

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MULTICULTURAL WORKFORCES:  
AN EXAMINATION OF GROUP MUTING AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

by

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A DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

Contemporary organizations have become composite structures of any number of nationalities and cultures. The forces of globalization have forced organizations to begin internationalizing by establishing production sites in other countries. This trend became increasingly common as the twentieth-century progressed and technological resources improved (Robertson & White, 2008). Current scholarship on the issues faced by international organizations has left a number of potentially important variables unexamined, such as the number of members of a cultural group versus their structural position within the organization. It has also raised an equally significant number of questions that must be answered, such as how organizational cultures are affected by internal cultural tensions and potential group muting. This research aimed to uncover the tensions present at the site of an international organization and the resulting organizational culture that developed from those tensions. Interview data was collected from a Japanese international organization comprised of a wide variety of national cultures. That data was qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis and the constant comparative method. Muted group theory was used to analyze the negotiation of cultural voice within the organization through the identification of resistance strategies. Organizational culture theory was utilized to uncover the elements of the organization that contributed to its discursive environment. Findings revealed that members of the Japanese national culture along with native English speakers expressed the most muting, but the organizational culture encouraged cultural expression, alleviating internal tension.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of those who have helped, guided, and prodded me along the way. Without the wisdom and support of my family and friends, the completion of this project would have been impossible, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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## Introduction

Organizations are dependent on effective communication among members to attain long term success. Communication resides at the heart of organizational processes, as resources are distributed, members are directed, and organizational cultures are developed through the interactions of employees and managers. The need to make sense of the organization and of the environment in which the organization is situated drives organizational members to establish goals, boundaries, and norms to increase efficacy and satisfaction (Weick, 1979). These goals, boundaries, and norms become assets that members rely upon to guide them through organizational life; however, these constructions are not permanently fixed. As economic and social environments change, organizations are forced to adapt in order to survive. The mechanisms of organizational adaptation are communicative, and they manifest themselves in a wide variety of practical forms, ranging from major restructuring, to image reconstruction, to reducing expenditures. All of these strategies carry significant impacts for the symbolic structures that organizational members generate, as employees must make sense of organizational changes. Thus, major changes in an organization signify not only the introduction of new methods of production or operation but also the introduction of new variables into the sense-making processes of employees.

Since the 1950s, one of the most common forms of adaptation has been the tendency to globalize (Hummels, 2007). Organizations of all types, private,

governmental, and non-governmental, were swept along in the tide of economic and political convergence in the post-World War II era. The duty to rebuild of nations coupled with economic alliances remaining from the war made it possible for possible for organizations to enter previously untapped markets. Organizations therefore found means of improving profitability and stability by internationalizing (Aghion & Williamson, 1998). Major organizations, rather than being limited to trading with foreign countries, began to establish branches in those countries, where production could be conducted at lower costs, economic incentives could be negotiated based upon population employment, and tariff costs could be reduced. This trend became increasingly common as the twentieth-century progressed and technological resources improved (Robertson & White, 2008). Organizations could communicate quickly and clearly with members around the globe, improving the capability of organizations to retain control of organizational processes while altering the types of stresses experienced. The distance between the eastern and western hemispheres disappeared, creating opportunities for increased cooperation and interdependence (Waters, 1995). Thus, rather than being primarily composed of members of one national origin, contemporary organizations have become composite structures of a multitude of nationalities and cultures.

The primary branch of a globalized or international organization is located in the “home” country and directs all other branches. The primary branch attempts to transport the values and goals of the organization to other branches in order to unify its members. In essence, the organization aims to extend its organizational culture to each foreign branch. For this reason, Stohl (2005) noted, “Globalization is not a state of affairs; it embodies dynamic communicative, economic, cultural, and political practices and

produces new discourses of identity” (p. 247). Members of both nations and organizations are forced into interactions that become negotiations of identity and power. Thus, the present research is primarily concerned with the ways in which members of international organizations, representing different national cultural groups, create unique pressures on organizational cultures that may be constructive or destructive for the organization as a whole. As organizations continue to expand and develop internationally, the communicative impact of national culture upon organizational culture will become an increasingly important realm of study.

#### *Significance of International Organization Research*

International organizations have become increasingly common due to the pressure on major companies to globalize (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999). The drive for sustainable profit or production has caused internationalization to become both an opportunity and a constraint for large organizations. On the one hand, organizations can, indeed, find immeasurable profit by creating branches in foreign countries that utilize local workforces (Beck, 2000). Organizations not only gain some reduction in costs, but also the experience of operating internationally, positioning them above those organizations that are restrained to one locale. For that reason, the number of international organizations continues to grow every year, regardless of the potential volatility of international markets (Monge, 1995).

On the other hand, organizations both influence and are influenced by foreign populations. Despite the fact that managers of the organization may be of one national origin, the majority of the workforce is of another, lending some level of communicative influence to the majority membership of the workforce. The concepts and policies of the

organization may face serious and significant challenges when translated across national boundaries. At the same time, the organization may disrupt the community or region into which it places itself. Giddens (1990) argued that this type of organizational structure causes irrevocable changes at the communal level, as decisions made in another country begin to impact the population of the host country. Organizations have only a limited capacity for envisioning those impacts, however, because of the influence of the national culture of origin on the specific organizational culture. In that regard, organizations have developed what Wilson, Thomas-Derrick, and Wright (2001) described as, “the awareness of the need to manage people and information globally and analyze issues from a global perspective . . . Decisions in one part of the company can have unexpected ripples in other territories” (p. 14). International organizations must take great care to ensure that their policies and procedures do not increase the tensions experienced by employees at international branches. However, as Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) argued in their analysis of organizational reliance, environmental, financial, physical, and informational resources are obtained by an organization from the environment, creating dependencies that are often, but not always, reciprocal. Organizations use the location in which they operate, but, without appropriate management of resources, may place themselves in a tentative position due to an inability to adapt. This brings to bare the most critical issue facing international organizations: the workforce of a branch is a resource of the organization and, for that reason, must be managed in the way the home culture deems appropriate.

Branches of international organizations bring together groups that may share few or no identity cues, such as language, ethnicity, or value structure. Moreover, the control

of one national culture is an implicit piece of the organizational structure in many international companies. Thus, the process of constructing or sharing organizational cultural pieces is complicated by the national boundaries of an international workforce and leads to the necessity of new, unexplored communicative practices in order for organizational members to create cohesion.

#### *Limitations of Current Scholarship*

A great deal of past research focusing on international organizations has centered on joint ventures between private and governmental organizations (e.g. Finnemore, 1993; Kratochwil & Ruggle, 1986; Ness & Brechin, 1988). More current research has highlighted the struggles of international joint ventures, instances where organizations (both domestic and international) cooperate for the purposes of attaining a specific goal such as profit or resource sharing (e.g. Barkema & Vermeulen, 1997; Inkpen & Beamish, 1997; Lane, Salk, & Lyles, 2001; Lyles & Salk, 2006). Little research, however, has focused specifically on the conflicts faced by private international organizations. More importantly, the issue of multicultural workforces has been studied from a number of angles (e.g. Kuebler, Mertens, Russell, & Tevis, 2009; Makela, Kalla, Piekkari, 2007; Ferner, Almond, & Colling, 2005), but little attention has been given to the ways those cultural groups engage with one another and the effects that engagement have upon the organizational culture.

In general, although there have been extensive examinations of international negotiations and international political entities, there has been of a lack of communication research into the negotiations of national or ethnic cultural groups within the same organizational context. This question is closely related to the work of muted

group theorists, who focus on the ways in which one national or ethnic cultural group may silence or mute another. Ardner (1978) developed muted group theory as a way of depicting how societies repress women and other minority groups. The theory centers upon the ability of a group to express “voice” within a broader context and links that ability to the power relationships maintained with other groups. Though it has been acknowledged that organizations are composed of groups defined by myriad factors (Putnam, 2003), current scholarship has failed to attend to the ways that cultural groups become positioned within international organizations and the ways that power relationships are structured based upon that positioning. Group muting provides an excellent frame through which to view these relationships but has only been used in a handful of organizational, despite the fact that organizations serve as an ideal context in which to study the phenomenon of muting studies (e.g. Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Meares et al., 2004). International organizations necessarily place certain cultural groups over others, but research focusing on the effects of that structuring is lacking.

Moreover, current scholarship has also failed to address the role that organizational culture plays in the dynamics of international organizations. Organizational cultures, because they are constructed by the implicit norms, values, and artifacts of the workers within organizations (Harris & Nelson, 2008), take on, at some level, the characteristics of the national culture in which they are formed and, thus, may play directly into the silencing or empowering of “other” cultural groups (Hofstede, 1984). Hence, at sites of international organizations, the interactions of national cultures in organizations create serious implications for the development of organizational cultures and, correspondingly, for the relative empowerment or oppression of



organizational members. Oppressed organizational members attempt to resist those in control through both subtle and overt tactics (Mumby, 2005).

### *Justification*

Regardless of the fact that international organizations face unique issues created by spanning national boundaries, much general organizational communication theory still holds true in the international arena. Perrow (1986) indicated that organizations are tools over which members of the organization constantly vie for control. Those in control of an organization typically introduce a particular value system throughout the organization via structural, procedural, and normative changes. Policies that focus on improved product quality or formalizing communication channels, for instance, are indicative of a broader value structure embedded in the organization (O'Reilly, 1989). Given that each branch created by an international organization introduces a new population to the cultural norms of the organization and its home country, each branch presumably disseminates the culture of origin's values to all employees. For the majority of international organizations then, those employees brought in from the host country ideally adopt the cultural norms of the organization so that there is little disruption between the branches and the home branch, leading toward the implementation of what Yip (1992) termed a universal corporate culture.

However, the employees of the host country constitute a group of their own, one that equally vies for control of the organizational space in which they reside. Thus, the "universal corporate culture" is disrupted in international organizations because of their reliance upon other national cultures with inherently different value structures. The organizational culture at the site of an international organization has not been considered

in this light. Research into the contested ground of sites of international organizations is therefore necessary to fully explicate the experiences of different cultural groups within international organizations and to identify the type of organizational culture present at those sites. Hofstede (1985) described the ways that “cultural misfit” is a natural occurrence in an international organization:

An African doctor (family model) comes to work in a Belgian hospital (pyramid, hierarchical bureaucracy). He will expect structures to yield to the personal authority of bosses and it will take a long time before he understands the rigidity of the Belgian bureaucracy. A German (well-oiled machine) is appointed to run a civil engineering project in Indonesia (family). He will create rules and procedures, only to discover that nobody keeps them and that his personal presences is what gets the job done. (p. 353)

Differing nationalities represented within a workforce may therefore become a serious concern for those who work in or with an organization, particularly because the organizational culture may seem impenetrable or at odds with one’s expectations. It may well be the case that the organizational culture of any branch is similar to or the same as that of the broader organization; however, it is also reasonable to expect that the interaction of different national cultures oriented towards the same organizational goal creates an opportunity for hybridity to spawn. In a broad sense, hybridity refers to the mixture of supposedly different phenomena to create a new whole (Pieterse, 2003). For this study, hybridity is concerned with the ways “cultures are shaped and reshaped through interactions with other cultures in which people reflectively or unreflectively insert new meanings into their own (already hybrid) cultural understandings” (Shimoni &

Bergmann, 2006, p. 78). The result of hybridization in an organization would presumably be the creation of a unique organizational culture in which national cultural characteristics are blended, one that silences an unexpected group, or one that is open and accepting of all members. Regardless of the outcome, organizations that fail to recognize how the interplay of national cultures affects organizational culture may face serious dilemmas, such as managers and employees becoming unable to communicate clearly with one another, leading to organizational turmoil (Varner , 2000), or the loss of niche markets due to flawed business strategy (Perkins, 1999). Capital structure (Chui et al., 2002) and group performance (Gibson, 1999) can also falter when national culture is ignored or given only surface level attention by international organizations.

As globalization continues into the twenty-first century, the prevalence of international organizations will only increase because globalization involves, “the widening, deepening, and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life” (Held et al., 1999, p. 5). Current organizations that intend to grow, even though limited by economic and social conditions, will inevitably face the choice to become internationalized or succumb to isolation and stagnation. Thus, as international organizations grow in number and influence, studies centering on their methods and manners of operation become increasingly critical to organizational communication.

### *Examination*

Research focusing on the interplay of national and organizational culture within international organizations is a necessity for contemporary organizations that hope to attain stability and profitability in international markets (Adler, 2002). Current

scholarship on the issue has left a number of potentially important variables unexamined, such as the number of members of a cultural group versus their structural position within the organization. Scholarship has also raised an equally significant number of questions that should be answered, such as how organizational cultures are affected by internal cultural tensions. The current study aimed to uncover the tensions present at the site of an international organization and the resulting organizational culture that developed from those tensions by examining the phenomenon of group muting.

An international logistics and transport company with branches in Japan, Europe, and the U.S. was selected as the case for this study. The company's primary function is to ship parts for a large Japanese automobile manufacturer to different locations around the globe. Two of the company's U.S. branches, both located on the West Coast, provided a potential subject pool of over 120 individuals representing at least three different nationalities. Interviews were conducted with 36 of these employees, representing a number of differing nationalities as well as a number of different structural positions within the company. The composition of this company was particularly valuable because the divisions between organizational power and national origin were strikingly clear, as members of the Japanese culture were clustered in management positions and other cultural members were clustered below. The interviews were semi-structured, including a number of pre-formatted questions while allowing the researcher to delve into particular answers or generate new questions if necessary. The interviews focused upon engaging the participants in a discussion regarding both the organizational culture of the sites at which they operate and the influence of national culture both on their perceptions of internal communication dynamics and power structures.

Certain interview questions were drawn from muted group theory in order to determine the level of voice each group maintains, if any types of muting exist, and which culture is dominant in the organizational culture. This theory provided a useful framework for examining the interplay of multiple national cultures within the same organization and the organizational culture that develops from them because of its cultural roots and its emphasis on power. Muted group theory emphasizes that power structures are called into existence through the negotiation of voice (Ardener, 1978). Muted group theory will be discussed in later sections in greater detail. Questions regarding organizational culture were drawn from literature regarding organizational culture and international organizations. This blending provided an ideal foundation upon which to begin examining the internationalization of organizational culture. Literature in these areas will be reviewed in detail in order to accurately position this research.

Analysis of the interviews was divided between thematic analysis and the constant comparison technique of qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis is appropriate for this study because it places, “an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured . . . in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). Thematic analysis was selected due to its applicability to the types of answers and stories shared by participants in describing their ability to express themselves. It also provided the researcher an ability to compare the results of answers to particular questions. This research highlights the variety of variables that influence the context of organizational cultures of international organizations. Though conclusions, implications, and recommendations will be drawn for international organizations in a broad sense, no attempt at true generalization will be

made from these findings. These two specific types of qualitative data analysis will provide the most useful means of revealing findings from interview responses and generating meaningful results.

## Literature Review

### *Organizational Culture vs. National Culture*

Organizational cultural research is primarily concerned with identifying the ways in which members of an organization communicatively establish a shared cultural context with one another that is singular to an organization (Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005; Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000). Organizational culture is constructed by the actions, practices, stories, and artifacts that gain symbolic meaning to organizational members. Employees act and interact in a manner dictated by culturally sanctioned norms. When employees are unified and aligned by an organization's culture, the organization gains power and direction (Harris & Nelson, 2008). Sorenson (2002) explains, "the performance benefits of a strong corporate culture are thought to derive from three consequences of having widely shared and strongly held values and norms: enhanced coordination within the firm, improved goal alignment between the firm and its members, and increased employee effort" (p. 70). Positive organizational cultures are attributed with providing a great deal of competitive advantage to companies (Martin-de-Castro, Lopez, Lopez-Saez, & Alama-Salzar, 2006). Organizations which are attentive to the type of organizational cultures they develop and that attempt to promote positive and open environments tend to be more successful over time than organizations that pay little regard to the culture which they manifest (Barney, 1986).

Cartwright and Cooper (1993) referred to organizational culture as the “social glue” that joins individuals and establishes a high level of organizational cohesiveness (p. 60). The culture of an organization is revealed through a number of levels, some of which are clear and some of which are more subtle. Each level plays a significant role in creating and reinforcing the others. Artifacts are the structures of organizations and behaviors of organizational members that are easily observed. Values, which are also explicit, are the philosophies and views of the organization. Finally, assumptions are the unconscious beliefs and feelings that motivate members’ actions (Schein, 2003). These three levels of organizational culture operate together, and are negotiated by the interactions and actions of organizational members. In that way, they become shared across the organization. A number of scholars have developed models for analyzing culture, all of which apply to organizational culture, including Hofstede (1985), Schwartz (1994), and House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004).

An important caveat regarding organizational culture, however, is that large organizations may develop numerous subcultures that reflect the overall corporate culture but which differ in critical and unique ways (Schein, 2005). Various branches or departments of large companies, for instance, may develop their own cultures that maintain some elements of the larger organizational culture, but that are specific to the task, context, or membership of the group. Subcultures that develop may be beneficial for the organization due to the fact that they offer members specific “places” in which they feel comfortable and may even allow the organization to better adapt itself to external occurrences (Boisner & Chatman, 2003). At the same time, such subcultures may be negative, as they can lead to internal dissent and turmoil with other subcultures,



fracturing the organization (Martin, 1992). Research into organizational subcultures has generally not addressed how conflict between differing national cultural values may impact the subculture that develops at an international organization site, either pushing it further away from the broader organizational culture or drawing it closer.

Organizational culture is therefore complicated by national culture. Given that international organizations are becoming increasingly prevalent in the modern business environment, the concern for native culture cannot be overstated. The inability to navigate native culture can lead to serious side effects for any type of organization, political, social, or corporate, as valuable insights into practices appropriate to the organizational environment are ignored (Kishe, 2003). Indeed, communication difficulties often arise because of cultural differences, and, as a result, there is, “a distinct lack of timely information sharing, derogatory name calling of cultural others, inability to enter a new market, loss of market share, [and] lack of trust between . . . cultural counterparts” (Lipp & Clarke, 2000, p. 12). Typically, national and organizational cultures tend to, on some level, mirror one another. Individuals of a particular cultural origin prefer business forms that reflect their cultural expectations and norms (Beamer & Varner, 2001). These preferences manifest themselves in a variety of forms, including the recognition of holidays, labor practices, and number of hours in a work week (Kwantes & Boglarsky, 2007). In a broader sense, U.S. organizations often maintain a culture that focuses on competition and individual advancement, reminiscent of the individualism found in U.S. culture, while Chinese organizations mirror the collectivist nature of Asian cultures by emphasizing quality and consensus (Hofstede et al., 1990; Ni, 2006).

Hofstede (1984) was one of the first to formulate a model for analyzing national cultures and the organizational cultures that tend to result from them. His initial work identified four dimensions upon which culture of any type could be placed. Specifically, Hofstede (1984) was concerned with using power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity to describe a national culture. Power distance refers to the level of acceptance among organizational members that power is unevenly distributed. Uncertainty avoidance is concerned with how comfortable individuals are with the unknown. Individualism focuses upon the level of affiliation cultural members express with groups for identification. Masculinity centers upon the degree to which a culture places emphasis upon characteristics that are typically considered to be masculine (such as competitiveness). The levels of each dimension will change relative to the amount of verbal and nonverbal communication necessary to operate within a culture making these dynamics context specific. Hofstede (2001) later added a fifth dimension labeled long versus short term orientation to describe the strategic mentality of a culture. This model allowed Hofstede (2001) to conclude, for example, that nations with extreme differences in power distance (such as the United States and China) would generate implicitly different organizational structures, thereby fostering implicitly different organizational cultures. Though Hofstede (2001) does not consider these differences to be insurmountable, they are considered the foundation of any number of potential problems faced by international organizations. Culture, in Hofstede's (2001) work is treated as voice, as it is inextricably linked to the manner in which individuals express themselves. This research aims to identify what problems might arise when national cultures interact

within an international organization and to ascertain the degree to which organizational culture is affected or affects those tensions.

