitors, cooks, printers, advertising salespeople, human resource
specialists, information technology staff, accountants, and baristas (at nearby coffee shops frequented by newsroom members).

Before entering the sites managers at both locations sent out an email about my arrival and added language notifying staff about what information to be collected, how data would be reported, and (particularly pertinent to this research) the research goal was to study communication in general. The last point was specific so that site members would not be primed.

When research began, site members were not engaged immediately – they were allowed to approach the researcher first. At both locations management provided a desk, and observations were first made on the look and feel of the environment and to let the curious come by when they were ready. Slowly, conversation with members initiated, members were engaged in various staff meetings, and individuals were asked to meet for more directed conversation on a formal and informal basis as the individuals’ schedule permitted.

Results: Even before physically entering the newsrooms, a nearly perfect example of silence was provided by a manager at one of the sites. A group of managers were implementing an intentionally designed plan for disseminating information in a way that restricted information between certain groups of staff. The rationale was that a group of managers hoped a program of limited communication would reduce anxiety about their company’s financial strength and future existence. However, staff felt the plan did the exact opposite by making the environment covert and suspicious, which increased their anxiety.

While writing observations and reviewing notes, first impressions were that silence was impacted in great part by the spatial and temporal environment: where people were, time that separated them, or high cubical walls. Initial observations also
included how basic logistical and biological limits curtailed communication: not
everyone can be in a meeting because some have to be producing, a person only has
so many hours in a day to accomplish tasks, and one’s ability to manage multiple
moving parts is limited by mental capacities. What was surprising to not see so
clearly was fear or the related fear of ostracism. Perhaps ostracism has many
thresholds, like water as ice, liquid or steam, and the constant desire to do a good job
and be liked by others may provide a foundation at all times, but such types of
survival fears did not always play out as silence because survival can either lead to
communicating dislike of another or silence about dislike of another.

In Appendix A, all factors and their contexts are summarized in a table. The
212 are unique, meaning observations were in some cases duplicate (similar)
relationships such that the table only represents what were identified to be unique
combinations of factors.

Analysis

Data were viewed two ways: one, data as types of data, and two, data as
representations of ideas in the sites’ environments. Viewing data as data types
involves considering a factor not as what it represents, like the word shyness can
mean someone who demonstrates shy characteristics, but by its dimensional qualities
like interconnectivity (how many different factors were observed to coexist with a
factor when summarizing factors from multiple contexts). Upon thinking about data
as data types, dimensions within each factor appeared. For instance, if shyness was
observed to have many different definitions with many nuances then it might be said
to have high gravity and density. Critically, the analysis suggested that an attempt to
hierarchically and linearly categorize data from construct to levels of concepts was a
failed practice. The data seemed to require a non-linear view and analysis.
Network analysis used as a tool to reveal underlying, connected and repeated relationships seemed to suggest the vast bulk of all variables could fall under about five major clusters: *structures* (social and physical), *ignorance*, *mental reconciliation techniques* (MRTs), *mediators*, and *coordination*. By “cluster” this means a collection of factors that seemed to share a particular theme. These clusters are not suggested to be the most important ideas related to silence; rather, these clusters were simply thematically grouped that seemed to appear in part because they had greater interconnectivity to other factors, or simply that they thematically seemed to relate.

In the newsroom environment, the most obvious relationships between variables seemed to be *structural*: the physical space, proximity, production procedures creating information barriers, mental orientation / mental capacity limits, social desire for keeping peace, social desire to not appear incompetent, and cultural blinding (repeated issue exposure leading to stereotypes or numbing).

*Ignorance* did not necessarily mean qualitatively negative ideas like being stupid or dumb. Everyone has some ignorance about something: a physicist might not know details about zoology, or a baseball player might not know about how to write C++ software. As such, ignorance appeared to be a central theme linking ambiguity, nescience, assumption and blindness because each involves some level of ignorance. Ambiguity occurs when insufficient information is known to differentiate two or more things, nescience is totally not knowing a thing, assumption occurs when one accepts a level of knowing and not knowing, and blindness occurs when one is either ignorant so as not to observe a thing or when one cannot observe a thing.

*Mental Reconciliation Techniques* (MRTs) was any act that accepted a proportion of unknowing. Otherwise phrased, it was a satisfactory threshold of knowing such that a person closed off future adjustment potential by using self-
reinforcing justification for sustaining a decision or knowledge. The cluster seemed to form out of rationalization, stereotypes, fantasy, ego, decision cost/benefit [analysis], and assumption.

Other clusters seemed to be mediators and coordination. The cluster of mediators was such themed because of factors’ role in contexts rather than by definitional similarity. While mediators have been defined in the literature, they seemed to need a slightly modified definition to fit a network analysis understanding: factors that provided a relationship between two variables but did not moderate (regulate) the level of the relationship. The cluster of coordination seemed common to secrecy, unsaid standards, and deviation [from expected rules]. The three factors seemed to be primarily causes of coordination problems and were linked in the observations. The reason for highlighting this element was because it seemed to be one of the few remaining unique grouped ideas. The remaining factors seemed to have direct association with the above clusters, and therefore were not thematically unique, or factors were single concepts with no cluster group to fall under.

After looking at the factors from the vantages of data characteristics and impressions from viewing the network of factors alone, the analysis of contexts described major themes and threads interwoven with network analysis. In particular, the analysis of contexts was newsroom specific. While silence may impact some organizational activities that exist in many different industrial contexts, like meetings, the aspects of shock and awe, online cultural conversion, product cycle times, promotion culture, and closed-loop feedback scenario seemed like contexts bound in many ways to journalism. That is not to say that promotion, for example, doesn’t exist in other industries, but the nature of promotion in these contexts seemed specific to newsrooms or at least specific to these offices.
Shock and Awe was the nature of the industry’s problems with monetization and the resulting shrinking workforces and difficulties managing increased demand for online content while financially supporting very expensive legacy equipment like printing machines and their required real estate. While some readers may perceive this theme to be incredibly important, please remember that this research was focused on the nature of silence. While issues related to shock and awe may be pervasive and encompassing for the industry, in relation to silence, it was only one piece of a greater puzzle. Theoretically, the theme can be restated as a low-munificence environment (i.e. Morrison & Milliken, 2000) and reactions thereof. Relating to silence, low-munificence was suggested to conjure a climate of silence, whereas observations suggested that reactions were both silencing and non-silencing. For instance, fear of layoffs or futility of action created silence, while in contrast, perceptions of the sinking ship and members’ self-perceptions as the few survivors seemed to instill greater agency among staff and resulted in more communication. As a result, shock and awe was not necessarily the sole major force on silence, even though it may be the chief topic in the minds of many industry members.

Online Cultural Conversion was another strong component of the sites’ experience and one that appears to introduce new concerns for silence. Aspects like more frequent production or the future and anticipated loss of a huge portion of the staff (printers, truck drivers, etc.) may lead to individuals working more autonomously and result in the reduction of potential sources of informational diversity through the loss of people. Such aspects have the potential to increase silence as a result of structural silence or blindness. However, the conversion may also increase communication for reasons such as technology that allows for multiple
story elements, from motion graphics to video, such that multiple people may need to coordinate and thus increase communication.

*Planning and Product Cycle Times* seemed to affect sites in that if planning times and product cycle times (allowance for product testing) become increasingly short relative to the industry, then such may correlate with organizations that are acting irrationally and may have a mild form of hysteria. This potential irrationality and hysteria may suggest that interpersonal trust and managerial insecurity may be so high that organizational members may be experiencing silence during coordination activities or between members of the organization as a whole. However, again, not all factors are one sided because if the organization displays shorter planning and product cycle times, then organizational members may logistically need to communicate more in order to accomplish production. However, the question will remain: is the conversation informative with critical information relaying articulate and efficient statements beneficial to the organization, or is communication high but with lots of redundancy and inefficient restatements?

*Promotion Culture*, as suggested, manifests in a particular type in journalism, because unlike some other industries, there did not appear to be a history of managerial tracks except as practitioners to managers; the contrast would be managers primarily being employed from MBA programs or other business degree tracks. In cases, managers had business degrees, but that seemed rare. The resulting lack of emotional and knowledge insecurity that some managers exhibited was striking. The net effect on staff related to those managers was a discernible silence related to a broad range of issues. Promotion being a deep part of the cultural values and organizational structure appeared to be a deep root that network analysis suggests is interconnected with nearly every other factor in daily experience – it permeates the
way people viewed day-to-day interaction and motivation for achievement and communication.

*Closed Loop Communication* was a theme born out of logical deduction and assessment of what was said that could infer what should be said but was not. The logic was that if an entity only reads its own product or the product of other entities in the same subculture, then that entity has a feedback loop in which ideas are self-reinforced and cultural fixations may blind the entity to new ideas. One may say that journalism’s purpose is to disseminating ideas from all over the cultural spectrum. However, ideas for society as a whole are separate from ideas specific to an industry – i.e. journalists understand journalism from reading/viewing journalism. As a result, the lack of solutions to monetization, the lack of creativity in developing a new journalistic product (rather than current activities of simply republishing the same tired print articles into a digital venue), and the fixation on a nearly singular reader stereotype are examples of a collection of people who are lacking diverse perspectives – thus, the blindness version of silence.

*Synthesis of Analysis*: After analyzing contexts by breaking them apart in to small units of factors, synthesizing them into clusters of concepts, analyzing them again as compared and contrasted with contexts, and performing a repeated reduction into a final synthesis of all analysis, conclusions are that almost everything relating to silence could be summarized by a single word: serendipity – as opportunities for serendipity go up, silence will go down, and vice versa.

In many ways this conclusion is uncomfortable. The idea that the opposite of a specific thing is to increase the probability of it not happening leaves open chance that it will still happen: in other words, no guarantees. While a lack of certainty may be uncomfortable, at least it is something tangible that an organization can do.
Companies can have meetings, designate a rotating contrarian position, physically co-locate diverse job roles like clusters of reporters and editors, invite external members to production meetings, and hire people from diverse educational backgrounds. The organization cannot stop all or some types of silence, but they can reduce the chances of it occurring.

LIMITATIONS

This was only a study of two locations, which means there could be numerous internal and external cultural norms that could be cross examined. These locations were also intentionally in similar geographic and cultural areas so as to minimize confounding factors; however, such similarity may itself be a skew when compared with a national or global sample.

This was not quantitative research. Therefore one should not consider any particular relationship observed herein to be stronger than another until further testing can be done. The strengths of relationships discussed herein were purely inferential.

Data collected came from organizations that allowed me to study their staffs. Therefore, one should keep in mind that the organizations may have had tendencies toward openness that may not exist at other organizations, or (as there may be hundreds of other contingencies) these organizations may have had any number of other characteristics conducive to research and not representative of the full spectrum of organizational behaviors.

COMMENTARY

The Unexpected Findings

There are a couple findings that seemed to defy past research or common sense. As much as distance interaction (telework, extended off-site tours, webinars,
etc.) should be reasonably effective, people are stunningly reactive to and affected by proximity – out of sight, out of mind. Anyone who has gone to summer camp and promised to keep up letter-writing afterwards probably learned that such attempts fail over time or immediately. Photographers and reporters are supposed to be out of the office much of their time, and this is a cultural norm, so distance work might be expected to be a non-issue for journalists. However, even these people found themselves blind to some conversations. Of special note, proximity does not need to be measured in miles but can be inches if production routines create time and social spatial differentiation.