That is not to say that organizational cultures in one country will be identical with one another; indeed, organizational cultures may vary widely within single cultural settings within a nation or region (Brannen, 1994). This is because organizational cultures, despite manifesting themselves within national cultural settings, remain highly dependant upon the interactions of all organizational members. Moreover, Tsui, Nifadkar, and Ou (2007) indicated that even the term “national culture” can be problematic as it implies a level of generalizability across ethnic or racial borders that does not exist. With that qualification in mind, however, it is possible to treat members of various nations as members of a common national culture in international organization research through polyontextualization, a process of incorporating a number of cultural contexts to create a holistic lens through which to perceive a phenomenon (Von Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004). National cultures, though comprised of members of a number of different cultures, maintain an identity and a generally identifiable set of values and ideals. Organizational cultures within one country include broader elements of the national culture in which they exist that may not even be recognizable to the members of those organizations until they clash with another culture’s value systems. Such clashes, however, are becoming more common within organizations because of the tendency of modern organizations to internationalize (Kompier, 2006; Schuler & Jackson, 2006). That clash, though studied in terms of its effect upon productivity or sustained organizational expansion, has not been fully examined for its effects upon dynamics between organizational members and, thus, organizational culture as a whole.

Two perspectives on organizational culture are valuable when considering how local cultures impact organizations: integration and differentiation. Myerson and Martin (1987) explained that the integration perspective treats organizational culture as an “integrating mechanism or social or normative glue that holds together a potentially diverse group of organizational members” (p. 624). Organizational culture is seen, from this perspective, as a force that unites organizational members from various national cultures by circumventing individual or cultural differences. The differentiation perspective, however, provides a framework through which organizational culture is viewed as a blend of a multitude of national cultures. National cultures may impact individual branches or departments or may play a role in shaping the larger, dominant organizational culture (Alavi, Kayworth, & Leidner, 2006; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Sakmann, 1992). The first perspective is useful for treating organizational culture as something over which companies can exert control; the second perspective treats organizational culture as a less intentionally alterable phenomenon. Research into both perspectives, however, has failed to make clear which national culture plays the most critical role in defining the organizational culture; moreover, both imply that internal cultural conflicts can exist, but fail to explicate how those conflicts are managed and the ramifications that management may have on members of different national cultures within the organization, two primary concerns of the current study.

Organizations which deal with multiple national cultures are referred to by a host of terms in organizational communication and business literature, such as multicultural, multinational, and international (Mathews, 2006). These terms, however, are distinct terms and deserve clarification. Multicultural organizations tend to operate in one

country, but maintain a culturally diverse workforce. Multinational organizations refer to organizations that predominantly represent one national culture while conducting business with a number of other national cultures. International organizations are organizations that represent and are comprised of two or more national cultures and that must find ways to negotiate the needs of those cultures, despite the fact that one national culture retains structural power (Stohl, 2001). The current research project is first and foremost concerned with those organizations that would be termed international organizations, as those organizations face a great deal of internal conflict generated by the tension between organizational and national cultures. The organizational members present at the various sites of international organizations are forced to negotiate the differences between the host culture and the culture of origin.

The specific obstacles faced by international organizations and their populations have received little attention despite the fact that those obstacles are based upon implicit communicative structures. Although there are numerous studies of intercultural communication in organizational settings, these examinations fail to consider the impact of a specific organization's culture on individuals not originally from the hegemonic background of the culture's majority. For instance, Beamer and Varner (2001) made clear that when U.S. organizations enter Asian countries, a clash must be expected between the fundamentally different ideologies embedded within each national culture unless accommodations for each are made. However, the research stops short of addressing the internal conflicts that develop as members of the host population are brought in by members of the culture of origin to serve as the majority of the workforce. However, even in international organizations that do not face such pronounced

differences between two national cultures, problems integrating organizational cultures may arise. Schneider (1988) argued that many international organizations attempt to implement their corporate culture as a means of control and coordination in order to resolve such problems, but often fail to consider the local cultures in which a branch or subsidiary is located. The results of such efforts can interfere with any number of organizational policies and systems and can lead to ethical conflicts that employees find difficult to resolve (Mattson & Stage, 2001).

Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) pointed out that much of the pressure to globalize is created by the potential that exists for managers of international organizations to gain experience and credibility by becoming exposed to various cultural perspectives, thereby improving organizational performance. Yet, in order to attain that result, they must be fully aware of both the organizational culture they bring with them and the national culture into which they enter. Thus, although national and organizational cultures are separate constructs, they are related along both attitudinal and behavioral lines (Weber, Shenkar, & Raveh, 1996). That relationship necessitates that the two be examined with regard to the effects they have upon one another. Research to this point has primarily considered how organizational cultures reflect national cultures (Ni, 2006) or fail to recognize the need for cultural awareness thereby limiting managerial influence (Ralston, Holt, Terpstra, & Kai-Cheng, 2008), but little attention has been given to the ways that organizational cultures are impacted by internal dynamics of multiple national cultures vying for control.

Newman and Nollen (1996) demonstrated that organizations are more efficient and effective when national culture and management practices correlate with one another.

They concluded that organizations should adapt the actions of management to the national culture in which they are situated, rather than approaching international management with a “one size fits all” mindset. In a related study, Pothukuchi et al. (2002) surveyed international joint ventures and examined cultural distance based upon both national and organizational cultures. Their results revealed that negative effects related to cultural distance originate more from differences in organizational culture distance than national culture. Hence, their results revolve around the notion that organizations must attempt to adapt organizational cultures to national cultures in order to be successful in international ventures. Their study, however, fails to address the differences between joint ventures and single organizations, as well as the comparison between organizational structures and membership makeup. In short, though the data is important in indicating why international organizations should be considerate of national cultures in their memberships, further research is necessary to illuminate the results of struggles between national cultures operating together in various ratios towards a common organizational goal.

In research conducted by Salk and Brannen (2000), national culture was revealed to play an important role in the relationships of international teams, though that role was not as significant as initially presumed. The authors argued that team members with differing national backgrounds might rely on areas of similarity (such as education or occupation) in order to find common ground upon which to base the organizational environment. Thus, the value of an organizational culture that has, in part, been generated at the site of an international organization may rest in its ability to provide organizational members a means of overcoming the barriers erected by national culture differences. In

that regard, identifying how such a culture is created and its value to organizational members is a necessary step in extending this research line.

Alkhazraji et al. (1997) conducted one of the few extensive studies investigating the experiences of Muslim immigrants in U.S. organizations. The results indicated that Muslim immigrants tended to adopt the organizational culture of the U.S. organization, despite its individualistic tendencies, if there were no perceived problems or negative elements in the culture. The study did not, however, examine the tensions experienced by Muslim immigrants in the process of determining how to become a member of the organization and what concessions, if any, they were forced to make. Though the present study did not attempt to reveal the stages of this tension, noting the tensions that develop during acculturation was an implicit part of identifying group muting. The study also focused on a U.S. organization within U.S. national settings, limiting its usefulness in understanding the importance of the where national cultures reside in the organizational structure of an international organization. Still, the data does reveal that organizational and native culture interplay on some level and, for that reason, must be investigated further.

Native cultures are clearly influenced by organizational cultures due to the impact of globalization. Held et. al. (1999) argued that while national cultures have for centuries dominated the political and economic arenas, the digital revolution, coupled with the global expansion of industry, has increasingly made it possible for a homogenizing influence to impact native cultures. Kim (2003) furthered this analysis, reporting in a study of a multinational Korean public relations organization that in global interactions, Korean cultural norms were made subservient to the cultural norms of the locale in which



they were operating and the organizational culture of the company. Thus, the Korean national culture and organizational culture of the company came into direct conflict when placed into an international setting.

Kim's (2003) analysis, however, failed to explicate how the organizational culture developed from the cultural tensions experienced both by Korean members and members representing other nationalities and how power dynamics were affected as a result. This influence is, at best, questionable, as Ladegaard's (2007) research indicated that native cultures still maintain dominance over cultures that are introduced through organizations and globalization. Adler's (2002) position confirmed this line of reasoning, as she noted that while many managers of international corporations believe organizational culture will moderate national culture in the work environment, ethnicity is still brought to the workplace by individuals. International organizations carry organizational culture and home cultures only so far before the host culture's influence prevents those cultural influences from spreading any further. Thus, it is clear that both national and organizational cultures interact, and, in that light, it becomes necessary to question how that interaction plays out, how organizational members are affected, and how organizational sites (which become zones of conflict) are perceived by members at those sites.

Because international organizations are populated by members of differing national cultures, the tensions that arise between those groups have considerable implications for the power dynamics of the organization. Factors such as lack of commonality in language, values, and perspective draw this research towards muted group theory as a necessity for articulating how cultural groups negotiate voice within an

organization. In order to fully understand the relevance of group voice in the development of organizational culture, it is important to briefly discuss the ways groups function in organizations and how muting begins to occur. Organizations are composed of a multitude of internal groups. Groups allow organizational members to become acculturated to organizational norms and to find a means of identification within the larger organizational context (Putnam & Stohl, 1990). These groups may be constructed by the explicit instructions of the organization, by the communicative choices and practices of organizational members, or by the ethnic or national identities of employees and managers. All groups operate within the same organizational cultural framework and, thus, have different levels of power, freedom, and voice. For international organizations, the issue of internal groups established by common national or ethnic backgrounds is of particular importance. International organizations establish branches in foreign countries and typically rely upon host countries to provide workforces for those branches.

Concurrently, such organizations may also export organizational members from home countries to serve as managers or technical advisers at international sites in an attempt to maintain the uniformity and purpose of the company. Thus, at sites of international organizations, the majority of employees may be of a particular nationality or ethnicity while members of management are of another (Shukla & Gubellini, 2005), an issue that makes it difficult to determine which groups maintain a greater amount of voice at a site.

### *Voice*

Cultural groups, separated both by organizational power structures and cultural barriers, operate in a unique tension, as the managing nationality is structurally “empowered” despite the fact that such a group exists as the numerical minority at the

organizational site (Childress, 2000). Questions of discursive empowerment arise from this potential conflict. Empowerment, though a contested subject in the field of organizational communication, is best defined for this study as, “an active, participatory process through which individuals, organizations, and communities gain greater control, efficacy, and social justice” (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 129). This is closely related to the notion of organizational power. In this research project, structural power is treated as rational power, power that is organizationally provided for the direction and use of resources, and is discussed in terms of managerial practices and policies within the organization being studied. The negotiation of power among organizational groups, however, assumes a more postmodern approach to organizational power, as power is perceived to be perpetually discursively contested and shifting (Dougherty & Kramer, 2005). Empowerment then is more closely related to the postmodern conceptualization of organizational power; however, both forms of power are necessary in order to compare the ways that the organization sanctions power with the ways that power is perceived to exist by employees.

For that reason, the “voice” of various groups becomes an important concept to consider when examining the manner in which these sites operate as it signifies attempts to articulate an empowered identity. Voice has remained a conceptually significant concept in organizational and group communication because of its critical link to the fundamentals of human communication and because of its value in describing oppression and resistance. Voice has received attention from a number of scholars, all of whom have defined voice in subtly different but significant ways, including as a means of identity construction and resistance against dominant groups (e.g. Hymes, 1996; Bourdieu, 1991;

Foucault, 1982). One of the most significant initial definitions of voice arose from Hirschman's (1970) framework of exit, voice, and loyalty, which referred to voice as, "any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs" (p. 30). For Hirschman, voice is an active means of initiating change for groups or individuals in organizations that perceive themselves to be oppressed or silenced.

This study is concerned with the relationship of voice to cultural constructs. For that reason, voice is often considered, "a trope that refers to the performance of culturally specific idioms and vocabularies" (Watts, 2001, p. 184). Individuals utilize voice to express their cultural identity and to engage in understanding the identities of others. Voice is, in that sense, both a collective and individualistic concept as it is largely composed of culturally bound themes. Perhaps more importantly, Watts (2001) noted, "Saying that persons or groups have 'voice' does not offer it as a unidirectional, primordial and autonomous projection . . . Rather, speakers can be endowed with 'voice' as a function of a public acknowledgement of the ethics of speaking and the emotions of others" (p. 185). In essence, though voice is on some level individually maintained and utilized, voice must also be recognized by others in order for it to be meaningful (Couldry, 2009). For the purposes of this study, the perceptions by cultural group members regarding whether or not their voice is acknowledged and accepted will be of particular importance.

Muted group theory relies upon the notion of voice to explain the silencing of cultural groups. Because muted group theory was initially developed in the field of anthropology, voice has been characterized in anthropological research as largely reliant on cultural power relationships. Giulianotti (2005) explained, "theorization of voice must

recognize the structured power relations involving dominant and dominated groups” (p. 343). Communication research focused on muted groups (e.g. Allison & Hibler, 2004; Meares et. al, 2004) has relied heavily upon this argument and has extended it by demonstrating how voice is articulated and negotiated in organizational setting. Voice may be used both reactively and proactively by groups attempting to gain recognition. This study continues in that vein, using perceptions of cultural voice as a means of evaluating the relative openness of the organizational culture and the implicit power structures that have developed as a result. Identifying if a group’s voice is in some way silenced or tokenized is not merely important because of its critical value; rather, it is of pivotal importance in determining the ability of a site to achieve long-term stability and success. Muted group theory thus serves an ideal theoretical lens to utilize when analyzing international workforces because it helps reveal how power dynamics may shift towards or away from a group based upon discursive practices and voice.

### *Muted Group Theory*

Muted group theory is premised upon the notion that organizations and societies privilege the voices, perspectives, and values of certain groups above others (Meares et. al, 2004). Edwin Ardener (1975) was one of the first to identify group muting taking place, noting in a study of Bakweri women that communication systems in masculine societies tend to favor masculine codes and values, inevitably limiting the ability of women to articulate their concerns. Uniquely feminine beliefs and perspectives were not included in the construction of Bakweri communicative systems, and women were rendered inarticulate as a result. A group is therefore “muted” when, “lived experiences are not represented in dominant structures” (Orbe, 1998, p. 4). Dominant groups establish

the rules and systems of accepted discourse, leaving minority groups without equal representation (Meares, 2003). These groups are thus marginalized due to their deviance from what the dominant groups have established as prototypical (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Inarticulateness is forced upon groups as they are forced to the margins of societies and organizations in an attempt to silence them. Muting then, according to Gal (1994), indicates the lack of a “separate, socially significant discourse” (p. 408). For organizational communication, the issue of muting therefore becomes a significant concern in organizational populations, where group identifications may lead to certain members being excluded from or silenced by the organizational culture.

This problem is confounded by the fact that minority groups are then expected to use the discursive structures of the dominant group to express a limited or controlled form of voice. Houston and Kramarae (1991) pointed out in their discussion of the silencing of women’s voices that, “men are in charge of legitimatizing words – through control of grammar rules, dictionaries, most publishing, even when women, as school teachers, carry out the dictates” (p. 390). Though this form of expression can serve to empower minority groups by providing them a level of voice, the dominant discursive structures are consistently reinforced through both overt and subtle methods. Thus, the inability to find a distinct and empowered voice leaves minority groups implicitly disadvantaged and ultimately makes resisting against extant power structures difficult (E. Ardener, 1975).

Henley and Kramarae (1994) confirmed the notion that dominant groups maintain discursive and ideological power, thereby muting subordinate groups. In their analysis of communication failures between men and women, the researchers found that the

interpretation of the more powerful figure, generally the male, became the accepted interpretation of the communicative event. The authors concluded that this occurred because male perceptions of reality were given primacy by discursive systems. Women, who were considered to be the suppressed class, had their opinions muted by the members of the dominant class, regardless of the relative veracity of each party's claim. This analysis confirms Wall and Gannon-Leary (1999) assertion that, "Women's voices trying to express women's experiences are rarely heard because they must be expressed in a language system not designed for their interests and concerns" (p. 24). Women, as a muted group, are often unable to attain the same level of credibility as males because of the ways social systems construct their discourse. In the same way, organizations privilege the voices of certain groups (generally those in positions of power) above others. However, at the site of an international organization, where the membership is primarily from the host country but is structurally not empowered, the ability to identify a muted group becomes complicated but necessary in order to avoid the negative consequences of flawed cultural consideration mentioned previously.

Shirley Ardener (1978) pointed out that muting may take place in myriad ways. Although muting may indicate that groups are provided a reduced ability to express themselves, in some contexts it leads to the actual silencing of those groups. For instance, Greek women are considered a threat to social structure if they speak when it is deemed inappropriate. Thus, not only is their means of expression controlled, but their ability to express themselves is severely limited and, "'muting' becomes total to the point of silence" (S. Ardener, 1978, p. 23). Marginalized groups have little or no voice and lack representation in the symbolic linguistic structures the dominant group controls (Allison

& Hibbler, 2004). The level of influence that the dominant group is able to exert over marginalized groups grows increasingly powerful over time as the rules embedded in linguistic structures become more rigid. Thus, language becomes a critical means in ascertaining which groups are silenced in organizations, especially when those groups are made up of different national cultures.

Initially, Kramarae (1981) asserted that language was dichotomized between the public and private spheres; men controlled the important public sphere, and women controlled the insignificant private sphere, a division that purportedly masked the effects of muting. However, because of the critique leveled at the public/private sphere literature, that the two spheres are not strictly separated, that account of muting has been rejected as too simplistic (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). Muted groups therefore experience muting not as a singular phenomenon, but rather as a continuous process that changes over time. Moreover, muting does not simply occur within singular cultures or nations; indeed, intercultural muting is possible particularly because different cultures prioritize information and values in different ways, creating unique frameworks for interpretation (Shukla & Gubellini, 2005). In organizations, those cultural frameworks become implicit pieces of the organizational culture (Ni, 2006) and, thus, may well perpetuate any muting that takes place by representing one national culture more than others.

Four specific theoretical premises underlie muted group theory. First, all societies are composed of groups that have differing perceptions of the world. These perceptions are based upon the various individual experiences of the members of those groups (Meares, 2003). Social groups are often distinguished by ethnic, cultural, gender, or socio-economic differences as these variables serve as identification cues for individuals.



Second, certain groups attain privilege over other groups, placing them at the top of a hierarchical system. That system reifies the perspective and discourse of those dominant groups, leading to the establishment of a proper social “language.” This tenet is particularly concerned with the power of “naming” assumed by dominant groups. Groups that name utilize their perspectives when creating those names, an act that necessarily suppresses the perspectives of others (Wood, 2005). Third, the linguistic system of the dominant groups fails to represent the experiences of subordinate groups, rendering subordinate groups “muted.” Muting minority groups, however, “does not refer to absence of voice but to distortion because the language the subordinate group use[s] is derived from the dominant group’s perception of reality” (Cowan, 2007, p. 11). Fourth, although difficult, resistance and change are possible for muted groups. Despite the fact that there are, “dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structure within it” (E. Ardener, 1975, p. 20), muted groups can challenge the dominant structure and create spaces to insert their own voice through techniques such as creating new terms, starting presses, and taking control of language (Houston & Kramarae, 1991). Resistance strategies are perhaps the most critical element of muted group theory as they are both representative of the fact that muting is indeed occurring and are demonstrations of the self-perceptions of groups. For the purposes of this study, resistance strategies will prove useful in research design and data analysis.

Colfer’s (1983) ethnographic study of three sets of “unequals” made great strides in demonstrating the validity of the premises of muted group theory. The first case examined rural and urban citizens in Iran. The second case studied women and men in a small U.S. city. The final case analyzed scientists from both the hard and soft sciences. In

all three cases, Colfer (1983) found “inarticulateness,” as the groups with greater power in each setting limited the free expression of the members of subordinate groups.

Dominant group members were able to comfortably express ideas and concepts while minority group members felt restrained and spoke in ways that reflected that restraint. In that regard, language, according to muted group theory, is, “social behavior, reflective of social values and status positions within a culture” (Devine, 1994, p. 229). Subordination to other groups occurs because of an inability to articulate a position within the social or organizational structure imposed upon marginalized groups. Thus, marginalized groups are forced to operate within structures that fail to reflect their values unless they are able to identify effective means of resistance.

### *Resistance Strategies*

Resistance remains a central tenet of muted group theory. Bowes and Domokos (1996) claimed that some of the most powerful tools muted groups have to oppose repression are self-empowerment strategies. Their study of Pakistani women indicated that, despite the fact that the positioning of groups and their voices may be ingrained in the social system, muted groups desire to be heard and can find moments to resist the power of dominant groups. The Pakistani women faced muting in a variety of ways, ranging from being forced to remain physical silence in front of men, to being told they were speaking out of place, to being denied health care, further indicating the dynamic nature of the muting phenomenon. However, the desire to resist remained important, and, although these groups may be portrayed as disruptive and hostile by dominant groups when their voices are raised, empowerment strategies may become powerful methods for allowing muted groups to be heard. Bowes and Domokos (1996) did make an important

point for researchers utilizing muted group theory: the researcher must be aware that their work may benefit them far more than the subservient group, and the goal of alleviating oppression must be kept in mind.