In the case of some managers who intentionally tried to create silence between staff of different departments and within departments, such observations were unexpected in that anyone in journalism would even conceive of such a thing. Equally, that said managers would also believe that engineering silence among people who are friends and coworkers would result in less stress among staff! The managers expressed a stunning number of sentiments that were characteristic of insecurity on many levels. However, insecurity was not exclusive to any one group of managers, for there were observed knowledge gaps and low confidence among even people who had several years of managerial experience. The root of the insecurity seemed to consistently have some element of training deficiency given their primary successes were all as practitioners – not as managers. Experience does not always allow people to learn, for there are only a few moments when one can experiment with events that are expected to be routine. Similarly, many aspects of management – as studies demonstrate – are not intuitive: we are not born with skills to be perfect parents, nor spouses, nor coordinators of others; many skills are taught, and most of the managers observed had not been taught.
While being a practitioner myself, I remember having been fixated on social interaction, and infrequently observed the physical environment. While having the chance during this research to observe numerous environments and to be conscious of physical and social spaces, the importance of the physical space was amazing. For instance, the act of turning off lights in a section to help with screen viewing inadvertently created a negative space people were uncomfortable to enter, installing high cubicle walls inhibited coordination and thus were stripped down only two weeks later, and long driving times to the nearest restaurants created a daily discussion of agitation that seemed to affect morale.

The Conjectures

When looking at hundreds of factors that were independent, dependent, mediating and moderating in a large network of relationships, finding a lynchpin is obscured, and there may actually be numerous. While serendipity appeared to be silence’s primary antonym, silence manifested as many different types. As a result, a prognosis of a particular organization may exhibit different types and each type may have different primary causes. Although in the analysis and concluding chapters I tried to synthesize what the data said was true, no research can currently observe all factors – for the holes in observation, one can only make a best guess as to the missing data. While trying to think like a human, anticipate what humans do and what they are reactive to, and extract the most important things that can silence a person or group, the following possible conclusions seemed natural:

- **Desire to get along with each other and/or inclusion**: Desire for peace and stability is not about fear of ostracism. As we grow up, for the most part, we learn that saying whatever we feel like might be perceived as insensitive or malicious and does not work for getting what we want or for having friends.
We hesitate and “pick our battles,” we try to keep people from knowing our mistakes so they continue or progressively think better of us, and/or we pick teams and stick to party lines. This desire for peace and stability causes silence, but not necessarily positive or negative silence.

- **Managerial insecurity, particularly due to promoting practitioners:** Managerial insecurity seems frequently a culprit for a wide-ranging set of outcomes – poor coordination, extremes of inflexibility or flexibility with staff’s job roles/territories, ineffectual communication, and/or perhaps inconsistent decisions (particularly on discipline). Such outcomes foster anger, resentment and other hostilities between staffs that are only present because a manager created the context. Like the pebble in pond: after a while we do not know where all the ripples started from, but they are everywhere and going in all directions. If we humans realized that managing people is just a different role in an organization – like a writer or a photographer – and if we saw managers as equals with other workers who each had a different promotion track, journalism and just about every other organization would be better off as insecurity would be reduced.

- **Mental limits:** No person can always think of all the people who might benefit from hearing a message (i.e. receiving a CC on an email), and cannot always think of all the background for a particular problem at any particular time. Equally, we cannot always imagine all of the possible conditions for a task at any given time: more often than not, it seems we are experimental beings who learn as we go, and we do not always think to invite others or to notify someone right from the beginning. There is also the classic line “they should’ve known about [a thing] because they had so much experience,” but
sometimes while juggling a dozen things, we simply lose track. This results in silence from mental capacity and blindness for those who did not receive communication.

- **Perceptual barriers:** Similar to mental limits, we cannot communicate what we do not know, and we cannot know everything. The result is silence from ignorance.

- **A Thread through the above:** Most of the above reiterate a theme that all/most of perception have limitations (whether good or bad). Whether we like them or not, humans have natural barriers to knowing and communicating. Such filters may be like a series of cascading filters limiting perception downward to what is potentially perceivable and what a researcher can observe and communicate:

  1. In the most absolute condition where one could perceive everything, that would be the first level – infinite ubiquity and speech.
  2. Factors related to one’s ability to perceive from a specific location introduce barriers like distance and frequency of communication.
  3. In addition, we are limited by who we are socially and who will speak to us.
  4. Next, technological ability to receive and share information limits communication.
  5. Then work routines affect us because we cannot be everywhere all the time.
  6. Then the local society’s culture affects what we feel we can and cannot say.
7. Etc., etc., etc.

The layers of factors in life narrow down to a point where we must finally realize that our ability to perceive and communicate about anything reduces to such an extent that we can only perceive or communicate at most two or three things consciously and simultaneously at any one moment. The logical end of this thought is that we are all limited at all times, so we always have some degree of silence going on. Life is (work included), from one perspective, about managing silence and having coping strategies, rather than trying to eliminate silence.

In conclusion, if silence is a thing to cope with rather than eliminate, then there are no guarantees – ever. If there are no guarantees, then a single hypodermic needle/silver bullet factor to eliminate silence is impossible. As a consequence, any solution cannot be something with a guarantee; it has to be something that increases chance. The answer appears to be serendipity. As suggested in the analysis section, the collective factors that an organization can construct to encourage serendipity – chance encounters – is probably the best thing for an organization to try and contend with all the individual and social contributors to silence. As a last metaphor, if the water in a glass is still and a drop of ink is introduced, the ink (like communication) seems to have areas of high concentration and low concentration as it moves down. But if the water is stirred, the ink mixes freely and seems to get into every corner. When stirred the ink is not forced to go everywhere, rather the stirring action facilitates dissemination. Likewise a boring, futile environment with hundreds of policies, big walls, and no coordination between socially compartmentalized silos seems like an environment where information does not flow evenly and does not distribute in a way to allow for the greatest creative potential. In contrast, an
environment with social stirring, where events are organized to stir groups together, walls are low, and people have contexts to speak freely, seems to have the fewest barriers and the least silence.
APPENDIX A: Table of Contexts and Identified Factors

PRIMARY

CONCEPT
LEVEL 1

CONCEPT
LEVEL 2

Ignorance

Ambiguity

Fantasy

Ignorance

Ambiguity

Sure Bets

Ignorance

Ambiguity

Blindness

Ignorance

Ambiguity

Decision Clarity

Ignorance

Ambiguity

Hypocritical

CONCEPT
LEVEL 3

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CONCEPT
LEVEL 4

SHORT
CONTEXT
Unknown protocol
- new employees
are sensitive to
everything as they
acclimate particularly young
ones - told a rule,
but not sure
when/where to
break or where
the hole is to
maneuver out
Even though staff
do not see any
inhibitions to
suggestions things
(or few) they seem
to want direction
and then they
modify the
direction
Senior Editor had one staff
member ask him
what 5 years out
looks like, and he
told the person not
to think that far go for 1 year
Rumor and
staffing - why did
they hire someone
who seemed less
qualified for their
particular
department
(photo)
Reporter said:
promotion is
based on
individual rather
than team,
relationship
system is for
accuracy not
organizational
learning - 50% of


newsroom has the capacity to shoot down an idea so that's too many gates: we have great writers who become terrible managers - managers say they have an open door policy but when you try to suggest things they say to get back into the hierarchy

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<tr>
<th>Ignorance</th>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
<th>Differentiation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief that one person is doing more work than others - employee does not bring it up - but the person suspects</td>
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<th>Ignorance</th>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
<th>Fear</th>
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<td>If in a public space near high-traffic zones, the context can cause momentary pause and rethinking</td>
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<th>Ignorance</th>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
<th>Ego</th>
<th>Fear-Paradox</th>
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<tr>
<td>Managers want to be positive and show they are capable leaders so as to give the troops a sense of security - so, the managers chose not to seek input from subordinate staff, however those attitudes are exactly what make the staff uncomfortable because to many staff it shows the managers are scared and are not being proactive to seek input from all levels.</td>
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<th>Ignorance</th>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
<th>Unknown - Fear</th>
<th>Change Fatigue</th>
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<td>People were very quiet before a single-copy sales manager showed</td>
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<th>Fantasy</th>
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up with the week's data - participant said they had anxiety about the results.

When roles are reversed: when some reporters became the reported - they flipped out - despite idealist statements about total transparency of speech and action by politicians and journalists. Apparently this has caused a bit of a quiet zone around certain people in the office who reported on what reporters said.

Posters about former employees were taken down.

Employee opinion: the office is an uncoordinated rabble making choices based on localized hearsay, ill-defined assumptions, and instinct.

Overconfidence and identity? Information Technology employee felt confident they knew what to do with my laptop, and refused letting me assist; however, after the employee fumbled around unable to figure out the wireless controls, the employee handed it back to me with an angry face and gesture.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ignorance</th>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>Unnecessary Information Sharing</th>
<th>&quot;The glass wall&quot; - a lead editor said Executive Editor goes to all those conferences, but pretty much keeps whatever information they heard to themselves.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>Rationalization and Ego: Suicide of someone they had covered - editors and reporters discussed their reportage and seemed to assume they were partially responsible because they believe the public places an enormous weight on the things that the newspaper says. No one offered a contrarian view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic</td>
<td>Business Intelligence</td>
<td>Fantasy Fear (What Could Happen)</td>
<td>Discussion in a meeting about dropping sections at another paper - an executive made a command that anyone their could not share that information with anyone outside the room.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Codification</td>
<td>Value Setting</td>
<td>Indication Of Preference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Contagion - Negative</td>
<td>Job Satisfaction</td>
<td>Looking for other jobs - primarily catalyst was negative talk by coworkers about organization.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Coordinatio n</td>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>Blindness</td>
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<td>Lack of Teaching - Temporary employee was left to do his job with no instruction. He was promised training on a variety of things; however, the employee has yet to receive it after several weeks (I learned later the employee never got the training!).</td>
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<td>Janitor wanted to speak with someone to alert them about a negative advertisement they saw about this newspaper - however, he did not know who to speak with, and the person he spoke with did not know but did give a suggestion - indication that a Point of Contact system for upward communication was not established, disseminated effectively nor periodically reminded.</td>
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<td>Employee was not sure what to say because a directive was too ambiguous</td>
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<td>Reporter withheld a source's name even from reporter's editor</td>
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<td>Some stories or elements get lost because of ambiguity about who has control of something</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Coordinatio n</td>
<td>Deviation</td>
<td>Rules exist for dissemination of information from single copy on a frequent basis (weekly, monthly or quarterly), but a certain individual has not emailed another group once for over a year.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Coordinatio n</td>
<td>Unsaid Standards</td>
<td>Editor: I was never told that we have a particular style - we do not massage all the reporters into a common language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorance</td>
<td>Coordinatio n</td>
<td>Unsaid Standards</td>
<td>Editor: Keeps opinion secret about writing styles where each reporter is supposed to have a unique voice: this editor disagrees and thinks the concept is entirely a joke.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Decodificati on</td>
<td>More Content Integration</td>
<td>The more content integration of different sections, the more information sharing seems to increase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Desk art: pinned to a partition wall is a cartoon about a reporter tepidly emerging from under a desk to do &quot;hard-knuckled&quot; reporting again after the post-9/11, quasi-McCarthyist, Nationalist American era.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Only once saw publisher walk through newsroom once ever.</td>
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</table>
New Employee Orientation: Culturally establishes what to talk and not to talk about - everything is positive and great except for a few things we may have heard about the newspaper industry in general (not us per se).

Editor: "It's what people want" - speaking about readers.

Individual preference - female reporter speaking about a prior newsroom culture said it was unheard of to speak about your personal life, while here everyone wants to be pals - the reporter is not ready, maybe never, to do so.

Conversation about "Northwest Nice" (Not being confrontational, and seeming to be friendly)

Editors throwing paper balls at each other during a meeting - then one guy glances at me and then tells the group "shut the fuck up - you know" (gestures to me)

Contradiction pointed out by reporter: the group knows they culturally blind themselves to something they know exists (observation made
During a debate about endorsements and not wanting to appear biased, yet only almost everyone cheered when democrats won.

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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Cultural</th>
<th>Differentiation</th>
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<td>Folks who were on instant messaging formed cliques</td>
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During goodbye events (retirement) when management say good things about people, it effectively sets-up a value feedback system by emphasizing particular positive virtues of the person's professional activity.