The notion of resistance is closely related to Bowers and Ochs (1971) description of agitation and control, which focused upon the rhetoric of protest groups. Brimeyer, Eaker, and Clair (2004), describing this work, claimed that, “agitation rhetoric is used by a group that has a grievance with no means of resolution inside the common constraints of society” (p. 52). Similarly, the resistance strategies of muted groups serve as means of presenting dissension within a cultural context that does not allot power to a particular group. Groups that are muted act in opposition to groups in control by engaging in some type of agitation. Bowers and Ochs (1971) categorize the rhetoric of agitation as falling into nine categories, including tactics such as petition of the establishment and polarization, and position that rhetoric against the rhetoric of control imposed by a dominant group. In this study, resistance strategies drawn from muted group literature can be considered elements of a rhetoric of agitation, as groups attempt to disrupt the control of others within an organization. Though their tactics are often not as overt as those depicted by Bowers and Ochs (1971) because of the restrictions inherently imposed upon individuals by organizations, the struggle for marginalized groups to gain voice in organizations forces them to employ rhetorical strategies that act against the control imposed by dominant organizational groups.

Specifically, three concepts from Houston and Kramarae (1991) must be elaborated upon as means of better understanding resistance to muting: changing definitions, creating new terms, and operating in active groups. Although these three

concepts are broad, in many ways they become some of the few methods muted groups have to express their dissatisfaction and attempt to gain standing in cultural power structures. However, an important distinction must be made regarding the use of muted group resistance strategies as means of gaining voice within organizations. Though these strategies are labeled as resistive in muted group literature, their use in organizations may signify a reinforcement of identity rather than overt resistance against oppressive forces. Groups may use these strategies to exhibit voice without clearly opposing one empowered or oppressive group, a tactic that is vital in generating identity. Olson (2004) noted, “by locating voice, we can understand simultaneously an individual’s social, cultural, and political position . . . we can understand how individuals as social and cultural speaking subjects form their self-identities” (p. 5). This same rationale applies to analyzing the negotiation of voice among groups within organizations, as locating instances of voice enactment provides a means of recognizing that group’s existence and position. In short, the resistance strategies referred to in muted group research may serve as announcements of ethnic or national cultural identity in organizations, allowing groups to proactively engage in displaying voice while reducing the ability of other groups to silence them.

The strategy of redefinition is a prime example of how strategies of resistance may also serve as methods of reinforcing identity. Houston and Kramarae (1991) cited “patriarchy” as a word which was not created by women and was typically thought to be a concept abused by feminists; however, patriarchy was claimed by women and redefined to indicate the subservient roles women were expected to play to men, thus allowing the term to gain new significance. Similarly, in settings of potential organizational or cultural

muting, the ability to redefine culturally established terms or practices (or at least attempts to do so) represent the desire to gain or express voice. In that sense, redefinition may be resistive if it is directed at a particular oppressive force, as in the case of the term “patriarchy,” but if used in a broader sense, the strategy may simply serve as a means of bringing recognition to a group that perceives itself to be unnoticed or unheard.

Creating new terms falls in this same vein, as it refers to the power of “naming,” something ordinarily done by dominant groups. Atkins-Syre (2005) noted that naming, “allows us to define reality through language by acting as a filter through which we view the world . . . . It can de-emphasize the existence of something by not naming it . . . or it can define something into existence” (p. 9). Muted groups can attempt to assert themselves through naming. “Sexual harassment,” for instance, is a term that was created specifically to provide voice to a silenced group within organizations (Houston & Kramarae, 1991; Wood, 1992). Naming signifies a desire to gain or use power by a group. Identifying the different names members of different groups attribute to a given item or phenomenon is thus an effective means of noting resistance or identity reinforcement by national or ethnic cultural groups.

Finally, forming active groups can function as a means of resistance or identity reinforcement for muted groups. Meares et al. (2004) identified women in an organization who had formed a group in order to report on a superior. That group helped the women find voice and overcome organizational barriers. That group directed its existence against a clearly oppressive force with which its members dealt and was composed of members sharing a particular identity. Similarly, members of organizations who share national or ethnic cultural identity may actively form groups when the

opportunity arises. That group may, however, lack an explicitly resistive purpose and instead exist as a form of proactive resistance against muting. In other words, the formation of active groups based upon national or cultural identity in organizations could signify a groups desire to be identified by others as deserving of voice and empowerment. Thus, strategies of resistance, when used without explicit direction against oppressive forces in organizations, may serve as methods of identity establishment and as preventative measures aimed at preserving a given group's voice.

### *Muted Groups and Organizations*

The majority of studies dealing with muted group theory have centered upon gender (e.g. Domokos, 1996; Houston & Kramarae, 1991; Kramarae, 1981; Spender, 1980). However, muted group theory has been used in organizational settings to explain a number of communicative dynamics related to organizational groups, including ethnic and racial tensions, employee mistreatment, and acculturation and inclusion issues (e.g. Allison & Hibbler, 2004; Meares et. al, 2004; Meares, 2003; Orbe, 1998). Moreover, Kramrae (2005) argued that all forms of group struggle should be considered in muted group theory as differences must not be limited to gender or white and non-white, but rather must include subjectivity, experience, and a host of other factors. The emphasis muted group theory places on conceptualizations of power thus provides a valuable lens through which to view organizations, the tensions between the groups that comprise them, and the organizational cultures that come into existence as a result of those tensions.

In the many organizational studies, emphasis has been placed on the notion that groups in organizations are often defined by power relationships or individual similarity. As Lutgen-Sandvik (2003) noted the following:

For employees . . . the issue is whether workers can freely say what they want at any time or place, or whether they must reencode their thoughts to make them more acceptable and understood in the domain of work . . . organizational language is dominated by persons with access to structural (hierarchical) power (p. 476).

Organizational groups then inevitably fall into a hierarchical relationship that begins, as muted group theory argues, to privilege the voices of some above others. Those who are muted face a much more difficult organizational life than those who retain dominance and are forced to work for an organization that may be perceived as uncaring, flawed, or inconsiderate, characteristics that can lead to increased turnover and decreased productivity (Taplin & Winterton, 2007). The ramifications for both individual members and organizations as a whole can be profound, as the tensions developed begin to make it difficult for organizational goals to be reached, something current research has demonstrated (e.g. Allison & Hibbler, 2004). Research has stopped short of analyzing how organizational cultures are effected by or affect this process and how the composition of the organization contributes to muting.

For international organizations, the issue of muting becomes much more complex. Because the majority of the workforce at an international site is dominated by a different nationality than that of the home country (Barkema & Vermeulen, 1998; Hofstede, 1991), the questions of whether or not a dominant group exists and which group is the dominant

group must be raised. Though managers clearly retain structural power, the discursive influence of an organizational workforce must not be overlooked. Murphy (1998) indicated that workforces generate their own meanings in private, a form of resistance from management that allows employees to enact control. Specifically, “the interactions, stories, myths, and rituals in which employees participate beyond the direct surveillance of power holders” can create subtle conflict with managerial expectations, providing employees with a level of power the organization does not assign (Murphy, 1998, p. 500). For international organizations, the muting of a cultural group may thus relate to managers or employees.

More importantly, those same elements Murphy (1998) depicts are generally considered to be foundational elements of organizational culture (Harris & Nelson, 2008; Modaff, DeWine, & Butler, 2008). Current research has failed to address the notion that if the national culture of the workforce contributes more to the organizational culture of a site than the national culture of management, then management begins to reside in a subservient organizational position. In that regard, the distinctions between rational and postmodern conceptualizations of organizational power and empowerment become important for analyzing international organizations. Tsui et al. (2007) touched on this concept in their analysis of directions for international organization and cross-cultural research, “the experiences of the individualists in a context of predominantly collectivists may be quite different . . . . Future theory development could focus on the asymmetric experience of people whose values differ from those of others in a group” (p. 465). Research is on the verge of explaining those experiences, but has yet to delve into how



the structure of international organizations, which establishes managers from the home country as an empowered minority, influences those experiences.

Typical conceptualizations of organizational power structures would indicate that members of management always retain organizational power (Jermier, Knight, & Nord, 1994); however, an examination of the discursive positioning of national cultures at the site of an international organization is necessary to investigate the possibility that this is not the case in order to reveal who is muted and the organizational culture that is established by the discursive struggle. Organizations may provide token gestures of voice to employees, such as awards, parties, and titles, in attempts to be ethical that complicate this question (Roussouw & Vuuren, 2003). However, the opportunity to uncover how and to what extent various national cultural groups are able to influence organizational culture and the level of voice of other cultural groups needs to be taken to advance current scholarship.

### *Research Questions*

Prior research has indicated that national and organizational cultures are important considerations for international organizations. The amount of influence one has over the other in an organizational context, however, remains in question. Coupled with the fact that current research on muted group theory has only begun to branch into the ways in which power structures mute various groups within organizations, analyzing a site of an international organization could provide pivotal data regarding how employees and managers of international organizations negotiate cultural tensions. In this study, qualitative methods of investigation will be utilized to uncover how national cultural

groups engage in muting behaviors at sites of international organizations. Thus, the following research question is proposed.

RQ1: In what ways is “voice” negotiated by national cultural groups at the site of an international organization?

Because the results of that muting determine who is empowered at the site of an international organization, the organizational culture of that site is highly dependant on the national cultural group that is in a position of dominance. That organizational culture may or may not reflect the corporate culture that the management of the company hopes to instill. Thus, the following two research questions are proposed dealing with organizational culture.

RQ2: How do organizational members of national cultural groups perceive organizational culture at the site of an international organization?

RQ3: How do organizational members of national cultural groups perceive organizational culture developing at the site of an international organization?

## Methods

### *Research Context*

The organization that agreed to participate in this research project is an international logistics organization based in Japan that employs around 1000 people. The company has locations in the U.S. and Europe, along with its main Japanese location. The company is involved in the global automobile industry and is therefore heavily reliant upon its international branches. Because the company is spread so widely across the globe, it serves as an ideal example of the type of international organization for this research project. Moreover, the workforces of its U.S. sites blend organizational members from across any number of nationalities and ethnicities. Access was granted to two of the U.S. branches. The first was the company's U.S. headquarters in Anaheim, California, and the second was a worksite in Chino, California. Because the two are so close geographically (separated by less than 20 miles), the management at the headquarters also serves as the management of the Chino worksite. Though the two branches serve different functions, the workforces interact on a regular basis and frequently work together to complete certain projects. The two sites combine to total around 120 organizational members. The majority of those members are located at the Chino branch.

The company's Japanese members generally operate in upper management positions, with members of other nationalities stratified below. The workforce is somewhat separated by linguistic barriers, particularly with regards to the ability to speak

either English or Spanish which are the two most common languages spoken at the U.S. locations. This population therefore creates an ideal research subject pool, as members representing different national or ethnic cultures are stratified across differing levels of prescribed organizational power, positioning them to provide meaningful insight regarding organizational culture and organizational muting. Because the purpose of the company is to transport parts for automobiles, the day-to-day tasks of the company leave little room for employees to engage in creativity. Jobs at the two locations include sorting parts, inventory check, boxing materials, and loading. The majority of supervisors and managers are responsible for simply ensuring that operations run smoothly rather than formulating strategy or policy. In short, employees deal with little variety or imagination in their work lives.

The organization is highly aware of the multicultural nature of its workforce and the lack of excitement involved in most of the tasks undertaken by employees. The combination of these two variables has led the company to generate programs aimed at preventing conflicts that might arise if workers perceive tasks to become monotonous. The company is openly concerned with cultural awareness and sensitivity, and has implemented a number of methods to improve communication between and among the national and ethnic cultural groups. Upon hiring, employees are led through a cultural awareness training program. They are provided information on the company's beliefs regarding multiculturalism in the workplace and are provided any information they request dealing with particular national or ethnic cultures. The company produces literature in a variety of languages to ensure saturation of information throughout the workforce. The organization also sponsors parties and meetings at different times

throughout the year themed around a particular national or ethnic cultural groups heritage. The goal of these gatherings is to increase awareness of the multitude of cultures operating within the company and to ensure that those cultures are treated with respect.

### *Participants*

As noted, the workforce of the two sites totaled around 120 members. Employees from both sites were combined into one participant pool for use in this project. Interviews were conducted with 36 organizational members, though five interviews were not included either because of poor recording quality or language barriers. This sample was, by necessity, a convenience sample, as, “Convenience sampling involves drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate a study” (Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 78). This sample was sufficient to produce a generous amount of data from which to draw conclusions regarding organizational culture and muted group theory.

Because this study was concerned with intercultural interactions and tensions, the diversity of the sample was considered equally as important as the number of individuals interviewed. Interviews were titled numerically and then correlated with the demographic information provided by participants. Participants were asked to self-identify a culture (with no specification given beyond the term culture) of origin, the results of which are listed in the chart below. The cultures specified were correlated with the primary language spoken by those national cultures, unless otherwise indicated by interview participants.

**Table 1 – Demographic Data**

Self-Identified Culture	Primary Language			
	English	Spanish	Japanese	Other
Caucasian/White	****			
Hispanic/Latino(a)		*****		
El Salvador		**		
African American/Black	*****			
Irish	*			
Pacific Islander	*			
Indonesian				*
Japanese			****	
Mexican		***		
Asian				*
Filipino				*
British	*			
Lebanese				*
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

The population of the sample roughly reflected the cultural population of the organization, with the majority identifying with a Spanish-speaking national culture followed by those identifying with a primarily English-speaking culture. Japanese and “other” language cultures represented identical amounts in the sample, despite the fact that members of “other” language cultures account for more of the organizational population, according to interview respondents, than those identifying with the Japanese culture. Though it may be argued that the inclusion of multiple nationalities at the organizational site complicated the ability of the researcher to delve fully into the organizational culture, in reality, such population diversity only increased the appropriateness of this research to current models of international business (e.g. Childress, 2000) and provided an additional layer of depth to the study of communication at branches of international organizations.

Fifty-eight percent of interview participants (N=21) identified as male, and forty-two percent identified as female (N=15). Because muted group theory includes considerations of the impact past cultural experiences may have on willingness to express voice, an initial concern regarding the sample was that groups who might typically not be as empowered to speak within their culture as others would not feel inclined to participate. Specifically, there was concern that women, who have been found in muted group research to have less access to voice than men, might not participate equally in the study. In contrast, the percentage of women in the sample was representative of the percentage of women in the company, who made up around forty-five percent of the workforce. Thus, the sample was almost equally representative of males and females in the organization. Theoretical saturation, which Bowen (2008) depicted as the point at which data redundancy begins to occur in a qualitative study, was reached by the end of the interviews, as the data in the last few interview demonstrated no new categories or themes and was repetitive when compared to earlier answers.

As members were also stratified across the layers of organizational structure, the researcher aimed to include in the sample a representation of the relative number of members at each level of the organization. Though the sample was voluntary, it was revealed to be representative of the organizational population in terms of structural position. Due to the fact that the organizational members were clustered at two different locations, one that was primarily management and one that was primarily comprised of lower-level employees, the sample was reflective of the imposed power structure within the company. Tenure with the organization was also an important demographic variable in determining the representativeness of the sample. Tenure was an optional characteristic

for employees to provide, given that members who had not been with the organization for a great length of time might not feel comfortable answering questions critically if they felt their jobs might be jeopardized. Data collected on position in the organization and tenure with the organization is provided in the table below.

**Table 2**

Organizational Position	Employment Length (yrs)			
	Unknown	0-3	3-5	5 or more
Upper Management		*	*	**
Middle Management	**		*	*
Lead/Supervisor		***	***	*
Associate	*****	*****	*****	**
<b>Total</b>	8	12	10	6

This research was concerned with gaining access to the perceptions organizational members have regarding the culture and power dynamics of the particular site at which they work. Participation was therefore entirely voluntary in order to remove any apparent ties to management or organizational power. Marshall and Rossman (2006) cautioned qualitative researchers to appear non-threatening in their entrance to an organization. Despite the fact that formal leaders must provide approval for research to be conducted in organizations, “sponsorship can backfire, setting the researcher up for difficulties in accessing other groups within the organization” (p. 75). In order to prevent this complication from occurring, participants were presented with a sign up sheet (which was prepared in the three primary languages of the site – Spanish, Japanese, and English) with a brief depiction of the study at the top. All paperwork included in the study that was provided to participants was made available in these three languages.



Language barriers can obviously create significant problems when conducting qualitative research (Edwards, 1998). Given that the participating organization indicated that the vast majority of workers speak fluent or passable English (the researcher was specifically told language would not be a problem), this issue should not be a predominant concern for this study. However, to ensure the comfort of participants and their ability to express themselves to the fullest extent, participants were encouraged to answer in their native tongue if necessary, a strategy that only one interview participant employed. Because all interview questions and directions were provided in writing in the three primary languages and because all interviews were audio recorded, an interpreter was not present during the interview sessions. Two interviewers were identified for use in this research, one for Spanish and one for Japanese, and both are native speakers of the two languages with high proficiency in English. Both completed the Institutional Review Board human subjects protocol prior to the research in order to guarantee participant safety. During the transcription of interviews, those translators were employed if foreign languages were present. The translators both reside in the area the research is being conducted and have agreed to participate on an as-needed basis in the process of the research.

It is important to consider, as Eco (2003) noted, that the act of translation by bilingual or multilingual individuals may lead to problematic interpretations of information as translators may select terms based upon rhetorical value and English preferences rather than direct expression. These problems, coupled with the fact that translators bring their own life experiences into the translation of data, can lead to a loss of reliability in research findings (Temple, 2002). To combat these occurrences, the

researcher gave explicit instructions to translators regarding interpretation and considered the positioning of the translator when reviewing research (Temple, 2008). Though there were few such problems since the majority of interview participants spoke English, translators were provided with instruction sheets and were encouraged to write multiple terms if necessary to convey the meaning of any problematic concept. The researcher took every precaution to ensure that the transcription upon which results were based was an accurate depiction of the experiences of study participants and not of translators, including returning to any translated data with translators in order to consider potentially excluded meanings.

### *Qualitative Methods*

Because this study focused on one branch of an international organization and the experiences of the members at that branch, a qualitative approach was deemed necessary. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explained, “Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality . . . and . . . seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (p. 4). The researcher aimed to gather information on the values, norms, and expectations of organizational members based upon their experiences of organizational and cultural dynamics. These “soft” variables are often some of the most ubiquitous and pivotal for long-term organizational success (Macaulay, 1963). For that reason, all interviews took place on site, at either the Anaheim or Chino location in an office near the main work floor but separated from the other workers. It was believed that the “natural” setting of the workers would increase the likelihood that participants would share valuable stories and thoughts from which meaning could be extracted both because of familiarity with the area and because of

researcher immersion in the research setting (Rubin, 2005). The potential for discomfort due to the location, however, was considered in case members felt nervous or hesitant, and the researcher included made efforts to create a relaxed rapport with all participants. For interviews to be a successful research tool, they must be thought out in great detail and the researcher must strive to generate rapport with interview participants.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. Each interview was tape recorded to ensure the validity of the data that was gathered. Brief notes were taken throughout the interviews in order to capture important nonverbal cues and moments in which participants had difficulty answering questions. Notes also encourage researchers to capture momentary thoughts and reactions to the responses of participants which can later be useful in coding and analyzing data (Charmaz, 2000)

Each interview began with an overview of participant rights and a statement regarding the goal of the study, anonymity, competency, and the broader impact of the research. Once agreement to proceed has been given, the interview progressed into a semi-structured format. This format provided both a framework through which answers could be compared to one another and provided the interviewer some control over the time each interview took, an issue of significant concern to businesses (Daniels & Cannice, 2004), particularly ones in which shift schedules are employed. Interview questions included:

1. How would you describe this company to people who aren't familiar with it?

What makes this company different from others?

- a. What would you tell them about working here, like your favorite part or your least favorite part?

- b. What's most challenging about working here?
  - c. What do you like best about working here?
- 2. What is a typical day like working here?
  - a. Follow up/alternative: Walk me through a typical day (asking for a chronological account).
  - b. When you have breaks at work, who hangs out together?
- 3. When you have a problem at work, who do you talk to for help? Why? Can you give an example?
- 4. Do you feel comfortable giving suggestions or disagreeing with others here?
- 5. Can you tell me about a time you couldn't say what you were thinking? Why was that the case?
- 6. Who was important in helping you figure out how to work here? When new people come in, who helps them the most?
- 7. How does the fact that different cultures/people from different cultural backgrounds work here affect your job? Has there ever been a time when it was difficult to get something done because you had to work with someone from a different culture?
- 8. Do you see Japanese or other cultures reflected in the things that are done here?
- 9. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about working here?