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<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Cultural</th>
<th>Value Freezing</th>
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<td>Employee: &quot;I never get a handshake … that kinda tells ya.”</td>
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Ongoing financial viability - one editor felt the issue was an elephant nobody really wanted to engage “We dance around it”

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<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Cultural</th>
<th>Elephant</th>
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<td>As if the talk was almost all positive the last time I was at this site, today it was entirely positive - one person known for being a skeptic kept their mouth shut even though I could see the person wanting to open up (I wonder if there was a command put out).</td>
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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Cultural</th>
<th>Fear</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Employee: &quot;Who</td>
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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Cultural</th>
<th>Elephant</th>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Elephant</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Topic</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
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<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>A priori Experiences</td>
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<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Ostracism</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Scale</td>
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201
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<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Cultural</th>
<th>Bonding/Blindness</th>
<th>newsroom they work for.</th>
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<td>Observation: It's like these people are all news hobbyists - they love to share about what they are going to report on, and love to share about news they heard from other companies - similarly many here love to gossip.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Blindness/Sharing</td>
<td>Company intranet site has links to two industry news sources: AP industry news and Romensko</td>
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<td>Again - of the senior editor's rare visits to the newsroom, the person never seems to stop and talk with anybody - just passes through the newsroom.</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Ego Routine</td>
<td>Found out that other researchers had come into this site, and the newsroom staff intentionally spoke to people they did not normally because they thought it would be funny (the researchers came in with lab coats!)</td>
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<td>Security Groups - Feedback</td>
<td>Senior Editor kept quiet about finance issue announced today, which is interesting because yesterday the editor whispered</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Security Groups - Differentiation</td>
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202
the announcement to second in command - so silence to most but not all.

Alternative communications paths: Newsroom employees go to a café where the café staff overhear conversations and keep a list of who they hate - ex: overheard why a story did not go to print because of a conflict of interest, or when certain people were going to be quitting before management were told - some of this information is passed to newsroom staff the café employees like.

Whispered employee names

Interior Geography: The work areas originally had high walls, but staff soon realized they could not communicate easily or know who was there at a glance (to run to a story) and so they took all the walls down.

"If you don't want someone to use your desk [because they are supposed to be shared], fill it up with crap."

Interior Geography: Talking about current and previous
employers, a reporter said this location is much more open spatially.

| Process issue: Everyone reviews copies of their paper, but they get versions that are from the press, not the true final product which might have advertising stickers covering portions - i.e. when they make decisions they are not basing decisions on what the readers actually see. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Structure | Limiter | Barrier - Learning Process | Blindness |
| Basics seem not to be conveyed: An employee was never told about what was through a door - he thought it was a janitor's closet or something, but actually the door led to a very valuable collection of information the employee needed for some of their work. The employee only learned about what was through the door 6 months or so after they began. |
| Structure | Limiter | Barrier - Learning Process | Assumption |
| Basics seem not to be conveyed: An employee was taught how to use a desk for proper posture and alignment only after having worked there for 8 months. Note: desk height adjustment was |
not obvious.

Despite some staffs' suggestion that the executive editor is "hands on" and frequently mingled, observation suggests neither.

Futility: Breaking news trickles rather than disseminates efficiently to all need to know parties - an employee complained of this again.

Following a meeting where I knew a particular person had an idea about a thing, the person said they did think of contributing, but figured their idea could not have been original and unique, and does not probably would not work because it did not exist elsewhere (which non-existence meant to this person that the idea had either been tried and failed or it was a bad idea for some other reason). Therefore, there was no reason to even mention it.

A person did not want to go to party because of activities which made them feel guilty.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Fantasy</th>
<th>Topic: I tried to get someone to estimate mood in the building from 1-5; the person said &quot;no way&quot; they would put that on record.</th>
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<td>Second person asked if I know something secret the managers did not want to share. The person was also very hesitant to answer anything, and had lots of nervous actions whereas during the first visit, the same person was a confident and relaxed during discussions with few inhibitions.</td>
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<td>Less contrarian expression than first visit: A particular employee body gestures irritation and desire to comment, but does not say anything and no one encourages him.</td>
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<td>Worsening Problems</td>
<td>Outside the newsroom in a non-work social environment, an employee gossips with outsiders and trusted friends about problems.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Barrier - Social</td>
<td>Security Groups</td>
<td>Social boundary: One person wanted to know what another person did but could not motivate themselves to directly ask anyone (except me - or this was a tactic for)</td>
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<td>Barrier - Social</td>
<td>Propriety</td>
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<th>Structure</th>
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<th>Barrier - Social</th>
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Employee wondered about managerial arrogance - asked why managers did not ask the staff for solutions to problems, such non-action seemed foolish and arrogant.

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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
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Some editors felt there was a distinct barrier between them and reporters despite sitting only a few feet and earshot from them.

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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Loyalty</th>
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One employee to another as I tried to ask a couple questions: "Don't tell him [me] anything or else he'll screw ya!" [Laughs] Other employee, "My window on the world is a little dirty."

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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Loyalty</th>
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Directive from one manager to another, "You are to be seen but not heard."

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<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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Topic: A reporter moved closer to me and used a whispered voice when speaking about workplace interactions.

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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
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</table>

Topic: An editor moved closer to me and used a whispered voice.
when speaking about workplace interactions.

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<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comment:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>there are many</td>
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<td>elephants</td>
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<td>(obvious and</td>
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<td>known yet</td>
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<td>undisccussable)</td>
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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Propriety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal gain:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nobody questions the fact that another employee is violating a particular contractual rule, because they hope they can take advantage of managers willing to look the other way, too.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social proximity:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Managers feel publisher is open but staff mostly do not.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Ostracism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elephant:</td>
<td></td>
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<td>ownership and that some people are cult-ish about the ownership.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Ostracism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comments about elephants:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>lips service to journalism elitism towards readers, people do not read long investigations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite management emphasis, we say we give readers what they want but actually give what we want, industry competitions like Pulitzer are for internal value setting but arcane and irrelevant to readers, and we’re really a homogeneous group despite diversity propaganda.

Senior editor: whispered when speaking that the future does not include drivers and trucks - just online services - that’s a big employee and union population that will feel pain and anger.

Rationalization of blame for poor performance: Single copy guy kept saying changes were entirely reader lifestyle changes, and that there was no way it had to do with the product they were putting out. No data support.

Editor said things were crazy since I had last been there. I asked if he would elaborate, he said, “No, I'll stop there and say no more.”

Reporter said they really disliked the Investigative Team and most
think there is much over-emphasis.

Reporter who believed they were part of the star system, said that resentment was palpable.

Contrast: only one person asked if I would maintain secrecy over comments at one site, but almost everyone asked if I would at the other site.

Contrast: only one person asked if I would maintain secrecy over comments at one site, but almost everyone asked if I would at the other site.

Union employee versus free agents: comment from free agent - "We know different things."

Reporter: communication is still all one way, they don't seem to want any input upstream

Conversations in context seem much more shop talk oriented - discussion of personal life down.

Morning meeting: Again the morning meeting was comprised of all positive comments - no contrarian views - something happened to the culture since I was last here.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Barrier - Social</th>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Employee believed some are heard more than others, but the speaker could not figure out why.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Social</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Reporter and Editor comment: Photo culture is very elusive and egotistical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Social</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Low capital means we cannot afford more laptops: less efficient and more barriers and agitation to getting story done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Technology</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Due to number of photographs and file sizes they do not keep backups of everything shot - only that which was published and maybe a few others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Technology</td>
<td>Blindness</td>
<td>Mass re-setting of passwords: systems access caused access problems for many and inability to coordinate as with many other effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Technology</td>
<td>User Lockout</td>
<td>If you forward your phone to your cell, both phones ring simultaneously and voice mail picks up twice - causing confusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Technology</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Many of the online folks wore headphones all day, and even when I tried to speak with one, he simply hit stop on his player, did not take out his earphones, and answered a few questions with no interest in elaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Technology</td>
<td>Source Validity</td>
<td>Spamming and restriction software stops around 7/8’s of all emails getting to staff - unfortunate but necessary due to system overload and employee efficiency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Technology</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Production software does or does not allow for notes/comments input in a safe way - i.e. employee said sometimes comments have made it into print that were intended purely for production staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Technology</td>
<td>Physical Barrier</td>
<td>Employee's telephone line does not allow the main number to be forwarded to her normal desk, so the employee gets irritated and distracted on duty days over the weekend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Time/Culture</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Sunday - very sparse and people generally stuck to themselves - plus news was pretty much already settled for the day's paper and the perception was that Sunday was a “slow day”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Time/Culture</td>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Photographers like to stay out of the office as much as possible; however, they must come to office every couple of days to save files to server due to bandwidth issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Time</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Timing is critical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Time/Culture</td>
<td>Communication Limit</td>
<td>Time/Culture Inconvenience</td>
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<td>Barrier -</td>
<td>Photographer not</td>
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<td>Time/Culture</td>
<td>wanting to be</td>
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<td>found - trying to</td>
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<td>work in back area.</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier -</td>
<td>Weekend</td>
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<td>Time/Culture</td>
<td>rotations: many</td>
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<td>people do not ever</td>
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<td>see or hear from</td>
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<td>another.</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier -</td>
<td>Sports works in</td>
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<td>Time/Culture</td>
<td>relative isolation</td>
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<td>- out of the office</td>
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<td>mostly and their</td>
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<td>workspace is</td>
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<td>separate and a bit</td>
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<td>awkward to find.</td>
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<td>Barrier -</td>
<td>Sports vs. metro</td>
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<td>Time/Culture</td>
<td>staff - comment:</td>
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<td>very different</td>
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<td>cultures</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier -</td>
<td>People appear to</td>
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<td>Time/Culture</td>
<td>be constantly busy,</td>
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<td>and seem almost</td>
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<td>perpetually angry</td>
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<td>with the forehead</td>
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<td>scrunched between</td>
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<td>the eyes - but once</td>
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<td>approached, they</td>
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<td>to lighten up and</td>
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<td>be open</td>
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<td>Barrier -</td>
<td>Not a single</td>
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<td>Time/Culture</td>
<td>person here on</td>
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<td>Saturday morning -</td>
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<td>a few dribbled in</td>
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<td>after 10.</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier -</td>
<td>So few people</td>
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<td>Time/Resources</td>
<td>hired (permanent or</td>
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<td>temporary) they only</td>
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<td>have training every</td>
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<td>couple of months -</td>
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<td></td>
<td>thus leaving gaps</td>
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<td>and often longer</td>
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<td>learning curves - no</td>
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<td>alternatives appear</td>
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<td>to be in place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Time/Culture</td>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>New employee cannot perform some work without training, and they do not have any training scheduled because there are not enough people - however there is a hiring freeze which means no new people will be needing training! Cultural resistance to alternatives seems to be causing gaps in assimilation (issue is not policy).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Time/Resources</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Disorganized relationship with sources had led to missed stories - scheduling of assignments seems to be a factor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Time/Resources</td>
<td>Blindness</td>
<td>Coordinatio n</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Proximity</td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Capacity - Communication Resource</td>
<td>Resource</td>
<td>Employee said we used to talk about journalism values, but now all we talk about is the financial budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Capacity - Communication Resource</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Cutback on freelance hires - lower external to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Capacity - Communication Resource</td>
<td>Blindness</td>
<td>Employee's spouse likes to remind employee that the next major city is Minneapolis - so, we're really isolated in the Northwest (cultural bias - Portland and Vancouver, Canada a much closer major cities).</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
<td>&quot;The [manager] hires people he likes and so that's how his personality takes over&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Capacity - Communication Resource</td>
<td>Blindness</td>
<td>Psychological freeze after many recent changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Capacity - Decision Cost &amp; Benefit</td>
<td>Change Fatigue</td>
<td>Learned Feedback Trivialization: Routine joke told by online staff - the guy who died from horse sex - no matter where the story is, &quot;they&quot; [readers] will find it. Used again as an argument that placement on the website is fairly unimportant. More importantly, the use of stereotypes and belittling examples about readers' habits suggests negative attitudes towards audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Capacity - Decision Cost &amp; Benefit</td>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>Reader feedback is boring some staff because those staff believe feedback deals with unrectifiable issues; as well, the same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More importantly, the use of stereotypes and belittling examples about readers' habits suggests negative attitudes towards audience.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Excessive Inclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees said there used to be a freakish amount of meetings and consultation: one example was when a person wanted to leave for 3 days, and HR asked section colleagues to consult if it was OK (people felt that was going over-board!)</td>
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<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I sense cues of &quot;not having time&quot; or &quot;it isn't worth the time&quot; seems to kill stories</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Many employees cling to research alphas (those who appear to be specialists) - listeners use the specialists' terminology and do not find it useful to seek second opinions - despite cultural tradition in their stories to always seek a pro and con voice.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Excessive Inclusion</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too much consensus building</td>
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<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Blindness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager: Wants to adapt online culture to be the same culture as print. Blindness due to continuity / habit?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Rationalization</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>True Blindness or Social Desirability: Instances of folks saying things contrary to what they said privately, and then later</td>
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</table>
suggesting their minds had changed.