After the interview was concluded, participants were offered the opportunity to provide demographic information to the researcher. This information was correlated with the answers provided by the participants in an attempt to uncover any culturally significant themes. To prevent research bias from interfering with participant intent, each

participant received a form that allowed them to self-identify their cultural background and gender. This removed any chance that incorrect categorizations were made in the analysis of the data. The form also included a request for age-range information.

Though these questions were asked of each participant, participants were allowed and encouraged to answer in any way they see fit. The researcher strove to create a conversational dialogue with each participant in order to increase the likelihood of additional thoughts and stories being shared. At the end of each interview, respondents were asked if they would like to alter any of the answers they had given to ensure the quality of discussion. Permission was then requested to conduct follow-up interviews if necessary for clarification, elaboration, or correction. Those interviews were conducted via teleconference. All participants were provided contact information for the researcher as a means of encouraging them to offer comments at any point during the project.

#### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Data from the interviews was coded using both thematic analysis and the constant comparative method to answer the research questions. These methods were, in part, selected because no concrete models exist for examining the process of muting within organizations or for identifying typologies of organizational cultures within international organizations. However, an a priori theoretical orientation, as described by Creswell (1998), was used in coding some of the data. Though muted groups have been identified in organizational settings, little structure has been given to the communicative process of muting within organizational studies because it is contextually dependant. Scholarship has primarily provided direction for identifying muted groups through the methods of resistance used by those groups. Thus, answers to the research questions were both

compared to existing theories on group muting and examined for those characteristics not present in current theory.

Approaches to studying international organizations have varied over time. Daniels (1971) examined a number of corporate headquarters in five countries with no model in mind and concluded that international companies move incrementally as they branch into new territories in a process now referred to as Internationalisation. The results of Daniels (1971) work, however, led to a great deal of scholarship on the topic in both qualitative and quantitative forms. Parke (1993), in her evaluation of research and theory regarding international joint ventures, argued that generating theoretical structures from single case studies and from existing theory is a valuable way to begin studying unexamined or misunderstood phenomenon. Such studies provide the foundation upon which to propose and test new models that are not restricted by methodological constraints.

#### *A priori and thematic analysis*

Research question one was analyzed with thematic analysis, as it was oriented towards identifying both existing and unexamined means of negotiating cultural voice from a muted group perspective. A-priori codes were brought into the analysis of research question one at the beginning of data analysis to provide guidance for the research. Those codes, drawn from muted group theory, centered upon perceiving resistance strategies as a means of identifying muting. Specifically, based upon Houston and Kramrae (1991), Allison and Hibbler (2004), and Meares et al. (2004), redefining, naming, and active grouping were used to code interview data. These codes were necessary to begin the interpretive process because, unlike previous muted group research in organizational communication, this research did not deal with overt oppression such as

mistreatment (Meares et al., 2004) or isolation (Allison & Hibbler, 2004). This approach to qualitative research is not without precedent, as a priori codes can give guidance to the research and allow the researcher to ensure that theory remains at the heart of the research (e.g. Ormond, Iris, Banuvar, Minogue, Annas, & Elias, 2007; Weston, Gandell, J. Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman, & C. Beauchamp, 2001). As the data is read and analyzed, new themes emerge through an iterative process that do not fit into the pre-established categories and that must be fleshed out by reexamining the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In that way, experiences of participants are represented through comparisons to existing codes.

Operational definitions were constructed for each of the three initial codes brought to the study from previous research. Redefining was considered the alteration of the denotation or connotation of terminology related to policies, practices, or organizational roles among members of a national or ethnic cultural group. Naming was defined as the active creation of unique terms used for particular actions, situations, or items by a national or ethnic cultural group. Active grouping was described as the intentional gathering of members of a group without organizational sanction or for exclusionary purposes.

The interview data was subjected to several rounds of coding in order to gather as much information from it as possible. Thematic analysis focuses upon identifying the themes in the data that appear after numerous readings (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Themes found in one part of the text must be compared against themes found in other areas to reveal similarities and differences. In that way, the analysis of interviews allows for the copious amount of data produced by qualitative inquiry to be synthesized into meaningful

segments (Patton, 2002). Thematic analysis, “repeatedly examines interviews for quite complex, elaborated statements,” and then reduces those statements to their essential meanings (Breakwell, 2006, p. 251). Thematic analysis therefore allows for research questions to be answered based upon common feelings and beliefs in a given population.

These thematic codes then become equally important to the research findings, but can, through the use of a priori codes, be guided by existing theory and thus are closer to the theoretical framework of the research design (Weston et al., 2001). Extracting themes from interview data revealed consistent conceptualizations regarding which cultures are in dominant and subservient positions, how those positions influence the level of voice cultural groups may feel that they maintain, what types of gestures or actions (both verbal and nonverbal) by others indicate that positioning, and how the organizational structure may or may not contrast with those results. It also allowed for correlations to be made between the ways in which cultural groups perceive their positioning and the relative amount of power given to those groups by the organization. Thus, if members of the one, less empowered cultural group indicated that their voices are muted, either in the ways they define or name their environment or in other unconsidered manners, a correlation could be made to their position in the organizational hierarchy. In contrast, if Japanese members felt muted within the organization, comparison of that result to their position in the organizational structure could reveal a disjuncture with what would be expected by traditional organizational power dynamics.

#### *Constant comparative analysis*

Questions two and three relied more heavily upon the constant comparison method to uncover findings. International organizations have been analyzed in a myriad



of studies that highlighted the intended organizational culture (e.g. Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005), but none of these studies have taken into account the ways that culture develop at the various locations of those international organizations. Thus, these research questions were broader in nature and, because organizational culture can be composed of any number of variables specific to a given organization, required the creation of categories particular to the organization being studied, justifying an exploratory approach. Generating results for these two questions from interview transcripts required open-coding initially (Charmaz, 2003). These codes can be placed into categories which can, themselves, be placed into meta-categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Over the course of coding, analyzing, and re-coding data, answers to the research questions should begin to become evident through the codes, categories, and constructs that are revealed (Glaser, 1978).

Memoing plays an important role in this process, as the researcher takes notes and formulates memos from the insights gathered from data (Brower & Jeong, 2007). This research used memoing to preclude false categories from being applied to data. Researcher thought processes can be recorded through memos, and the researcher compares these memos throughout the coding process with the data until all similarities and differences are recognized and labeled (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1993). Results can then be framed in terms of the causes and effects unique to the phenomenon being studied (Charmaz, 2003).

Ultimately, the constant comparative method provides a means of systematically parsing through data and producing theoretical results (Glaser, 1965). For this study, the organizational culture developed at a site of an international organization was the object

in question, and those elements that contribute to its existence were, first, identified in the data and, second, compared with one another and broadened until they provided meaningful answers to the research questions. Thus, the constant comparative method of data analysis was appropriate for this research. Once the data analysis was conducted, results were examined for any gaps or lapses that might necessitate further interviews to produce clarity or to flesh out vague constructs.

### *Reliability and validity*

Reliability refers to the assurance that a research method can produce similar results consistently over time (Stenbacka, 2001). Reliability is generally considered to be a concern for quantitative data analysis which strives for repetition and objectivity. In this project, the a priori codes brought to the research from the muted group literature were checked for intercoder reliability and intracoder reliability. A sample of the interview transcripts was provided to a second coder who coded the data based upon a coding sheet developed by the researcher. This will ensure that the thematic section of the project meets research standards. Intracoder reliability was used to ensure that the researcher applies codes consistently across interview transcripts.

Qualitative research is primarily concerned with accurately representing the experiences of the individual participants. Qualitative researchers bring their bias with them to the research project and attempt to acknowledge that bias and the impact it may have upon the study. Some scholars consider the term reliability incommensurate with qualitative research (e.g. Stenbacka, 2001). Lincoln and Guba (1985), however, attempted to treat reliability as a qualitative concept that was comparable to dependability, and Merrick (2000) equated reliability to reflexivity, trustworthiness, and

representation. In short, for qualitative studies to be considered reliable, they must demonstrate that the researcher and the research process were rigorous, honest, and fair. Regardless of the analytic procedure used, keeping the research process transparent should provide some amount of reliability. Thus, in order to attain a level of qualitative reliability for the comparative findings of this study, the researcher clearly outlined all data gathering and analytic procedures, highlighting any problems or inconsistencies that arose during research.

Validity is an equally important consideration when discussing the rigors of research. As Ruyter and Schnoll (1998) explained, “Validity in its quantitative sense refers to the correctness of the operationalisation of constructs that are used in a research project” (p. 11). In essence, validity refers to the relative “truth” of the findings. This notion seems to contrast on face with a great deal of qualitative theory, in that it presupposes a singular, positivistic truth. However, qualitative studies can benefit from conceptions of validity being applied to their findings, and, indeed, there is a push for qualitative researchers to prove that their studies are credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This can be accomplished in a number of ways that still uphold the value of participant experiences and stories, while simultaneously providing qualitative research with a greater amount of dependability.

One method that was used to solidify the validity of findings was follow-up interviews and feedback. This coincides with Creswell and Miller (2000) claim that, “Qualitative inquirers may use a second lens to establish the validity of their account: the participants in the study . . . . Those who employ this lens seek to actively involve participants in assessing whether the interpretations accurately represent them (p. 125).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) concurred with this sentiment, as allowing participants to review the data and information ensures the interpretation is accurate. Another method of qualitative validity that was employed is disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this process, the researcher takes the categories extracted from the data back to the data and searches for supportive or disconfirming instances. This protects the study from creating contradictions, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the data. Finally, peer debriefing, a strategy in which a colleague familiar with the research reviews the data and research findings and plays both supporter and critic, will be used to generate validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### *Generalizability*

Although a qualitative study cannot be considered truly generalizable, the concept of generalizability still deserves attention. Generalizability is a term that indicates the capacity to extend the results of a study of one population to another population. Qualitative organizational communicative scholars have long struggled with the issue of generalizing findings. In this study, for instance, the desire to generalize findings to all international organizations is mitigated by the fact that the methods employed delve deeply into the experiences of specific groups at one organization. External validity simply cannot be attained at the levels expected by quantitative researchers to create generalizability. In that regard, Denzin (1983) rejects generalizability as a goal in qualitative research, preferring to treat each interaction as a unique moment of qualitative inquiry. It is important to remember, however, that generalizability implies a level of validity in the study and makes the study more broadly applicable. For that reason, finding ways to reconcile generalizability and qualitative research is extremely important.

Some scholars have attempted to combine generalizability with qualitative research. Guba and Lincoln (1982), for instance, argue that qualitative researchers ought to strive for “fittingness,” or the ability to match one research project with other, similar research projects. For example, comparing this study to other situations that are similar to it might well provide useful information to the international organizations that must deal with multinational memberships. Others are concerned with internal generalizability more than external generalizability. Internal generalizability deals specifically with guaranteeing that the conclusions drawn are applicable across the group or organization being studied. In fact, “Internal generalizability in this sense is far more important for most qualitative researchers than is quantitative generalizability because qualitative researchers rarely make explicit claims about the external generalizability of their accounts” (Maxwell, 2002, p. 54). Internal generalizability is also necessary for effectively interpreting interviews, as the interviewer develops a relationship with the participant. That relationship must be repeated with all interview participants in an organizational setting if internal generalizability is to be developed. Through the methods of ensuring validity described above, it was possible to develop internal generalizability for the international organization being studied and to begin identifying “fittedness” to other organizations and groups dealing with similar contexts.

## Results

Interviews proved to be a useful tool for uncovering the thoughts and experiences of organizational members in this international organization. Though many indicated that they were satisfied to be working for this company, almost all acknowledged at least some amount of tension experienced either as a result of national or organizational culture. Interestingly, the company had undergone a series of major changes over the past year, including personnel changes at both the employee and managerial levels. Those who had worked for the company for longer than a year were able to provide a great deal of unique information that was compared to the answers of those who were newer to the company. This comparison demonstrated, to some degree, the impact of varying levels of acculturation on members of organization. The interview data revealed a great deal about both the relationships between the various national cultures present at the organizational site as well as about the organizational culture.

The study took place at two primary locations: a corporate headquarters in Anaheim, CA, and a warehouse in Chino, CA. Members from the two branches work closely together, despite the physical separation of some upper management members from the employee base. For that reason, the sample for this project was selected from a participant pool formed by combining the populations of both sites. Though demographic information was gathered, all interview participant data was kept confidential as required by Institutional Review Board standards.

Notes were taken throughout the interviews and were continually reviewed in order to identify common emergent themes as well as to help alter existing interview questions or to generate new, related interview questions. These alterations provided an additional level of clarity and specificity to the interviews. For research questions two and three, a comparative approach was necessary to identify codes and themes emerging from the data. For research question one, which dealt with the negotiation of voice among cultural groups, thematic analysis, using a priori codes to begin the analysis, was deemed appropriate. This question was specifically concerned with identifying how various cultural groups experience and respond to muting within international organizations. New codes were developed by comparing data to the existing codes.

#### Research Question 1

Research question one posed the following: In what ways is “voice” negotiated by national cultural groups at the site of an international organization? The focus upon negotiation led the researcher to code for instances in which national or ethnic cultural groups expressed voice either as a means of resistance against perceived oppression or as a means of reinforcing their identity. In order to find those instances, interview data was coded, initially, for the three tenets of resistance outlined by Houston and Kramrae (1991), Allison and Hibbler (2004), and Meares et al. (2004): redefining, naming, and active grouping. These signs of resistance were selected both because of their specific relevance to organizational communication studies and because of their direct relation to cultural studies. Though their use has been documented among marginalized groups as means of combating domination, the three strategies are, again, not purely resistive in nature. The three forms of resistance are also methods of identity construction or

reinforcement when used by national or ethnic cultural groups, as they signify to others that the group possesses a coherent voice. In that regard, coding for the three tenets focused upon resistive uses of the strategies as well as their uses for identity reinforcement.

The research developed a coding sheet that provided operationalized definitions of each term to assist in the coding process. The interviewer coded the interviews for the three forms of resistance and then returned to the transcripts in order to identify forms of resistance or identity negotiation that did not match with the a priori categories. The development of new codes occurred in a two ways. First, episodes of resistance that did not fit the preexisting categories were examined to determine the commonalities they possessed. Second, episodes of voice articulation that were not clearly resistive but were distinctly related to cultural group identification were categorized. These new codes were then used to guide a second examination of the data.

A sample of 15% of the interview transcripts was then provided to a separate coder who reviewed the interviews for each of the three primary codes to ensure a level of reliability, despite the use of a single coder. Intercoder reliability using percent agreement was found to be 100% for naming and 100% for redefining. Reliability for the code of active grouping was initially found to be 88%. After discussion with the second coder, the operational definition for active grouping was altered to include the term “cultural groups.” After this change, intercoder reliability rose to 100%. As an extra measure of reliability for these codes, intracoder reliability was assessed. Intracoder reliability determines the consistency with which a coder applies codes and is a particularly useful means of gauging the application of codes by a single researcher. This



measure may “require a re-analysis of a sub-sample of cases at a later point in time” (Neuendorf, 2000, p. 80). For this study, half of the interview transcripts were recoded with the three a priori codes. Intercoder reliability was found to be 100% for naming, 96% for redefining, and 94.1% for active grouping, all of which were considered to be acceptable levels. Finally, member checks were conducted throughout the interview process as the interviewer coded and categorized data. Member checks confirmed the conclusions of the researcher and in some cases helped to further refine categories that were constructed.

The a priori codes were also used to help define categories for data that indicated voice negotiation but that did not fall into any of these classifications. Approaching the research in this fashion, as outlined by Ryan & Bernard (2003), was incredibly useful in uncovering previously unexamined elements of muting and articulation of voice within organizational settings. Resistance and identity reinforcement were key elements of many of the interviews, though the sources of those goals were more varied than could have been predicted. Overall, resistance and identity reinforcement were exhibited on some level by all cultural groups; however, the negotiation of voice within the organization primarily demonstrated that Japanese cultural group members experienced the strongest sense of muting, followed by native English speakers, a group that was comprised of several national cultures that use English as a primary language. While naming, redefining, and active grouping were found during interview data analysis, two new categories of resistance and identity reinforcement emerged: rhetorical projection and linguistic form. These two forms of resisting and establishing identity operated both in

conjunction with and isolated from the three previously articulated forms of cultural resistance, justifying their inclusion into the broader category of resistance strategies.

### *Naming*

The act of naming serves to empower groups. Naming causes other groups to use the language or symbol system of a particular group and, in that way, allots the group a level of control. When used to resist power structures, naming becomes a tool to counteract the influence of dominant groups or to attain some level of influence. In this study, naming was revealed to be a strategy primarily used by Japanese management members rather than by employees. Japanese members engaged in naming explicitly through Japanese terms and policies, leading to the conclusion that they experienced muting. This result was unexpected initially, as it was assumed that the workforce population rather than the management population would be involved in naming for resistive or identity purposes. However, rather than becoming a critical tool of resistance from employees, naming appeared in interviews as a means of resistance or control for a specific management group that was culturally a minority and felt pressured to conform to other cultural standards.

The unique names that appeared in interviews were universally Japanese in origin. To the majority of the workforce, the terms are unique to the organization in which they work. Though Kaizen for instance, one of the terms employed as an act of naming, is utilized by other organizations and has been adopted for use by upper management in this organization, respondents indicated no awareness that the term existed outside of their workplace. In that regard, naming by upper management has specific roots in the Japanese business culture, but the terms have become symbols for employees that allow

them to describe their organization in what they perceive to be organizationally unique forms. In none of the responses that included these names was it claimed or implied that other companies use the terms found in this organization. Instead, employees and managers representing a number of national cultures within the organization used the names generated by Japanese management as ways of describing the company or its practices, imbuing the terms with a distinct level of organizational significance.

The terms that were classified as instances of naming were primarily present in answers to interview question eight, which asked, “How do you see Japanese or other cultures reflected in the things that are done here?” Typically, responses to this question dealt with the ways that the company had been structured or the practices that were discordant with expectations based upon experience in company’s based in other national cultures. Three employees pointed to several instances of naming:

*Respondent 16:* This is a Japanese companies. The slogans that we role out, I mean, what American company has the slogan, “We can do that” and “Can do?”. . . like the way we use “Kaizen” kind of fits, but it does not really fit with what you see everywhere else . . . I mean “Kobons” and “Kaizen,” this stuff is . . . probably much more Japanese than what you see at Wal-Mart.

*Respondent 32:* Just by the signs. The signs of Gemba and Kaizen . . . Gemba is “Go to the, Go to the spot.” It’s one of their philosophies. If there’s a problem, you don’t just stay in this area and try to think what’s happening in that area, you go to that area and try to figure out what the problem is and try to resolve it. And then Kaizen is just the way of presenting your ideas and to help improve.

*Respondent 11:* The three philosophies of Komyo are Gemba, Gembutsu and Genjutzu, three Japanese words. Gemba means “Go to the spot,” Gembutsu is the actual thing, and Genjutzu is the actual occurrence. So it means that, at all levels, we should be able to, you know, understand things by going to the spot, looking at the real thing, not just hearing it from somebody else, not being so aloof or so detached from the operation that we don’t understand what’s going on. So we have a lot of that sort of philosophy, Gemba, Gembutsu, and Genjutzu.

The unique names provided generally serve as both slogans and value or mission statements for the company. The Japanese terminology is an explicit form of naming; gemba, gembutsu, and genjutsu are all terms that would not exist were it not for the insistence of members of the Japanese culture. The connotations of the words, regardless of specific definition, are intrinsically related to the culture from which they originate and serve to provide a form of voice as members rely upon the Japanese culture to describe their organizational lives. The Japanese origin of the terms is tightly linked to the content of those terms, and, in that regard, members rely upon the Japanese business culture that has been introduced to express themselves. On the other hand, the example of the slogans “We can do that” and “Can do” are equally important forms of naming. The slogans are, as the respondent points out, in a format that is uncommon in American business practices. Though these slogans are not themselves names for specific things, they serve the same function as names, as they are phrases created by members of a particular national culture to isolate a specific manufacturing and production philosophy and practice.

Using the Japanese terms in this way includes them as elements of the organizational culture that become almost subconscious elements of organizational life, allowing the Japanese members to articulate a culturally specific voice within the organizational structure, reinforcing their identity and presence. For example, another participant included one name in a story about the company failing to address a concern:

*Respondent 20:* Before stuff gets on the truck and gets shipped out, I felt like we needed to have a set of eyes checking what’s going out the door, you know, and they, you know, I put in a, they have a thing called a kaizen, and I put in a kaizen, it’s like a, it’s like a suggestion box. Yeah, it’s like a suggestion. They call it a kaizen. And I put in a kaizen and nothing really happened.

This story makes evident how natural the terminology has become for many of the employees. Though they can describe what the terms mean if necessary, the need to process and consider when attempting defining a term is clear through the use of language such as “it’s like.” The names are connected with fairly straightforward objects, such as suggestion boxes, yet the use of the name imbues the Japanese business culture with a level of power beyond the power dictated by the organizational structure. Kaizen has become a philosophy within the organization, underscoring the power of naming.

Only one respondent, respondent sixteen, even remarked upon a disconnect between the Japanese names and the ways in which they were applied to business concepts. His statements were not meant as a critique, but merely as an acknowledgement that the terms might seem out of place to outsiders. Other members of the company did not even attempt to define the Japanese generated names in their responses. A long term African American female employee noted, “There are a lot of cultural values that we have here in America for this Japanese company that you can see. I mean we do Kaizen projects. They are constantly rewarding.” The use of the name is assumed to cause instant recognition among audience members, even though, in this case, the audience member is not a member of the company. Kaizen is, here, described in terms of “projects” reinforcing the notion that the name connects to a philosophy that is itself premised upon a particular culture’s value structure. The other Japanese terms that were commonly referenced in interview responses, Cobon and Gemba, were used in similar fashions; the employees that mentioned these names used them as if they were natural elements of their vocabulary. This finding indicates that the Japanese members of the company attempt to instill parts of their native culture in the organizational culture. The conclusion

that can be drawn from this is that the Japanese, who are primarily members of management, feel it necessary to exert their cultural presence through naming.

An important consideration, however, is whether or not the use of naming by Japanese organizational members indicates that the Japanese members feel the need to express voice because they perceive themselves to be muted. Individuals who self-identified as Japanese represented around eight percent of the sample in this study. According to statements found in the interviews of those individuals, the Japanese make up about six percent of the entire workforce between the two sites. Thus, the Japanese contingent of the workforce, despite being clustered in management positions, represents a cultural minority within the company just as they exist as a minority group within the country in which they reside. This places a unique pressure upon Japanese managers who simultaneously must negotiate the broader U.S. cultural context in which they have been placed while they manage the negotiation of cultural groups structurally below them within the organization. This conflict is exacerbated by the expectations generated by the cultural context in which the site is located. One Mexican male associate indicated the impact of location upon the distribution of voice while describing organizational pressures:

Respondant 24: You have to be bilingual because in this case, we have a people, like talking about myself, I feel more comfortable speak Spanish, but I do my best to speak English . . . So, but with Japanese people no because we don't speak Japanese in this company, always Spanish and English.”

The Japanese language itself is perceived to be unnecessary to the majority of employees, despite the fact that the company's native culture is Japanese. The voice of Japanese members of the company is therefore inherently limited by the “othering” they experience through the type of bilingualism encouraged. One employee claimed,

“Spanish or English, you can learn it easier I think.” Another associate noted, “But always, you now, when the boss talking, they talk in English and Spanish.” Employees generally expressed only pressure to speak either or both English and Spanish; no employees recognized Japanese as a language that employees should be capable of understanding.

Conversely, Japanese members of the organization are pressured to learn English or Spanish in order to operate effectively within the U.S. One Hispanic male associate’s story of a Japanese manager suggested the demand placed upon Japanese cultural members:

*Respondent 19:* Before, I remember, before like maybe five years ago, two guys came from Japan. For that guys is very smart. He wanna talk to you but he have a little translation, little computers, and that’s good cus you can talk to the guys. So that’s good. The other, the other person I think is still, move to stay in this company. He try to speak to you, I mean, with your hands, this and that, and now he speaks English.

In this narrative, the first Japanese manager was only at the site for a brief period and uses a translation dictionary to communicate, a tactic described as “good” because he can then speak with employees. The second Japanese manager was moved to the U.S. to help manage the organization’s site in the United States. His ability to communicate, however, was limited until he learned English. Rather than the organization accommodating the Japanese management members, those members were forced to find alternative means of communicating outside of their native language.

To be fair, external pressures to learn English exist for those Japanese cultural members who are transplanted into the United States. The transition from Japanese business cultural settings in general, which have been described as focusing on collectivist values, teamwork, and group values, to U.S. business cultural settings, which

are often referred to as individualistic and competitive, can necessitate a great deal of preparation and adaptation in order for Japanese sojourners to operate successfully in the U.S. (Watson, Tsubota, & Barker, 1994). Moreover, Japanese members who work in the organization used terms such as “honor” to describe working in the United States, indicating a willingness to deal with the linguistic and cultural pressures fostered by working in a foreign country. That does not, however, fully explain or justify the environment of the organization’s site which almost completely excludes the Japanese language. Members of upper management who were not Japanese expressed little or no recognition of a need for any Japanese language knowledge but did express expectations that Japanese members be capable of communicating. The linguistic burden is thus placed upon Japanese organizational members who must learn to speak in the fashion of other national cultures if they intend to be heard within the organization.

Stories dealing with senior Japanese members of the company bolster the conclusion that this group experiences muting and that naming is a means of addressing that muting. For instance, one Caucasian male manager who had been with the company five years told a story of his interactions with the company President, claiming, “There have been decisions that Masaki has made, and I’ve disagreed with him, and I’ve had to go back to him and say to him . . . “Masaki-san, you can’t do that in America. You can’t do that!” This narrative clearly points to the cultural pressure exerted upon Japanese members of the organization, including the president of the company, to change their behaviors to fit a Western standard. The Japanese are othered by this narrative, and a demand to detach the organization from its native culture is explicitly linked to the very survival of the organization. Another Latina female employee mentioned that the



organization was Japanese, but described is as “Americanized.” The very essence of the company is changed by this term, as the company is no longer a Japanese organization, but an “Americanized” company with Japanese management members. As a result, Japanese managers presumably chose to introduce the Japanese terms in order to reconnect the company to the broader organizational culture and to reestablish their identity at the international site.

Japanese members are thus burdened with responsibility for the continued survival and success of the organization while simultaneously facing forms of cultural muting. One Japanese male member of management who had been with the company for four years reported, “I mentioned it a little bit, but I am from Japanese culture, environment, and this company is not. This company is not Japanese-Japanese. It is more very international and interracial company and company is treating people like that.” Japanese members of the organization experience a degree of confusion regarding their roles in the company. Whereas other national cultural members of the organization openly recognize the Japanese elements of the company, Japanese members of the organization indicate that the company is more detached from the Japanese culture than others are aware. Japanese organizational members are forced to negotiate their voice in ways that other members of the organization are not. Resistance and identity reinforcement through naming of organizational activities, policies, and artifacts is therefore a means of reclaiming voice as well as ownership within the organization.

#### *Discrepant Evidence*

Discrepant evidence for the category of naming generally focused on respondents identifying no significant acts of naming within the company. Though many employees

pointed to the Japanese terms as defining elements of the organization and as ties to the home culture of the organization, other employees did not reference those terms at all. Responses in which naming was identified were often provided to the interview question which focused on recognizable elements of Japanese culture in the organization. When asked that question, one African American male participant claimed, “No. It’s normal here. The same as any other company.” The names identified by other respondents seem to carry no weight with this employee. Another respondent simply stated, “No, no. I don’t have that feeling.” This short, abrupt response was typical of the responses that contrasted with evidence of naming. A Mexican female employee stated, “No. It doesn’t, that doesn’t phase me, I mean.” Though several of these employees continued on in their answers to describe the exercises or uniforms as evidence of Japanese culture, their initial reaction to questions regarding that culture did not result in the discussion of the Japanese terms.

In that regard, this evidence may point to a lack of recognition by employees that naming has taken place, making it difficult for the strategy to be used as a means of exhibiting voice. Another potential reason that those names were not considered by some employees, however, is based upon organizational tenure. Not all respondents chose to reveal how long they had worked for the organization, a choice the researcher related to fear of job loss if responses became public. Of those that provided that information, many of the long term employees discussed the Japanese terms whereas shorter tenured employees did not. This may indicate that a greater degree of socialization and acculturation is necessary for an organizational member to recognize the act of naming by Japanese managers. At the same time, it may simply be the case that some employees

choose to ignore the terminology because they consider it a managerial ploy unworthy of their time and attention.

### *Redefining*

Redefining was found to be a form of resistance and identity reinforcement isolated to the Japanese cultural members within this international organization. It was believed that any cultural groups experiencing muting would attempt to redefine either terms or policies used by the organization that were considered oppressive. Because the study took place within the confines of an organization, the redefinition of practices was also considered a part of this code as organizations rely upon shared definitions of practices to operate effectively. Given the stratification of national cultures across organizational structural layers, it was presumed that redefinition of organizationally sanctioned practices or terminology might be a significant means of resistance. In contrast, the only form of redefinition evidenced in coding was related to the organizational roles of Japanese organizational members. This reinforced the notion that Japanese cultural members experienced cultural muting and felt motivated to resist or reinforce their identity, despite the fact that their organizational positions made it difficult to engage in redefinition.

Japanese members of management expressed different conceptions of their roles within the organization than others expressed. That is not to say that others redefined the roles given to them by Japanese management; instead, Japanese organizational members tended to indicate that their perception of their roles had changed based upon their interaction with other national cultures within the company. For instance in interviews, members who identified themselves as White/Caucasian and Hispanic/Latino/a described

the roles of Japanese managers as “policy makers” or “relationship builders” or simply the “head bosses.” A Japanese male member of upper management described his role in a different way:

*Respondent 14:* I can say U.S. people is very positive people. Very positive. They don't think negative things. So difficult things is to do the risk management. So our risk management has to think about any risk in the future, but they cannot basically . . . My priority is to check the future risk. So, for example, today we began the July work but they are just forecasting the work, but I should think about any risk in that work. And when I find something, I will talk to the manager, “Please be careful, please something.”

The manager juxtaposes ways of working in the U.S. with Japanese ways of conducting business. His answer indicates that his experiences with U.S. workers have caused him to redefine his role in the company, despite the position he holds. U.S. workers are “very positive” and ignore the concept of risk management, regardless of how important the Japanese managers consider it to be. Thus, rather than formulating policy, his role has become to check against policies moving forward too quickly.

This redefinition is particularly clear when compared to the answer of one of the white upper management members:

*Respondent 12:* But the Japanese have a very long term approach to things. And there are many really good aspects of the Japanese culture, business culture, and there's some bad aspects to. So we try to pick and choose, and that's kind of my filtering point. There have been decisions that Taka has made, and I've disagreed with them, and I've had to go back and say to him, while choking him, “Taka-san, you can't do that in America, you can't do that, you've gotta, you know.”

This manager explicitly points out the influence exerted upon Japanese members of management by other management members. The decisions of the Japanese manager have been “filtered” by the American manager in order to make them appropriate for the U.S. business culture. Moreover, this response bolsters the notion that the Japanese manager has redefined his role over time, as the decisions referred to indicate an ongoing

process of negotiation among upper management. In that light, redefinition serves as a means of opposing the cultural elements that silence the voice of the Japanese manager. His role has become one that is designed to juxtapose what he perceives to be the more detrimental aspects of other cultures voices being heard over his within the organization. Indeed, redefinition has become necessary for this manager in order to ensure that the Japanese cultural voice is included in organizational practices despite the structural position of the Japanese business culture.

Role redefinition for Japanese managers also appeared in other less dramatic forms. Redefinition does not necessarily have to result in direct opposition with dominant cultural norms. Instead, subtler means of redefining can provide a sense of empowerment to those for whom the term changes. One new male Japanese manager explained his role by providing a narrative reflecting his conceptualization of business practices:

*Respondent 13:* Customer says, “Can you get it here by two o’clock?” And I say, “Ok,” so I arrange the truck and the truck gets there. The trucker will call us and say, “It is 1:45, I am here, and everything is ok.” And now I know everything is ok. So I think in general, Americans will end there. But what the Japanese people will do is we will call the customer again and say, “Hey, my driver says it is there, is everything ok?” And I know everything is ok because we already have the signature and everything is ok, but I am just giving them one more call and say, “Is everything ok, blah, blah, blah, and if something happens give us a call again.” Stuff like that. That one extra call. Stuff like that I think is something that I have learned from my past Japanese companies, and I don’t know if that is a Japanese way or what, but I have worked for a lot of American companies too and a lot of American companies do not do that. So, I am using sort of those culture things to this environment.

This manager’s decision to redefine his role is based in large part upon his experiences in other American companies. His argument is one formed through differentiation, as practices he hesitates to label as Japanese are clearly not present in United States companies. The “one extra call” indicates the level of frustration he has felt trying to

convince members of other cultures to utilize his perspective. This company is, in his eyes, no different, though the parent company is Japanese; redefining his role to incorporate more Japanese ways of doing things is a necessity for establishing a voice that reflects his national culture in “this environment.” Though he does not frame this method of resistance as resulting explicitly from the organization at hand, the subtle redefinition of his role to include the “one extra call” clearly serves to establish a specific cultural identity in an environment that fails to adequately allow its expression.

Another Japanese manager expressed redefinition regarding his role in the company from an entirely different perspective. Rather than focusing upon the practical role he plays in the company, however, his answer centered upon the need to specifically bring Japanese cultural values into the warehouse. His explanation linked this role redefinition to cultural pressures:

*Respondent 22:* I want to replace the US bad culture with Japan culture and I want to learn more on the US culture and the US culture of course they have the good good point . . . But I wanna combine good the culture all together and build the good working environment and the also this company, you know, the basis is Japan, this Japanese company, so I have the still, you know, Japanese culture inside of myself, so my supervisors or the came from Japan personnel asking me to keep that level high in Komyo.

This participant initially responded with intense misgivings regarding the culture which he perceived to be imposing upon his voice, the “US bad culture.” Those misgivings are most likely manifested due to the same pressures experienced by the first Japanese manager, pressures to “Americanize”. Though the latter half of the response pulls back from the initial reaction to the “US culture,” the interview participant then emphatically points to the cultural roots of the organization, implying that Japanese culture should be more reflected in the methods of operation in place. He then draws attention to the fact

that other Japanese members of the organization specifically asked him to promote the Japanese business culture within the United States site, presumably because of a perceived fear that the values of that identify will be lost. In that way, the role of this manager is redefined from one dealing with finance to one primarily focusing upon reminding organizational members that Japanese cultural values are at the heart of the company.

The primary form of redefining identified in interview data rested with Japanese cultural members of the organization. The redefinition of their roles is a means of expressing national or ethnic cultural voice, despite the fact that it is operationalized by those in positions of organizational power. The Japanese managers all indicate that cultural pressures are exerted upon them and, as a result, the need to articulate new or altered roles for themselves becomes a necessity. These roles serve to give Japanese organizational members a sense of national cultural identity and voice that would otherwise not exist.

The fact that redefining was strictly limited to the redefinition of the roles of Japanese organizational members may be related to several considerations. First, it is possible that redefinition of other terms, practices, or roles was so heavily proliferated among organizational members of other cultures, that it was unrecognizable in interview data. This consideration is not highly likely given the similarities found among interviews but remains a possibility. A second reason for the isolation of redefinition to this cultural group may be that other, more subtle resistance or identity reinforcement strategies are more reliable and safe within company settings for less empowered members of organizations. The most likely explanation for this occurrence, however, is that Japanese

managers, who experience the most cultural muting, rarely have the capability to engage in redefinition because of their ability to name.

Broadly speaking, the terms and practices constructed by the Japanese management members are implemented by the organization in the very form they are created. As one associate noted, “what American company has the slogan, ‘We can do that,’ and ‘Can do.’” Because an organizationally empowered group engages in the greatest amount of naming, its ability to redefine is necessarily reduced. The names they generate are disseminated throughout the organization, meaning that the initial definitions of those terms, unless altered by other organizational members, remain intact. Though intuitively paradoxical, structural empowerment of this cultural group reduces their resistive options. The only time that Japanese cultural members of the organization, all of whom hold management positions, can express any redefinition is in constructing their roles. As they experience cultural conflict or oppression, new policies or terms can be created to assert voice, hence the use of naming found among Japanese cultural members; however, the roles in which they operate are already established. Redefinition is the only means of utilizing those roles to establish a cultural identity. Thus, redefinition is limited in scope within this company because of the organizational positioning of those who must engage in it.

#### *Discrepant Evidence*

Very little discrepant evidence appeared for the category of redefinition. This is, in large part, because the majority of the evidence supporting redefinition came from Japanese management members. Their interpretations of their roles in the company all indicated some degree of redefinition. Responses from other national or ethnic cultural



members regarding the roles of the Japanese typically referred to them as the “bosses” or “the big guys.” Japanese members are, for the majority of employees, simply perceived as distant figures that control the company. In that regard, employees generally have no opportunity to observe or identify Japanese members redefining their organizational roles, limiting the amount of responses relevant to this category. The only discrepant response that appeared in interview data came from a Japanese male manager who had been with the company five years. He articulated his position in the company as, “I’m the quality control. So many times the parts coming from the manufacturer, those are not hundred percent perfect. Sometimes, you know, we find the mispackage or the misassembled like an unassembled part.” Though he does detail additional responsibilities he has assumed later in his response, his general purpose in the organization has not changed since he joined the company. Redefinition is unnecessary for him because his task remains the same regardless of other changes in the organizational structure. In that regard, not all Japanese members feel it necessary to redefine their roles in order to gain voice.

### *Active Grouping*

The code active grouping was used to identify groups formed with the particular goal of resisting or distinguishing themselves from organizationally imposed or sanctioned groups; in short, to serve as a strategy of resistance or identity reinforcement, active grouping had to occur as the result of separation from others with the intent of demonstrating a distinct cultural identity. The most commonly referenced form of active grouping was seen in the description of groups formed during the breaks taken by employees over the course of a work shift. Almost all cultures were referenced by

interview participants as engaging in active grouping during work breaks in order to secure space and privilege outside of the immediate work area. The only form of active grouping isolated to a single culture was the formation of work teams that allowed only English speaking members. That grouping was mentioned both by its members and by others. Recognition of that identity by others, either through stories or brief references, served to not only verify that the active grouping code was accurate, but that the strategy of active grouping gained the attention of surrounding groups.

One interview question was particularly relevant to this discussion:

2b) When you have breaks at work, who hangs out together?

This question was found, during interviews, to be too nonspecific for interview participants to answer. It was altered as interviews progressed to include more detail:

2b) When you take breaks at work, do you see any groups that always hang out together? How would you describe those groups? Who makes them up?

This question received a wide variety of responses; however, almost all interview participants acknowledged that groups form and are rigidly held to during both the fifteen minute and thirty minute breaks scheduled during a work shift.

Groups were treated and described as an extremely active undertaking in which employees exerted control over space and privilege. One employee, in describing his lunch group, explained, “We have a tables and everybody makes their own groups . . . In this case, I’m sitting at that table because I’ve been sitting at that table for the last four years . . . it doesn’t mean we don’t have any issues between us, so.” The territoriality expressed in this statement was echoed by a number of employees, leads, and managers, who used terms such as “mine” and “ours” to describe the tables at which their groups

congregate. The groups are an important piece of organizational life and are adamantly defended by their members.

Despite the fact that a number of potential causes for grouping were revealed in interview answers, culture remained a central piece in describing active grouping. In fact, many employees would respond with one potential cause for grouping, but would naturally return to culture as a principle factor with no.

*Respondent 9:* Usually, I see a different group, let's say culture, say the Asian people hangs out with the Asian and Mexican and Hispanics hangs around their own.

*Respondent 18:* I don't know. They just sometimes, sometimes it will be cultural similarities.

*Respondent 22:* Mostly it's the inner department, you know, group. And also sometimes it is the culture group. Some people, you know, that come from the same country or similar country, so they have their own group.

*Respondent 33:* Well, mainly, I think, a lot of people like you say, culture, the cultures. Cus, you know, some, you know, who don't speak the English very well, they stand to be, you know, comfortable with themselves. And I think there's also a lot of, maybe, a couple of Afro Americans like us, to be together too.

Many of the active groupings are thus culturally defined and are noticed during break periods. Some employees attribute these grouping to language barriers. One white female manager explained, "language does play. You'll see tables of just Spanish speakers and then everybody else speaks English." Though a few employees indicated that they attempted to use hand signals or signs to break through these language barriers, the majority acknowledged simply that, when given the freedom to select those they socialized with, employees chose members of their own cultural groups. The fact that no one culture or group was singled out more than any other as taking part in this grouping phenomenon demonstrates that the act of negotiation of voice among these active groups

is constant, as each group vies for recognition in its rigid boundaries. Moreover, the results of finding active grouping in these answers show that speakers of all languages feel some level of muting, creating the need to actively group in response. The breaks serve to provide a time for cultural unification and solidarity for all organizational members.