Reporter comment: An individual was a "military manager"

Market research employee said they've had focus groups, but that he felt the editors already had their minds made up before and during the events

One person whispered to another about the high cost of one story, but would not voice dissent at budget meetings.

Working off old data in research department - too expensive - so they have been working off data that was 5 or more years old.

Mid-manager suddenly realized he's forgotten for several weeks to tell a reporter to move desks - busy with the elections

"They're trying to keep doing business as usual" even though finances keep dwindling.

Reporter said they wished there was more talk of what could be - in contrast they mostly talk about things they cannot do
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Limiter</th>
<th>Capacity - Resources</th>
<th>Ego</th>
<th>Perceptual</th>
<th>Some reporters feel the culture is equitable - others not: small observation but suggests variation of perspectives, fairness, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Group Complexity</td>
<td>Blindness</td>
<td>Missing Contrarian</td>
<td>Group-Think or Time and Place Hesitation? Observations at a single-copy results meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Futility</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Rationalization</td>
<td>Deference</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rationalization of institutional problem rather than local problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Rationalization</td>
<td>Ego</td>
<td></td>
<td>Pay freeze &amp; expected attrition while others &quot;stay &amp; complain&quot; - managers feel everyone perceives management targeting individuals when the reality was a uniform action across staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Limiter</td>
<td>Barrier - Cultural</td>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Employee's spouse went to a hospital: Note, this was a statement, and no one asked any more questions or even about sending a get well card etc…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td></td>
<td>Myths</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;The containment facility&quot;: an office room for reporters with many cubes - a colloquial term.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consistency</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
<td>Employee said: There's no consistency in anything here but for how long any one person sits in a seat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>De/Centralization</td>
<td>Parent company orientation - an employee said: one company seems to work for its newspapers, while another seems to tell newspapers what to do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>Employee: We used to have Christmas parties, but those stopped about 10 years ago</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Groups seem to form by the number of years of service.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Within minutes of re-entering the office (returned after a wave of layoffs were announced): MetEd came over to me, shook hands and asked “Do you know something we don’t?”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Provenance</td>
<td>Symbolism of having a huge beautiful work of art in main hall, or impression of history as you walk into lobby.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Senior manager sees themself as an advocate for the city - one attribute of this self-image is that the manager refers reverently to major industries/companies rather than as objective observer.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Only one key person left in section, and their role has been divided such that</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
boundaries are now unclear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
<th>One editor’s sense of certainty went from 6 months to 3 months, and had a very hard time thinking about 6 months to a year.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Observation that since I was last here a lot of posters from or about former employees came down (later heard management did not want reminders of departing folks around).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Time Shifting</td>
<td>All meetings and deadlines were set 30 min earlier to speed up process. Reaction to budget reduction (drivers were fired - and so they need more time). However, I also heard that news staff rarely got a finished product to union paid printers on time, and so this was meant to buffer against having to pay overtime.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Mediator | Organization Perception | New employee orientation session, trainer said: "We’re really in the same league as Washington Post and New York Times" - although not a universally held belief, key people in management believe this and seem to act conservatively in a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>&quot;Sometimes we have to write about something we do not want to - like bad news about Boeing.&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Employees perceive some &quot;Perks&quot; as fake and pathetic tokens: example, they get 50% off the newspaper subscription - however, they get it for free at work, and online is always free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Selective Method</td>
<td>There seems to be a preference for phone and face to face with news sources, but the same people seem to prefer email and IM with colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Myths</td>
<td>&quot;I laughed when I heard what you were up to, because our job is communication yet we are terrible [communicators] with each other!&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Sub-Group Behavior</td>
<td>Mental orientation: A reporter was highly animated and excited about details, while their editor seemed unemotional and searched for only the necessary bits in the conversation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Mediator | Sub-Group Behavior | Behavior of editorial staff was intense and gruff: is this intentionally
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Efficiency &amp; Learned Response</th>
<th>Negativism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>After weeks of discussion, only males seem to be deeply irritated by &quot;thank you&quot; email: such emails made them think something new must be in the email only to find nothing - viewed as wasted time.</td>
<td>One could hear in the open, editors looking at journalismjobs.com and talking about what editors were being paid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>When talking about personal issues, a manager would sit back with open body language, but when we discussed work topics, the manager would lean closer and lower their voice - even with banal issues like using instant messaging.</td>
<td>Employee prefers task specific communication and low personal details (female speaker - seemed different from other female speakers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exitless</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negativism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Expectation</td>
<td>Individual preference: reporter from prior culture said it was unheard of to talk about personal life, yet here everyone wants to be pals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Communication Perception</td>
<td>Editor: &quot;We find that communication is at the heart of every problem&quot;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Staff was asked to pay more for parking, and now have to dump their own trash.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Demotion</td>
<td>Star system reduced, and efforts implemented at maximizing remaining staff for all production types.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Reporter spoke about one of the smaller offices: there you're really under the regime of one editor, whereas here it's like if you do not like what Mom said you might be able to go to Dad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Perceived low ability to communicate at small regional office (could be high comm and low comm for diff topics)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Reporter: Not sure what to do - feels there is role ambiguity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>Reporter: because of attrition - people who had been</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Deference</td>
<td>&quot;stars&quot; were relocated back to grunt work from features</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Even though a key manager was rarely in the newsroom, perception seems to suggest when the person is there everyone is very conscious of the manager's presence.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Passive Policy</td>
<td>With fewer people and multiple venues, reporters have less time to research and commiserate – from one article a day to multiple web updates plus story</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Due to ownership features, a manager said publically traded companies have more transparency, and the managers know it - this means their staff will hear about financial issues faster or at all, while fiscal health might be hidden at the private ownerships.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Systems Fatigue</td>
<td>Comment: Some team leaders were better at conveying than others.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td></td>
<td>Photographer said the increasing number of systems drives them nuts – particularly the number of passwords</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Manager said: we mustn’t show favoritism or have relationships; one manager was told they had to leave because of a relationship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Injury</td>
<td>Parent company came in and fired many awhile back: a reporter sensed the remaining staff were resentful, however with a new senior manager morale seemed to get much better.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Comment: leadership training is lacking - one short course (week), one seminar at Poynter, and some mentoring at work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Organization Perception</td>
<td>Reporter: “I'm so glad to be working somewhere where people really know their shit.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Negative Feedback Loop</td>
<td>Editor comment: the copy desk used to be where the good and experienced reporters would go if they wanted a desk job, but now because of attrition it is made of a bunch of inexperienced youths who have screwed up so many times that if you go over and try to make a comment they defensively eat your head off – like scared dogs that put up a show.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>When talking of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Oversight</td>
<td>Micromanaging</td>
<td>management a senior manager whispered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Mood</td>
<td></td>
<td>Two cleaning staff said they had a boss who literally followed them around the building trying to hide covertly while trying to catch them slacking off.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Iteration/Redundancy</td>
<td>Futility</td>
<td>The worse the internal mood gets, the less negative/dissenting speech occurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff fed-up with a single reason used for justifying many different problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reporter: If an office is small (&lt;15) then everyone has to be invited to socials, however, here (&gt;15) you can invite a few and not feel like you insulted everyone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Inequity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Employee: &quot;I feel like filing a complaint just so the Union actually does something for me.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Suspicion/Paranoia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Employee: &quot;I know they're not telling me everything, but I think they are pretty straight with me.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Priming</td>
<td></td>
<td>A student is here: the student is taking notes for a project on emotional issues in journalism - a reporter is telling a sob story about thinking about a story while at home and not being able to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
leave the stories at work (note, this is from a reporter who is nonplussed about everything and has at least once seemed bored about reporting a suicide or bored about other death stories).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Colloquial terms: &quot;Soft promoters&quot; and &quot;Heavy Promoters&quot; (speaking about colleagues and attempts at promotion)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Leadership Perception</td>
<td>Comment about a manager: &quot;Well, his Dad was really beloved as a nice guy, but [he] was like the anti-Dad - he was cold and not nearly as personable.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>Exitless</td>
<td>Reporter discussion: Staff and managers have perceived divergence of interests. Pay freeze, anger and resentment, loss of positions - nowhere else to go (not like it's just us).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>Blindness</td>
<td>Opinion from an editor: we normally move glacially, but lately decisions feel erratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>Negative Expectation Setting</td>
<td>Employee comment about news industry: defined as &quot;severe and pervasive&quot; problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderator</td>
<td>Micromanaging</td>
<td>Editor comment: a senior editor comes in after 100 hours of work to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moderator | Positive Feedback Loop | make a couple changes – why not earlier – irritating – and maybe it makes it better but maybe not