Another important area in which active grouping became evident, though less universally recognized, was in work area groups. Because leads are assigned team members and supervisors are assigned several teams, organizational policies ensuring random selections for departments appear to be upheld (beyond any advanced qualifications such as computer or accounting skills); however, the amount of leverage in selecting team members appears to contrast with the organizationally claimed randomization. One team in particular was cited twice as an active, culturally defined group that was overtly and purely resistive in nature. The leader of that group was described as having a great deal of power in determining who would and would not be a member of their group. One manager clearly described that group:

*Respondent 32:* There, there, we have one, one person that works here that, in their department, all they want is somebody who speaks English. So they don't want to even try speaking Spanish or anything like that.

Field notes indicate that this response was made in a more exasperated and hesitant fashion than the respondent's other responses, indicating that this manager viewed this group as associated with embarrassment. It is a discrepancy that has appeared within the boundaries of the warehouse with an existence solely premised upon language and culture.

In short, this actively generated group has been formed within the organizational framework and, unlike the groups formed during breaks, is constantly reinforced by an individual in a position of power. In that regard, this group represents the most overtly resistive cultural group indicated in the interview data. One respondent referenced this group as one they were a part of, stating, “I don’t speak it. I can’t say, maybe I do not see as much of it because in my department you have to speak English.” The member went on to describe their department as one where English was a necessity for the work being conducted; however, this statement, coupled with the managers description of this group, makes evident the underlying yet stringent reliance on maintaining the homogeneity of the work group.

Interestingly, this active group is resistive from the perspective of those whose primary language is English, rather than those who are, in terms of geographical location, the cultural minority. The groups that come to exist during the breaks represented any number of cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities. This work group, though referred to a minimal number of times in the data, is purely a resistive move for those whose primary language is English. No other work groups mentioned by interview participants were initiated or maintained in the same active manner as this work group.

Although references are made by other employees to moments in the warehouse and other areas of the site in which Spanish speaking employees rely purely on Spanish, no responses indicated that these were active groups as was operationally defined for this study. One employee noted, “With the Spanish speaking, they are more reserved and off to the side and they do not really want to talk too much because they do not really know English.” A lead’s description of his experiences affirmed this conclusion:

*Respondent 20:* if everyone spoke English I would understand, you know, who's doing this and why the don't wanna do that sometimes they have complaints and then there's two that always complain, but everyone kinda makes a joke about it and I can't tell if it's a joke or if it's real, yeah, so.

Any Spanish speaking (or other linguistically defined) groups that appear in the warehouse, with the exception of break groups, are not perceived by organizational members active groupings and, thus, are not resistive in nature. In that regard, the resistive active grouping that takes place "on the floor" is limited, according to the data, to English speakers. Hence, the negotiation of voice in the workspace through the formation of culturally resistive groups appears to be singular to English speakers.

That is not to argue that the English speakers are a disenfranchised cultural group within the organization; indeed, any number of responses indicated that because almost all managers speak fluent English, employees who speak English are comfortable speaking their minds. It does, however, indicate that some native English speakers feel pressured or excluded when among the larger workforce. Their resistive work group is an attempt to renegotiate some level of empowered voice. The perception of muting by these members demonstrates the tensions that come to exist within the site of an international organization when expectations of voice are contrasted by perceptions of voice.

#### *Discrepant Evidence*

Interview data revealed several factors that potentially caused grouping which were unrelated to national or ethnic cultural identity. These responses indicate that some employees do not perceive grouping to occur for any purpose related to expressing voice. Employees noted a number of potential factors that resulted in the formation of groups. One participant explained, "I would say it's more like, it's their department. You know, they hang out together." Another participant stated, "I think a lot of the seniors kind of

hang out more with the seniors some times.” Yet another ascribed grouping to age, noting, “I think it is mainly old and young . . . there is always the four older ladies that eat lunch and then there is the younger crowd that will eat lunch . . . But yeah, that is mainly how it is, older and younger.” This phenomenon is presumably a common one to any organizational setting, as groups serve to provide individuals with companionship and comfort.

However, the discrepancies in these responses are reflective of several factors that must be considered as it is the rationale for group formation that is critical to the definition of active grouping. First, employees in the same shift take breaks at different times. One lead, an organizational term used to describe leaders of a given team, explained, “We take our breaks separate, so my crew takes it, just us. So, we are a pretty tight group, so normally we all sit together.” This forced separation from others by the organizational schedule can be assumed to lead to a wide variety of experiences based solely on the smaller numbers receiving break time together. Second, when it was clear employees were discussing the “breaks” rather than the “lunches,” discrepancies in the causes of groupings were much more prevalent. Breaks, which are only fifteen minutes, are staggered to keep operations running smoothly and leave little time for interaction and socialization. Lunches, on the other hand, which are thirty minutes, allow more time for employee groups to form.

### *Rhetorical Projection*

A critical part of using a priori codes in qualitative research is comparing those codes against elements of the data that do not fall into the structure they provide (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). In the case of this research, the a priori codes used to examine the

relative muting of cultural groups all focused on resistance or identity reinforcement strategies. Thus, when analyzing the data, the codes previously discussed became particularly helpful in identifying forms of communicative cultural resistance that have not been recognized in previous muted group or organizational communication research. The code ascribed to one such phenomenon by the researcher was “rhetorical projection.” This code was operationally defined as the placement of feelings upon a group while distancing oneself from that group. Though this strategy was used by a number of cultural groups, almost all of those groups directed the technique against organizational elements associated with the Japanese business culture. It was concluded that this indicated a general discomfort among the workforce population with the imposition of overtly dissimilar business culture practices. Rhetorical projection was also used by a number of cultural groups when describing the groups formed during work breaks. Those groups were associated by participants with cultural tension and discomfort.

Previous organizational research has centered upon overt forms of cultural resistance, but the displacement of feelings or thoughts made evident in the interviews was a distinctly subtle means of resisting cultural and organizational power structures. Interestingly, the findings for this code largely indicated resistance against the Japanese culture. Given that the Japanese organizational members populate upper management positions, this conclusion does not, at first glance, seem out of place. However, when placed in context with the findings for naming and redefining, the conclusion that employees of other cultural groups felt the need to resist against Japanese efforts to exert cultural identity highlights the ongoing struggle for voice that takes place within this international organization.



Rhetorical projection was particularly evident in the answers to one of the interview questions:

8) How do you see Japanese or other cultures reflected in the things that are done here?

In response to this question, many of the employees mentioned exercises that are conducted at the beginning of each shift. According to one employee, “There are stretches we do everyday to start our shift to music. It is a Japanese tradition.” The exercises have been an integral part of the organization since the establishment of sites in the United States. A Japanese upper-management member linked the rationale behind the exercises to Japanese culture:

*Respondent 14:* Japanese start. Manager has to keep and improve the working environment, including keep them and improve the safety. So before working, people should have exercise to keep safe. That is one of the Japanese culture.

The focus of the exercises is the safety of the employees. Many of the jobs on the warehouse floor involve heavy lifting and the operation of heavy machinery. Moreover, the purpose of a manager, according to this Japanese manager, is to improve the overall working environment. Japanese cultural values are an implicit part of this rationale, as quality of the work environment and the safety of the workers takes primacy to other organizational goals.

The exercises are conducted ten minutes prior to every shift. In order to maintain continuity in the exercises, the same member of the management staff runs them for every shift. His own shifts are staggered by the company in order to ensure that he is free whenever the exercises must take place. This role is thus one that he has created for himself and that the company has adapted to allow and encourage. That Japanese management member noted in the interview, “this is not my job description, but since I’m

doing the exercise, I'm leading the other department exercise too. So, typically I do the four times a day on the exercise . . . Which is good, you know, that I'm showing my face to the floor associate every day." Japanese music and terminology is also used during the exercises, helping to explain the immediate ability of roughly three-fourths of organizational members to connect the exercises to the Japanese culture and, ultimately, to the culture of the company itself. One interview participant stated, "If that is something that is a Japanese tradition and they want to hold on to it, I say I am all for that. Because every company has to have some type of background or some type of something to separate them from other places. And that makes you happy to be a part of something." Thus, in answering interview question four, the majority of employees connected the Japanese culture with at least one ritual that had become a part of the organizational culture. The exercises were treated as if they are part of the organization's very identity.

That connection, however, created some degree of tension for a number of the employees, though few explicitly stated their experience of that tension. The strategy of rhetorical projection as resistance became evident in the types of responses formulated to a follow-up question that was ultimately included in the interview protocol as the interviews progressed. Employees who mentioned the exercises in their responses to question four were then asked:

8a) Do you believe the majority of the employees like or don't like the exercises? This closed question was intended to serve as a means of uncovering the impressions participants had of the employees around them; however, in eighteen of the thirty-one interviews included in this analysis, the answers surpassed the boundaries of the question in one significant way. All eighteen participants answered the question by indicating that

they “liked” the exercises, while the majority of employees “did not like” the exercises. For the other thirteen participants, nine did not receive the follow-up question, either because their department did not participate in the exercises (such as accounts payable) or because the follow-up question had not yet been formulated, and four answered that they were uncertain, were involved in running the exercises, or provided merely descriptive answers of the ways the exercises operate.

The group of interview respondents whose answers were categorized as rhetorical projection fell into two important categories. First, when comparing the group to the organizational structure, all were identified as falling into the classification of supervisor, lead, or associate. No assistant managers, managers, or upper management members engaged in rhetorical projection. Though only a few of these members received the questions in interviews, since their day-to-day activities do not place them on the floor of the warehouse consistently, those that did receive the question answered in either a positive fashion or descriptive fashion. Second, the respondents ranged the self-identified national cultural categories. The only national cultural members that did not engage in rhetorical projection when discussing the exercises were Japanese members of the organization. This is, of course, likely relatable to the fact that the exercises are constructions of the Japanese upper-management and therefore inherently serve as a form of voice for these members.

The eighteen participants whose responses included rhetorical projection attempted to maintain a corporately sanctioned image while making potentially negative statements. These statements often included lengthy pauses that were captured in field

notes as the interviewees formulated the most acceptable response to the question. A few such answers included:

*Respondent 8:* I enjoy it because I am not trying to pull a muscle. But I know some other employees are not too fond of it . . . The majority does not like it.

*Respondent 24:* I think that's good because sometimes if you don't do anything that stretches or something you can hurt yourself . . . They don't like. Like, I would say, like, like fifty percent.

*Respondent 33:* I think they, they don't like it for the reason is they, they just don't feel like it really helps them or anything like that. But for me it's nothing to it . . . But I just feel that some people find it annoying.

*Respondent 34:* Some people, most people don't like it, but less of the percentage people do. And that's, I think, mostly men. So, but yeah, I like it myself, so.

*Respondent 37:* Some people don't because, I don't know, I guess they feel it takes a lot of their time away. But I find it helpful and there's really nothing wrong with it, so.

Each of these participants uses language that places displeasure regarding the exercises among groups of “other” employees, while the participants themselves are content or happy with the stretches. There is no need for the employees to point out that others are not satisfied with the exercises, yet each includes that qualification in the interview question response. Though it is possible that the sample included only members who appreciated the exercises, the claim that the majority of employees disliked the exercises would seem to dispute that possibility. Moreover, the consistency of this type of response, coupled with the pauses that were evident in many of the answers, indicated that employees desired for this information to be heard but did not want to be included in the category of those dealing with feelings of discontent. Thus, participants displaced those feelings onto non-specific “others” in an attempt to maintain distance while simultaneously expressing resistance. The use of this strategy for resistive purposes is

bolstered by several respondents recognizing the fiscal uncertainty of the times, with one claiming, “I wouldn’t let this job go since how the economy is right now, so I’m in the right track right now.” Overt resistance might be seen as grounds for termination, leading employees to utilize safer methods. This conclusion is also useful in explaining the ways other strategies of voice negotiation are employed by cultural groups and will be discussed in greater detail later.

This form of resistance is directed against the Japanese culture, as employees perceive that culture’s voice to be overshadowing their own. The ritual exercises represent a constant form of cultural oppression, one that employees do not feel comfortable speaking directly against because of those who enforce them. The power structure of the organization therefore incidentally serves to mute the cultural voices of the employees in favor of the cultural voice of the managers, despite the fact that it does not directly attempt to silence any one culture. One of the only means for associates to begin negotiating voice is to use non-specific others to deliver resistive messages. Though rhetorical projection is not used in this case to generate or identify voice for a specific oppressed cultural group, it is utilized by multiple cultural groups to express a sense of oppression resulting from a perceived dominant cultural group. In that way, rhetorical projection serves as a safe method for articulating a need for voice within an organization.

Several interview participants also mentioned that, at one point, the company chose to switch the language in which the exercises were conducted to English. Both the music and the accompanying directives were translated from Japanese to English. One employee succinctly stated, “because when they switched it to the English version they

really did not like it. They wanted the Japanese version.” The ironic desire of the employees for the exercises to be returned to the original Japanese language was explained by another employee who noted, “One time he translate to English, but you don’t get it because you already know how the music works.” This seemingly straightforward statement is indicative of the fact that employees of the company have, to some degree, accepted the Japanese cultural elements of the company as elements of organizational life; attempts to manipulate those elements to fit a Western standard were met with much more explicit dislike than the original exercises themselves. In that light, resistance through rhetorical projection was strengthened when the national culture not viewed as originator of the company inserted itself into an organizational ritual.

Rhetorical projection also became evident in answers to another, previously discussed interview question:

2b) When you take breaks at work, do you see any groups that always hang out together? How would you describe those groups? Who makes them up?

More than simply allowing the researcher to identify active groups, this question provided insight into the potential tensions that exist among those groups. When prompted with ideas such as seniority, culture, and work areas as means of classifying groups, a number of respondents answered in a manner that removed them from any groupings that might be considered problematic. For instance, one participant explained, “I, you know, I’m a person that talks to everybody. I talk to everybody, say hi to everybody, I don’t care who you are . . . there’s sometimes will be little issues there, but sometimes we don’t know until it’s too late, you know, and something goes wrong.” Another participant stated, “I mean, we interact with everybody, but you just sit other, with the people you feel more comfortable with.” Respondents consistently emphasized a

desire to be perceived as communicatively opened, but described seating arrangements as, at least to some degree, bound by the self-imposed limitations of various groups. . For instance, a participant noted, “there is this one group that they all hang around because maybe because they speak Spanish so they hang around in that one particular table.” In that way, respondents were not necessarily included in the groups, although some were willing to discuss their personal break-group, but could describe the factors that perceived to be the defining elements of those groups. Thus, respondents again projected any sense of discomfort or unease onto non-specific “others.”

In this form of rhetorical projection, however, the “other” was sometimes an implicit piece of the example given by organizational members. Language was a consistent factor brought up by respondents when discussing the groups that form during breaks, yet respondents in all language categories were careful to describe the linguistically defined groups from a third-party standpoint. In other words, though some participants depicted national or ethnic cultural groups formed by organizational members who spoke their own native language, they extricated themselves from those groups. Any intercultural tensions that might be a result of the groupings could therefore be detached from those that described them. The answers that characterized this form of rhetorical projection were presented in different forms:

*Respondent 19:* Yeah, sometimes, yeah, the people speak English like is on one table and the other people speak Spanish is another one.

*Respondent 24:* if I speak Spanish, I’m gonna feel more comfortable with people who speak Spanish. And then, like I say, we have some people who don’t understand English. They understand like fifteen percent, so they gonna get together with the people who speak Spanish because they feel more comfortable in the conversation.

Though not as clearly stated in these answers as in the answers to question eight, this sentiment was echoed in seven interviews, a significant portion of the total sample. Language, and as a result culture, was largely seen by organizational members as a way of depicting the groupings of employees, but was also a source of hesitancy for participants. Rhetorical projection was therefore a strategy deemed necessary when describing cultural groupings or any tension that existed between cultural groups.

An important consideration to address is that a potential cause of this rhetorical projection could be the perception of the researcher as a member of the organization. In three interviews, the interviewer was linguistically grouped with management through the use of terms such as “them” or “you guys.” One participant indicated a level of discomfort in one such answer, stating, “There’s nothing I could ask for, I mean, you know? I mean, you guys tell me, I mean, that’s good enough for me.” Clearly, this participant perceived the researcher as a member of management dealing with trepidation when reporting experiences. The limited appearance of this grouping, however, mitigates, to some degree, this consideration as the sole cause of rhetorical displacement. Moreover, the fact that participants felt the need to express problems with the exercises or the groupings indicates that, first, these responses were honest evaluations of organizational phenomenon and, second, that rhetorical projection was a safer means of articulating workplace concerns to others.

#### *Discrepant Evidence*

Some interview data did not provide evidence of rhetorical projection with regards to the exercises or the groups. Though the majority of participants did seem to use this strategy when discussing the exercises, some did not, possibly indicating that



those employees included in the sample simply did enjoy the exercises though they feel many other employees do not. One such respondent was a Hispanic female who had been with the company for two years. Her description of the exercises highlighted their necessity despite their slightly inconvenient time:

*Respondent 29:* I think they tolerate them more than anything. It's, you know, it's ten minutes before we actually have to work . . . But I honestly enjoy it cus I'm thirty-one years old.

She suggested that the exercises are useful and seemed to genuinely enjoy them. Another associate, an Indonesian male, claimed, "It's that very important, really good, you know? Because we start at five o'clock, wake up four o'clock in the morning, you know. Before you lift something, you know, you should little bit exercise that help a lot." He too views the exercises as helpful, particularly for the morning shift workers. In both of these cases, the exercises are not treated as problems and are, instead, described almost as beneficial to the employees.

Descriptions of grouping also varied in the use of rhetorical projection. One Pacific Islander male employee claimed that the only group that formed was, "The smokers. The cigarette smokers . . . That is it." This answer was repeated several times by members who claimed to be smokers themselves, forming a group with which only they identified. Other responses contrasted more directly with rhetorical projection. For instance, a Hispanic female who had been with the company four years claimed that although cultural or linguistically determined groups might form on breaks, "that only happens in the break room, but that's only cus there's four seat tables . . . But no, no real, you know, split, you know, 'You speak English, you're over here, and you speak Spanish you're over here.'" This response refutes evidence of both active grouping and rhetorical

projection, as the groups are bound by environmental restrictions and do not appear to experience any cultural tension. Yet another associate, a black female who had been with the company for three years, claimed, “the Asian people hangs out with the Asian and Mexican and Hispanics hangs around with their own. But you know, it is not because they want to separate themselves, maybe it is because it is easy for them to communicate.” This example makes clear that although cultural groups do form on breaks, they exist solely because communication is simpler either due to the use of the native language of the group or the common cultural reference points they share.

### *Linguistic Form*

Another form of resistance and identity reinforcement that became apparent in coding for research question one was resistance through language. Because the most common signifier of cultural difference in the warehouse was language, interview participants referenced displeasure with language practices and policies in order to negotiate voice. Specifically, English speaking employees were found to resist against the Spanish language, both in terms of its use by employees on the warehouse floor as well as in terms of its necessity to advance within the company despite the corporate English language policy. Native English speakers utilized this strategy in attempts to literally silence the voices of native Spanish speakers and to increase the level of influence their own voice held.

This form of resistance and identity reinforcement was indicated by interview participants representing a number of national cultural backgrounds. Linguistic form as resistance was discussed by participants when specifically asked to describe cultures in the workplace. Interview questions seven and eight posed the following:

7. How does the fact that different cultures/people from different cultural backgrounds work here affect your job? Has there ever been a time when it was difficult to get something done because you had to work with someone from a different culture?

8. Do you see Japanese or other cultures reflected in the things that are done here?

When answering these questions, many participants began discussing the impact of the different languages spoken within the workforce and upon the warehouse floor. One participant, for instance, explained, “Sometimes I see people getting frustrated due to the fact they cannot understand one another and that causes some intensity.” This answer and others like it spawned a new follow-up question after question seven: “Is there ever a language barrier? How do people deal with it?” These questions received the majority of responses that were coded into this category, as almost all employees described ways of dealing with the multiple languages represented within the organization. Given that employees expressed thoughts regarding their language compared to the languages of others, the negotiation of voice became apparent in interview answers.

As evidenced by the demographic data provided earlier, the primary languages of the workforce at these sites were English, Spanish, or Japanese. Though other languages were represented, they constituted a small percentage of the languages spoken at the workplace. The organization itself is an English-first company, meaning that the organization asks that individuals be capable of speaking English since operations the majority of its operations are conducted in the United States. One employee, discussing the company’s language policy, explained, “Due to the fact that it is an English-based company, English-speaking based company, English should be the major one that everybody should focus on.” Organizational members therefore presumably feel pressure to understand and be capable of conversing in English regardless of their native language.

Resistance to learning that language, or being forced to use it, should appear as a means of negotiating culturally unique voice if groups feel muted. A few interviews confirmed that non-English speakers face direct pressure to learn and speak English:

*Respondent 24:* But when somebody, when they had a supervisor he didn't speak Spanish, it's pressure for people who don't speak English because sometimes you had to get somebody can translate the language because they don't understand in each other.

*Respondent 25:* Well, I would say it is gonna affect say if you don't know as much English as others, you're probably not going to move up higher because you do need that language that we speak here, English, you need to know well, read and write because you gotta communicate with people out in the warehouse . Not only that, but probably you gotta talk to customers, take notes, do all this other stuff that requires the language speaking and writing. So yeah, I think maybe not someone that doesn't know how to speak or write English that well is not going to get as high as the ones that do.

*Respondent 35:* It's, you know, we talk English, you know, we have to talk English . . . I don't understand one hundred percent English, so I have to ask some other way, you know, to, to know exactly what going on . . . Everybody understands English, you know, that's the important thing.

These responses treat the need to know English in a variety of ways. The first discusses the pressure to understand English based on the need for basic, task-oriented communication to take place on the warehouse floor. The second response indicates that internal advancement is impossible without knowledge of the English language because of larger business practices. The third treats the need for English as an organizational mantra, as English is "the important thing." In none of these statements, however, or in statements from other interviews, is any resistance to learning or using English apparent. All respondents discussing this pressure treat it as simply a matter of fact, not a matter of oppression.

Respondents discussing the use of the Spanish language in the company, however, both overtly and subtly demonstrate resistance aimed at linguistics form as

directed towards gaining voice. A recurrent theme in interviews with native and non-native English speakers was the need for bilingualism within the company. Primary English speaking workers often treated that need as an “annoyance,” while non-English speaking workers acknowledged that it existed and that some primary English speakers were unhappy that the need existed. One interview participant claimed, “If you don’t speak Spanish, you’re usually semi-excluded. I mean even with the bilingual people they prefer to speak Spanish . . . it’s kind of like you have you’re English speakers and then there’s everyone else.” The exclusion of individuals in the organization is directly related to cultural expression in this statement, indicating that language is viewed as a method of oppression by organizational members. The form of resistance and identity reinforcement that ultimately became clear in interviews was therefore unhappiness about or outright refusal to learn and speak Spanish.

The Spanish language was viewed by many non-native Spanish speakers, including non-native English speakers, as a symbol of internal oppression. This theme is evident in the responses below:

*Respondent 4:* The only thing that bothers me, if I am working in my, lets say I am talking to another Hispanic person and another Hispanic person comes up and talks to the Hispanic person. They are speaking Spanish, and I think that is very rude. You walk over in my work area and start speaking Spanish, you know I don’t understand, I think that is very rude in every culture . . . Rudeness from working and talking to somebody else and then another person comes up and instead of saying, “excuse me,” they just get to laughing and talking in a different language.

*Respondent 9:* Sometimes I think it is necessary to learn a little bit of Spanish because most of the employees here, I would say, about eighty percent Hispanic, but most of them their primary language is English.

*Respondent 20:* if everyone spoke English I would understand, you know, who’s doing this and why they don’t wanna do that. Sometimes they have complaints

and then there's two that always complain, but everyone kinda makes a joke about it and I can't tell if it's a joke or if it's real, yeah, so.

*Respondent 25:* They like to talk Spanish, you know, in front of, you know, different, you know, people. So sometimes we are though, you know, right, you know, like in a meeting, you know, they talking each other Hispanic, you know, Spanish. Sometimes I hear my name and, you know, "Oh, what happened?"

The theme of linguistic form as resistance appears in a number of different varieties in these responses. One employee blatantly calls speaking Spanish in her work area "rude," while another implies that his work is disrupted by the use of Spanish, as is the work of others. Another indicates that potential interpersonal conflicts arise from the use of Spanish. The prevalence of the Spanish language around these employees has generated a feeling of being voiceless. The muting of native English speaking workers would seem paradoxical given the geographical location of the international site; however, given that the warehouse, as depicted by one native Spanish speaking employee, is "ninety-five percent Hispanic," those native English speakers who resist through language perceive themselves to be isolated within the workforce population, with the Spanish language becoming a symbol force heightening that sense.

Their response is to argue that the use of an "other," non-organizationally sanctioned language limits or inhibits them. Promoting the use of English and denigrating the use of Spanish becomes, in their minds, a means of resisting the dominant power structure that the Spanish language has come to represent. Native English speaking organizational members directly combat the type of voice they perceive to be opposing or repressing their own. One primary Spanish speaker even mentioned the cultural tension that exists due to language conflicts instigated by native English speakers:

*Respondent 38:* There's people that been complain about us speaking Spanish, and I've been told, personally I've been told, that I can only speak English in my

work area. But I mean, I was told, you know, talk English and try not to speak Spanish.

The non-native Spanish speakers in the organization seek to control the languages spoken around them, making the attempt at resistance a much more active one. This effort is observed and reacted to by native Spanish speakers. One native Spanish speaking respondent described a conflict she had with one of her native English speaking coworkers and explained, “And I explain to her, you know, ‘We’re not talking about you,’ but she says, ‘you’re in America, you should speak English.’ . . . but you know sometimes it just comes out, the Spanish comes out.” The native Spanish speakers in the organization naturally fall into patterns of speaking unique to their culture when around one another that involve the Spanish language. Some native English speakers, however, perceive the use of Spanish to be an intentional form of cultural exclusion.

Interestingly, upper management exhibits a slight disconnect from this sentiment, despite the fact that many of them are primary English speakers, possibly adding to the feelings of frustration that have generated resistive action among non-native Spanish speakers. The rationale for the “English language” policy is not premised upon unification or capitalistic gain, but rather upon the assumption that an inability to communicate in English will impede an employee’s success within the organization. One senior manager explained this rationale:

*Respondent 11:* It’s important that we, and (we’ve) been trying to make it a practice that if we hire people if they’re primarily are native Spanish speakers that they have some working level of English because otherwise we’re ostracizing them from the group. You know, there’s a common path, you know, we’re all trying to get onto, and if they can’t understand what, what that path is then we have to stop and go back and change and that makes things more difficult.

Management clearly considers native Spanish speakers to be the group most likely to become marginalized and “ostracized” by the organization.

In contrast, the efforts of resistance through linguistic form identified in interview data seem to indicate that non-Spanish speakers experience more frustration and isolation due to language barriers. Some native English employees even conclude that organizational policies and practices inherently come into conflict due to the languages spoken. This conflict, in their minds, results in unfair or problematic business practices, as one participant made clear:

*Respondent 6:* Yes I do. But the only thing I would say about that is if they hire for the lead positions then they should let us know that bilingual is a must. Or a lot of applications do that. And if that is what they are hiring in here, and it is good to be bilingual, then do that. Either if you are going to hire the bilingual associates, yeah, then make it so the leads have to be bilingual as well. If the leads are not bilingual, then you have to understand that don't keep pilling in all of these associates who the leads cannot talk to.

Both the organization and native Spanish speakers are indicted in this response for preventing native English speaking team leaders from being able to competently accomplish their tasks. The amount of Spanish spoken within the warehouse is perceived to be incredibly high by those who are not native Spanish speakers. Regardless of the actual level of spoken Spanish, this perception leads other workers to feel as if the organization has created an impasse by promoting an English language policy and failing to follow through with it. This respondent feels as if she has almost been deceived by the company because she was not told bilingualism was a “must.” In turn, her means of using language to resist is to demand that, in order to be fair, either the leads be selected based upon bilingualism or, more tellingly, that the company hire only those that definitively



speak English. In either respect, the policies of the company are framed to be at odds with its practices by native English speakers, forcing them to find a means of resistance.

Language in this organization thus serves as both a symbolic means of cultural resistance as well as a symbol of cultural oppression. The fact that the organization sanctions English as its primary language only furthers this symbolic structuring, as non-native Spanish speakers identify the conflict between what is supposed to occur and what actually occurs due to the interactions of employees. The organization appears, to those who attempt to gain voice, to ignore their demands and needs, despite its insistence that English be spoken by all employees. Thus, in negotiating voice, a resistive move oriented towards language is undertaken by native English speaking organizational members. This move results in a certain amount of subtle but noticeable intercultural conflict.

#### *Discrepant Evidence*

Discrepancies existed in interview data regarding employees' perceptions of linguistic form. When asked whether language was ever an issue, one Hispanic female lead claimed, "I don't think so. You know, when it comes to work, what I need to tell you or tell anybody is pretty simple I think for most of the cases." Another Mexican female explained, "I would say it's ok. I mean, you know, as long as, I mean, it gets translated or, but, to me, like I said, working for another, like a Japanese company, I mean, I'm here, I mean, I'm successful, so I shouldn't be, should be any problem." Both of these respondents seemed to indicate no awareness of resistance though linguistic form taking place within the organization. The second respondent pointed out that any issues related to language that do arise are generally resolved on the spot, preventing them from becoming major dilemmas. It is important to note, however, that neither of these

employees identified as part of a native English speaking culture. Thus, their evidence may in actuality bolster the evidence for resistance through linguistic form as they represent those that the resistance is directed towards. No members who identified with native English speaking cultures provided discrepant evidence for this category.

### Research Question 2

Research question two posed the following: How do organizational members of national cultural groups perceive organizational culture at the site of an international organization? Because the interplay of national culture and organizational culture has received little scholarly attention, an exploratory approach was selected as the appropriate means for examining the data for answers to research question 2. Thus, the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis was selected to analyze interview data in order to answer this question. Interviews were coded using open and axial coding, with field notes utilized to gain increased insight into the answers of respondents.

The terms and phrases used by interviewees to describe the organizational culture they perceived within the company consistently highlighted its openness and sensitivity to multiculturalism. Perceptions of the organizational culture were, predictably, influenced by a number of factors, including experience, culture, ethnicity, and position. Managers and supervisors universally held slightly differing perceptions of the organizational culture than employees, and members of different national cultures perceived the organizational culture in slightly different ways. At the same time, however, the similarities that characterized the answers were enlightening and incredibly useful in identifying the unique challenges and opportunities experienced within

international organizations. The organizational culture was continually described with terms such as “good”, “fair”, and “friendly” by employees at all levels.

Two themes emerged from the data as critical elements of the organizational culture that will be discussed below: multiculturalism as an organizational cultural value and structure as an organizational cultural artifact. Multiculturalism was viewed by the majority of respondents as the organizations most important characteristic, and the structure of the organization, which was related to the Japanese business culture, was attributed with allowing employees to express national or ethnic cultural voice. These themes were consistent in the answers of participants who ranged across the spectrum of national cultures that participated in the study. Despite the results of the analysis of voice presented above, which seemed to indicate some degree of communicative cultural tensions existing among workforce members, associates and managers at all levels expressed similar understandings of both what the organization valued and how it maintained those values.

#### *Multiculturalism as Organizational Cultural Value*

The most recurrent theme found within interview responses that dealt with organizational culture had to do with the multicultural orientation of the company. Though in research question one the struggle for voice among different national cultures was evident, in terms of the broader culture of the organization, a general recognition of the need for multicultural awareness and consideration was treated as a primary facet of the organizational culture. Most employees and managers felt that, regardless of the success of multicultural efforts within the organization, the organization represented and encouraged a positive forum for cultural interaction. Indeed, many respondents indicated

both explicitly and implicitly that the cultural milieu of the organization was one of the more exciting and unique reasons to work for the company. One respondent claimed, “It makes it more interesting and makes it more fun. Not only are we learning different cultures, but just working with the different cultures, it is a whole different atmosphere.” This response makes clear that employees perceive the organization as one that encourages interaction with different cultures and that therefore hosts a select and unusual type of work environment.

Perceptions of an organizational culture that highlighted multicultural awareness were not limited to broad claims regarding the environment. Many participants provided stories and examples that constantly reinforced the power of this perception. In particular, the first half of interview question seven asked, “How does the fact that different cultures/people from different cultural backgrounds work here affect your job?” Question one asked, “How would you describe this company to people who aren’t familiar with it?” These questions prompted respondents to, first, articulate their understanding of the setting in which they worked. One associate noted, “I understand this is different cultures because we have Latinos, we have Anglos, I mean, African Americans too, and we had a, I don’t know how many different cultures, but we had like seven, seven, a lot, a lot.” Another employee claimed, “We have worked with all kinds of, I worked with a couple from Middle Eastern people, Hispanics. There are a lot of Hispanic here. Chinese and Japanese. We have had everything here.” The awareness of the multicultural makeup of the workforce, an awareness that is highly specific with regard to cultural background, is almost instinctual for employees. Some are constantly in tune with the cultures represented in the organization and any changes that occur in that cultural makeup.

Others are merely aware that a large number of cultures work within the organization, and that such a diverse workforce is unique. In either regard, the cultural makeup of the workforce is a defining characteristic of the organization in the minds of employees and managers alike.

Moreover, their ability to immediately draw upon that knowledge indicates how critical a piece of the organizational culture that knowledge has become. Rather than managers simply being concerned with cultural representation in the workplace, both employees and managers are interested in the multicultural nature of the organization and in highlighting that fact to others. The policies, procedures, and practices of the organization ensure that that mentality is instilled in workers. Since the company's move to the United States' locations, efforts have been directed towards ensuring that the company is as open to cultural differences as possible. Two members of upper management explained the rationale behind the company's focus upon diversity:

*Respondent 12:* But if we can find something where they can get along, or put them in an environment where they have to get along and they have to get to know each other and they have to do team building exercises with somebody who they would not be as comfortable with initially, it kind of makes their bubble a little bigger. It makes their viewpoint a little bit wider.

*Respondent 13:* This is because the company, since this is a culturally-mixed company, the company wanted us to go through a lot of classes on how to deal with people, how to manage people, how to deal with difficult people, and stuff like that. A lot of classes. And to me it felt like we were in elementary school, in the beginning, right? But then maybe I was naïve in a lot of ways. I did not know what the differences are and what the difference will bring to me.

The first respondent was a member of the initial group of managers that helped to develop specific guidelines for the company's United States locations. He describes the focus on multiculturalism as both a means of avoiding potential conflicts that might arise and as a means of expanding the perspectives and experiences of workers in the

company. The second manager was brought in after the company had established a foothold in the United States. His story depicts the acculturative process he underwent as part of his training to join the management team. Though at first he felt as if the classes and exercises were “elementary” in nature, he now considers himself to have been “naïve” before the classes, an indication of the level of importance that these policies have come to hold in the eyes of those who are responsible for it. For that reason, these policies serve as organizational cultural artifacts, as members attach significant value to them and guide their work lives based upon them.

As interviews progressed, it became clear that workers also contributed to the organization’s approach to multiculturalism. The level of buy-in to the organizational value system constructed by management was extremely high. In answering interview question seven, many employees discussed their interactions with one another as both positive for them and for the organization as a whole:

*Respondent 3:* As a matter of fact, it is great opportunity because we could have ideas from other places. We could get together and make something better out of it. You never know when that person has an idea and my idea will combine it a make it a stupendous idea. And it has happened a couple times, when other people have brought in an idea and we put it together with somebody else’s and it works great . . . The company is open doors.

*Respondent 5:* It makes it very interesting. You learn a lot. It helps you to be more open. I am a supervisor here so it has helped me when planning different activities and wording things or how you are saying things, there are always ways that you need to make sure that you are adapted to the different cultures and you learn those, so thus, when I got this position as a supervisor, I did some research on different cultures.

*Respondent 19:* I think it’s very good. You learn from other people, I mean, and other people learn from you. Everybody, I mean, help. I think for this thing it’s very good. We don’t have no problems.

These responses indicate more than a simple approach to upholding diversity; rather, the responses make clear that multiculturalism is considered a practically useful piece of the organization. The atmosphere is one where the “open doors” lead to feelings of satisfaction and support. Despite the fact that analysis of muting reveals some discomfort among employees based upon relative levels of culture empowerment, most employees, including native English speakers, expressed no overall discomfort with the organizations focus upon diversity. The culture of the organization thus encourages members to treat diversity as an imperative element of the work environment. The ways of thinking and acting that are unique to cultural backgrounds are considered to be both useful means of improving business practices as well as potential commodities. Without the multicultural atmosphere, employees and supervisors seem to believe that the capabilities of the workforce would be drastically limited. New methods and systems that result in profit and expansion are directly related to the organization’s focus upon multiculturalism.

These practices are therefore incorporated into the pieces of the organizational culture to which employees are exposed. One employee explained, “And it is something that with my culture may not be as prevalent, but you get those understandings and stuff as you go and you hear stories and learning.” The fact that “stories” and “learning” are included in the employee experiences of the workplace make the multicultural focus a natural part of the work life. In that way, the multicultural orientation is reified for employees and managers alike. As more employees of differing cultural backgrounds enter the company, they both contribute to and are affected by the stories of multiculturalism that pervade the organization.

The perception of the multicultural workforce directly impacts employee expectations of the company. On the whole, associates and managers alike expressed a desire for the company to aid in preserving the open cultural environment that exists within the warehouse and within the larger organization. Some even made suggestions during their interviews for ways the company could improve communication within the warehouse by improving cultural awareness. One employee offered, “So, you know, if, if there were, I don’t know, if there were some kind of booklets or something saying this is each person’s culture we gotta respect, you know . . . it would probably just help us to be more open minded and stuff.” This suggestion is one that implicitly deals with cultural conflicts created by a perceived lack of understanding of different cultural values and expectations. Two concepts can be derived from this statement when coupled with the repetitive statements highlighting national cultures within the company. First, organizational members sense the need for intercultural understanding. The workforce maintains the notion that the numerous cultures within the organization are as valuable an asset as any piece of equipment in the warehouse. Second, employees recognize that without a consistent emphasis on this value, and without efforts specifically directed to upholding it, intercultural tensions could become a serious concern for the organization. Rather than homogenizing employees, it is imperative that the members of the workforce feel as if cultural identities are respected. Thus, within this international organization, multiculturalism is perceived as a necessary value for organizational survival.

#### *Discrepant Evidence*

Evidence did exist that not all employees perceive multiculturalism to be an organizational cultural value. One Hispanic female associate pointed out when asked



what the key was to being successful in the organization, “Not pissing off the right people. I mean honestly, that’s, like, a lot of the people around here are younger than me, so.” Despite the emphasis placed upon multiculturalism by many associates and leads, employees such as this one focused more on the need to simply please those in positions of power. Another Mexican male associate echoed this sentiment, noting, “Well, when you’re doing your job, you know, that, you know, your boss is gonna be happy and you’re gonna be happy. So, here, you know, you’re doing your job and, look at me, I’m doing my job.” Though these employees did not express opinions that the organization did not appreciate their culture, they did not choose to emphasize the multicultural orientation of the organization. Instead, this associate and others noted other elements of organizational life as being critical to long term success or simply indicated a lack of attachment to the organization. A Pacific Islander male employee claimed, “You want me to be honest? I don’t want to come to work. On the way here is the worst time of my day, on my way here.” This employee displays a detachment from the organization that is directly related to some displeasure with the work environment. Though this evidence does not directly oppose the finding that multiculturalism is an organizational cultural value, it does demonstrate that such a value is not recognized by all employees as being an integral part of the company.

#### *Structure as Organizational Cultural Artifact*

Typically, the types of artifacts that play roles in generating organizational cultures are, “art, technology, and visible and audible behavior patterns as well as myths, heroes, language, rituals, and ceremony” (Alavi, Kayworth, & Leidner, 2006). A defining piece of the organizational culture within this international organization, however, is the

reliance upon organizational structure. Japanese business culture was cited by the majority of employees as having the strongest influence in solidifying the structure as an artifact of the organizational culture. In that regard, the structure of the organization of this international organization is perceived to be as culturally bound as the multicultural orientation that is prevalent among organizational members.

The importance of organizational structure became abundantly clear through answers to interview question three, which asked, “When you have a problem at work, who do you talk to for help? Why? Can you give an example?” Participants generally asked for clarification about the term “problem,” leading to the addition of the phrase, “whether it’s personal, technical, or professional,” to the interview question. After hearing this qualification, participant responses began to highlight their faith in the structural elements of the organization rather than showing any signs of dissent or internal grouping. Field notes emphasize the lack of hesitancy in the majority of answers to this question. One employee succinctly stated, “I go straight to my supervisor, I mean, my supervisor, HR.” Initially, the researcher suspected that these responses were motivated by a belief that the responses would be shown to management; however, even after further rapport building and qualification statements, such as, “This is strictly going to be read by me, I’m just curious if you feel like management really listens to you,” the type of answer provided was almost ubiquitous.