Structure | Policy | Direct Command | Fantasy | Fear | Observation: Size and Density? Communication seems to relate to more communication regardless of topic

Structure | Policy | Hierarchy | Employee observation: We know what not to talk about, we are supposed to stay in our place

Structure | Policy | Direct Command | Directive from one manager to another, "You are to be seen but not heard"

Structure | Policy | Blindness | Goal focus (setting any goals, for that matter) sets observational limitations

Structure | Policy | Fear | Managers fear employee complaints that are sex or racial in nature.

Structure | Policy | Hypocritical | Proximity | Reporter made a negative comment (unknowingly) to someone about what they were doing (the object of the comment was a person who just so happened to be visiting the newsroom): even though the reporter could say
what they said in their copy, when in the face-to-face context the reporter was told to shut up when outsiders were in the area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Implied</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indirect communication Policy: Policy about production cycle seems to imply policy about other work habits.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Implied</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy about article content may have carryover to the interpersonal - e.g. &quot;least harm&quot;</td>
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</table>

A photo editor said the reason the online folks never integrated with the rest of the newsroom was because organizationally they were not part of the newsroom: they were paid from the advertising budget, not news. "FUNNY" - after the speaker said that, two others nearby said, "really I never knew that." The speaker said, generally it did not come up - except in times of conflict - photos wanted to put up some images without ads as a respect thing, but online staff did not (because they were paid by advertising) - nearby speakers: "so their allegiance is to ads?" speaker:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Ambiguity</th>
<th>Employee comment: cannot talk about personal, political, legal, unions - everything is so interlaced with work that we’re not sure what we can talk about.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>Senior manager: Rules for senior managers: “be sensitive” - “know their personal life, but not yours” - “the less they know about you the better”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Legal/Privacy</td>
<td>Employee’s spouse went to hospital, no comment on details from managers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Editor comment: reporters are told what to write about - fish, coffee, planes and rain - this is kind of tongue and cheek, but frequently not - they are rough guidelines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


Hitz, F. P., & Weiss, B. J. (2004). Helping the CIA and FBI Connect the Dots in the War on Terror. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence, 17*(1), 1 - 41.


VITA

Damian Kostiuk received his master’s degree in Journalism and Public Policy from American University in Washington, DC, after having worked at the Associated Press, at NBC Television News/Dateline, and on numerous projects during an since high school with ABC News, a CBS affiliate (WUSA) in Washington, and at a regional newspaper (Loudon Times). Before pursuing his doctorate, he was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Uzbekistan, where he worked as a university English and journalism instructor.

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