The structure used by the company was both overtly and subtly brought out by all employees as a valuable element of their work. Several responses make clear the emphasis that both managers and employees place upon the structure of the organization:

*Respondent 9:* Most of the time I see the conflict between coworkers and I have no idea what their problem is, but I usually I could see their facial expressions. So

they usually go to the supervisor. Usually the problem and issue is solved right there and then . . . All my coworkers, they are very, very helpful . . . And then you can come to your lead or supervisor and they help you. So there is nothing to be embarrassed to ask.

*Respondent 24:* Ok you thinking something, so yeah, you have to go in and talk to your supervisor or manager. Or sometimes when you don't have the support from your supervisor, so you gotta go and, you know, and talk to your manager. Because sometimes you don't . . . have that support from your supervisor.

The first respondent, a male who identified as Latino, describes the system for addressing concerns within the company. His responses are indicative of those given by many employees that emphasized the reliance upon the chain of command regardless of the problem experienced. The second respondent, a Filipino male who had been with the company for over three years, further illustrates the importance of the organizational structure. He makes clear that if employees are not satisfied with the response of a supervisor they then turn to managers. The chain of command is repeatedly referenced with little variance in the process described. Though many companies utilize bureaucratic structures in attempts to direct channels of communication, reduce workloads, and delegate responsibility, analysis of this interview data revealed that organizational members considered the structure of the organization to be a crucial element of its identity and relied upon the structure to describe their place in the organization.

#### *Cultural Roots of Structural Emphasis*

Members of the organization indicated a belief that the importance of structure derives from particular cultural roots. One Hispanic female associated the emphasis on organizational structure directly to Japanese business culture when responding to a question relating to how she dealt with problems at work, noting, "Japanese culture they

are very strict and very structured.” The Japanese business culture plays a direct role in the structure of the organization serving as an organizational cultural artifact. A number of employees related the importance of structure to Japanese ways of operating:

*Respondent 16:* Yes, to a certain extent because it is still structured. We still have our structures. We still have what we have to do and because our parent is still a Japanese company, we still have to follow those rules.

*Respondent 18:* Yeah, there is a big Japanese influence . . . Everything just seems like very serene, you know how Japanese are very calm, and everything over there just seems very calm.

*Respondent 20:* Yeah, well, Japanese culture they kinda more, they’re more organized I would say. Like, you know, some things that need to be in a certain place that we need to follow something. You know, like it’s help us out in the long run, I mean.

Associates and managers relate the Japanese culture to the systems and procedures that organize the work environment. The Japanese culture is perceived to be “more organized” and “serene,” characteristics that are reflected in the emphasis placed upon following specific policies and practices within the company. Employees perceive these characteristics to be positive. One supervisor referred to acculturating to the specifically Japanese aspects of the organizational culture:

*Respondent 32:* But I just liked it. I, I, I, it was a different culture, something I wasn’t used to. Complained about it a lot, but then I kinda started seeing, ok, if I’m working and I’m wearing white and I’m keeping myself clean, then I’m keeping the whole area clean and keeping the area around me and my workstations clean. But it, it was good. I like it.

The specific policies mentioned in this Mexican male’s response are related to the general concept of cleanliness. That cleanliness is considered important to maintaining a healthy work environment, an idea proliferated by Japanese management. The “different culture” becomes a meaningful piece of organizational life. Perhaps more tellingly, the supervisor complained about the demands and expectations of the company initially, but

eventually came to a point where, “I just liked it.” The point of acculturation could not be reached without assimilating some degree of the Japanese business culture present in the ways the company is organized. Thus, the roles and structures that are created to foster the “serenity” described have become, in the minds of organizational members, symbolic ties to the organizational home culture and to the organizational culture that has been spawned at the site. Thus, the structure of the organization is an artifact of the organizational culture to which they have been introduced and which they have helped to establish.

#### *Discrepant Evidence and Rhetorical Tensions*

The importance of structure does not mean that all individuals feel included or capable of fully expressing themselves within their position. Indeed, interviews revealed that organizational members in specific structural positions felt less empowered than their title indicated and experienced rhetorical tensions with regards to their ability to express themselves to others. This resulted in discrepant evidence that seemed initially to discount the conclusions discussed earlier. Those who expressed the least confidence in relying upon the structure of the company were members of middle management, such as supervisors. Supervisors were consistently referred to as people with whom employees felt comfortable discussing problems. Conversely, however, supervisors themselves expressed feelings of isolation and, to some degree, limited capacity due to their placement between upper management and leads. This becomes particularly clear when discussing their communication practices. One supervisor, when asked who he turned to for advice, discussed his frustrations:

*Respondent 32:* Actually, it’s my wife. I, I, I tried coming here and talking to people, but it, it’s kind of like they don’t see it as, as something wanting to help

you or somebody coming to you, coming to them asking for advice, but they see it more as, “Ok, what did you do to start this?”

This supervisor describes an environment in which he feels unable to express his concerns to those above him. He depicts an environment in which he is unable to trust the structure in which he operates.

A cause of the frustration found in the responses of middle managers relates to the restructuring the company has recently undergone. The previous supervisor’s position, like many supervisory positions within the company, was created during the personnel shift mentioned earlier. As a result, there are high expectations regarding the performance of these but limited appreciation experienced by those holding those positions. This sentiment was echoed by another supervisor:

*Respondent 5:* I think that there was a lot of, we have gone through different managements here quite frequently in the last like two years, and I think that there was some, maybe say animosity . . . Because there was a period like for myself that I really did not have, it was kind of like you run your business and you are fine, you don’t need help. You are aggressive enough, just take care of it.

Though this supervisor indicates that the discomfort no longer exists, again, a feeling of isolation is apparent in the response, “You don’t need help.” Supervisors are required to maintain an open door policy for employees but, themselves, feel as if the doors to which they can turn for help are often closed. The structure of the organization does not adequately address the needs of these employees.

Their feelings of discontent, however, can be attributed to the same importance of structure to which employees adhere. The culture of the organization fosters certain expectations among organizational members due to the emphasis it places upon obeying structural rules. All of the supervisors were internally promoted to their positions, meaning that they had acculturated to the organization through time spent as associates

and as leads. The supervisors' dissatisfaction can therefore be linked to the fact that they perceive the organization to be violating the organizational structure which, for them, is a cultural artifact that operates in a very specific fashion. Where before they were able to rely upon the structure to provide them voice, their positioning now seems to silence them or lead them to feel unappreciated, causing them to feel disconnected from the rest of the organizational membership. One supervisor noted, "It's, they're craving attention I think. It's understandable cus I kinda crave it myself, cus I don't hear nothing from my boss. I'm like, 'Am I doing ok?'" The lack of downward communication to supervisors contrasted with the outpouring or upward communication leaves them stranded with what they believe to be very little support. Their acceptance of the Japanese emphasis upon structure, however, leaves them feeling even more dissatisfied because of the failure of that structure to meet their expectations.

Only one floor-level associate explicitly claimed to distrust the structure. A relatively new employee of the company, her answer to interview question three was dramatically different from all others:

*Respondent 19:* Me, I never go to the, by the levels. I never go to the supervisor because I know friends and this, this, and that. Most of the time, I go to HR and fix, and fix it.

*Researcher:* You say you have friends and things like that. Do you go to friends to talk to them for help or do you strictly go to HR?

*Respondent 19:* I go to HR. I prefer to go the HR because on the floor, you know, it's, if the problem is very small and you see something over there, you can trust the supervisor nothing because right away everybody knows.

This response highlights a dilemma that was expected to arise in a number of interviews but that only arose in this respondent's answer. Internal promotion provides a means for employees to identify with and appreciate the structure of the organization. The line between employees and managers is, in some ways, blurred by the policy, ensuring that

associates perceive a great deal of opportunity within the company. At the same time, however, the policy has the potential to alienate those who feel that the line between management and associate is not starkly drawn and, more importantly, lends itself to reinvigorating the issue of favoritism that plagued the organization's past.

Supervisors and associates are perceived by some to be "friends," meaning that certain professional and personal issues cannot be trusted to those in positions of power. That friendship is a result of the level of identification that exists between associates and supervisors due to internal promotions. The tension resulting from that friendship is reflected in a mistrust of the immediate communicative structures available to associates. That does not, however, mean that associates become completely detached from the company or the value it places upon structure and process. This associate's narrative returns to a structural element for finding resolution for problems; rather than turning to friends for help or aid, she turns to Human Resources, a department she feels is objective and separate from the warehouse itself. In that light, she adheres to the cultural artifact of organizational structure while still expressing a sense of oppression that results from that artifact. Others turned to Human Resources as well in their answers, depicting it as a piece of the organization that preserves the quality of the work environment. Thus, the organizational culture is premised upon the notion that the structure of the organization will serve the needs of employees, even if those needs seem unheard.

### Research Question 3

Because this study focused upon the perceptions of employees regarding the organizational culture in which they take part, it was deemed equally important to identify the ways in which participants perceived the organizational culture of the site to



develop. Though multiculturalism and structure were critical elements of the organizational culture, the ways in which they came to carry meaning for organizational members were equally important. Thus, research question three asked the following: How do organizational members of national cultural groups perceive organizational culture developing at the site of an international organization? The constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis was again used in answering this question.

In general, the two pieces of organizational culture revealed in interviews seem to develop from managerial efforts to maintain an open work environment and employee expectations that no national or ethnic culture attain prevalence. Multiculturalism as an organizational value appeared to originate both from the constant managerial emphasis on cultural diversity and the desire of employees for no single national or ethnic culture to be overtly present. Structure appeared to become a cultural artifact because of the process it represented in the minds of employees. That process guarantees a relatively free level of expression as well as preservation from dominance by any one particular national or ethnic culture within the organization because it directs communication in a way employees consider valuable. Teams and “lead” positions play particularly important roles in the structure of the organization and will be discussed in greater detail below. The structure of the organization can, however, generate rhetorical tensions for specific employees that deserve attention.

#### *Manifestation of Multiculturalism as Cultural Value*

Employees describe the organization in ways that demonstrate the strength of the acculturative process with regards to multiculturalism. One employee described the company as, “a multi-race company. There is a lot of different people here, different

background, working as one unit.” In this statement, it is clear that the differences among members of the workforce are considered important to the organization’s identity by employees. Moreover, the rhetoric implies a certain coherence cemented through those cultural differences. Multiculturalism ironically provides a fundamental, unifying tenet of the organizational culture that, as employees acculturate, becomes more meaningful. Another, relatively new employee, when asked how he would describe the organization, claimed, “Exciting, challenging, and diverse.” Though the first two words selected would be, in any organization, a means of answering the question in an organizationally favorable manner, the third term is not as straightforward when examined out of context; in context, however, the term is clearly viewed, along with the first two, to be organizationally desirable.

Moreover, given the relative speed with which the term was selected for use, the concept is clearly at the forefront of the cultural orientation maintained in the attitudes of employees. Another employee explained, “The thing is, you know, they don’t discriminate over here. People here they respect each other. Actually, it is kind of great that we have different cultures working here.” “Culture” is associated with respect when discussing the general organization. “Discrimination” is treated as a term that is foreign to the organization. A Latina employee acknowledged, “I really, really like this company. I like this company for giving everybody the opportunity . . . To me, they are a very, very equal opportunity employment agency.” The notion of equality is reflected in the cultural representation present in the mid-level structure of the organization. Of the team leaders appointed from the employee base to run warehouse team operations, employees indicated that anywhere from half to two-thirds of the leads are non-native English

speakers; in short, the observable practices of the company bolster the sense of multiculturalism that prevails among employees.

From the standpoint of employees, the rhetoric used by management to encourage cultural diversity is linked to the organization's treatment of the workforce. The terms "fair," "good," and "fun" were repeatedly used by employees as a means of characterizing the nature of the organization. The culturally aware atmosphere of the organization heightens the work experience of employees as they accept the environment that has been promoted. One employee explained, "It's actually fun." That atmosphere generates pressure upon employees embody the multicultural character that is so critical to the organization. One mid-level manager described her approach to working within the organization:

*Respondent 30:* It's definitely a plus to learn some other language. I speak, my mother language is Japanese, and I speak ok English and I love to learn Spanish. To have better understanding of, you know, Spanish speaking people and Chinese too.

As discussed earlier, a particular sense of the need to learn Spanish exists for non-native Spanish speakers. This narrative, however, points to a larger sense of the need to be aware of the number of cultures that work within the warehouse. This manager specifically points out the Chinese and Spanish cultures, but she describes her approach to them as a search for "understanding." In that light, it becomes necessary for employees to adopt the organizational cultural value of multiculturalism in order for the company to operate smoothly. Three interview participants indicated a desire to learn languages other than Spanish or English in their responses and attributed that desire to their experiences within the organization.

### *Employees as Generative Agents*

These experiences, however, point towards another important element in the treatment of multiculturalism as a cultural value within the organization. Management cannot completely dictate organizational culture. Some respondents claimed displeasure with the strategies employed by the organization as a means of promoting a particular culture. This is clear in the analysis of voice presented earlier, as the national culture most prevalent in upper management is, in many respects, the most muted. Another example of this muting, and the resultant effects it has had upon the organizational culture, came in descriptions of the past actions of the organization and supported the notion that employees play a critical role in reifying multiculturalism as an organizational cultural value.

One rule within the warehouse several years prior to this study that many employees distinctly recalled was a requirement to wear white uniforms. Though a number of employees claimed to appreciate the company's provision of clothing, many pointed to dissatisfaction due to uniforms. This dissatisfaction, unlike dissatisfaction expressed regarding the exercises, was not projected. Associates were direct in stating the displeasure they felt when they were required to wear all white uniforms, with one lead claiming, "I thought I was a milkman." Other employees expressed similar feelings, but related those feelings to the cultural elements of the uniforms:

*Respondent 6:* They recently started letting us wear jeans and pants, and before it was strictly the uniform; you could not wear that. And I just figured, like, okay, yeah, Japanese culture, they are kind of strict and they are in their ways, and this of the Komyo logo and everything, the colors and everything, this is them . . . but up until recently, like I think they are kind of starting to bend a little bit, just a little bit . . . I think they are starting to lay that down as they see what type of company we work in, because we are not in Japan. We are here and it is a little bit different here.

*Respondent 20:* Well, in the beginning I did with the wearing white. We would wear only white and it's a warehouse so I kinda was like, "Whoa that's kinda different." But that was, that was one of the things, and that, that, you know, the Japanese, like I could tell that's something they really stick for. And everything else has been positive . . .

The first employee describes the uniforms as a "strict" means of imposing the Japanese culture. This, in her mind, conflicted with both the national culture in which the company is operating, as indicated by her reference to "here," as well as with the cultural milieu of the organization itself. The company's site in the United States is a different "type" than the Japanese management is aware. The second associate initially seems only unsettled by the uniforms, though he does clearly note that Japanese management considered the uniforms to be incredibly important. At the end of the statement, however, when discussing other cultural pieces of the workplace, he claims that, "everything else has been positive." In other words, the uniforms represented a violation of organizational cultural norms, as one culture imposed itself in an unwelcome manner upon others.

These employees sum up the experiences of many who felt that the imposition of the uniforms by management as an overtly Japanese artifact was unfair. The uniforms were a means of homogenizing employees, revoking their voice and masking their voice. In these interview responses, the need for appreciation of individual and cultural differences surpasses, for employees, the need for managers to express their cultural voice. Associates desired increased ability to express themselves culturally and individually. Thus, when the uniforms were relaxed, employees exhibited a great deal of satisfaction. Associates often returned to descriptions of the company that highlighted the positive ways it treated employees, such as free lunches, picnics, and parties after

describing the uniform conflict, indicating that once the cultural signifier was removed, the organization developed a more open and caring environment..

In a simplistic sense, employees choose to accept, reject, or modify the larger culture of the organization. The differentiation perspective on organizational culture, as described by Alavi, Kayworth, and Leidner (2006), is particularly useful here. Employees within this international organization represent a variety of national cultures, a fact that the majority of associates and managers overtly recognize. Those national cultures interact, merge, and diverge within the site of this international organization to spawn a unique culture to which employees contribute. Because of the diversity present within the organization, any sense that a cultural group is insensitive to or ignorant of other cultural voices becomes a violation of the organizational culture specific to the site. This explains a great deal of the negotiation of voice taking place within the organization, as cultural perceptions result in resistance or reinforcement. Rather than struggling for dominance, however, the value of multiculturalism iterated in interviews indicates more that organizational members desire an environment open to all cultures. No group is revealed to feel as if they are the dominant group within the organization and, thus, groups struggle to simply be recognized.

The multicultural orientation is therefore a pivotal element of the organizational culture. Employees constantly negotiate voice within the walls of the organization, but are equally aware that the organizational culture promotes and encourages the acceptance and inclusion of all national cultures. The efforts of management to develop this value couple with the natural cultural diversity of the warehouse to embed it within the value structure of the company. Members of the organization are acculturated to and internalize

that value through experience, training, and stories. Though at times the lessons seem “elementary,” they become the most important elements of organizational life because they create a broader sense of identity to which organizational members can become attached. In that regard, the organization, which itself conducts purely logistically oriented work, becomes a more meaningful, valuable, and unique site in the minds of employees.

### *Structure as Process*

This is, in part, due to the fact that members of the organization attribute it with maintaining a remarkably open environment. Interview question four asked, “Do you feel comfortable giving suggestions or disagreeing with others here?” and question five posed, “Can you tell me about a time you couldn’t say what you were thinking? Why was that the case?” Universally, employees expressed their sense that the environment of the organization welcomed their thoughts or comments. Follow-up questions were used to investigate this further but yielded similar results; however, a common distinction made by employees when discussing the relative “openness” of the workplace was that communication was open in structural order; that is to say, employees felt the need, not the pressure, to follow the path created for internal communication when expressing themselves within the organization. This is particularly interesting when considering how closely managers and employees work. Employees and managers of all levels work on the warehouse floor together quite often, barring certain members of upper management who make limited appearance.

Rather than feeling as if complaints or suggestions become lost in a bureaucratic maze or selecting certain individuals with whom they feel comfortable, employees treat

the channels of communication with respect and rely upon them heavily for addressing organizational concerns, allowing for the culture of the organization to become enacted through the structure. The established channels allow them to deal with almost any concern, suggestion, or conflict that arises, a fact that roughly half of the interview participants noted. One respondent linked the structure of the organization to the alleviation of concerns:

*Respondent 21:* Well, it's not only because of the chain of command, I mean I want to respect that process, you know, when reporting something, but also I mean reporting, reporting to, I would say talking to anybody, HR or any other staff member, I don't see, I won't have a problem telling them what's my issue.

The emphasis on “process” is an important facet of this response. In one respect, the process imposed by the structure ensures an open environment for employees. This response coupled with the three other responses that utilized process to describe structure, however, points to a larger conclusion. The structure of the organization is more than simply a corporate diagram passed down by management; it is, for employees, representative of the process through which their work world is oriented. The emphasis they place on organizational structure allows them to make sense of the multitude of tasks, cultures, and positions at play within the organization, especially since there is a general recognition that the job itself is not complex. As one employee noted, “We are not, what are we doing? We are moving spare parts for Honda cars. It is not like we are doing something earth shattering.” Others described the work as “unstressful,” “easy,” and “boring.” The focus upon structure and the process it represents brings a depth to the organization that allows employees to recognize and orient themselves to a larger purpose.



For that reason, the structure is held in some level of esteem, and violating the process imposed by that structure would be a violation of organizational cultural norms. One associate noted, “Any direct issue, I address it first with the supervisor. You know, I try to follow the order, the chain of commands, the supervisor.” Those who stepped outside of the structure were characterized as proliferating “gossip” and “rumors,” and several times respondents implied that those people should not advance and did not deserve to work for the organization. One associate explained, “You get noticed several ways, you know? There’s the rumor starters with the gossip and all that or you get started with, ‘That’s a good solid right there.’” In short, “good” employees are those that stay within the system and “rumor starters” are those who are noticed for violating cultural expectations. Accepting the structure of the organization as a cultural artifact represents a process that employees consider a fundamental aspect of belonging within the organization. One associate brought light to the way that individuals become acculturated to the communicative structure of the organization:

*Respondent 20:* So it’s kinda like, even though the management might have a, they’re might be a guy who has a problem here, and there might be a person that, a supervisor might be kinda one of those guys that doesn’t wanna communicate, but it’s like they’re forced to come together. And even though the, the associate may feel like, you know, “I don’t wanna talk to my supervisor,” and they may be disgruntled, eventually, just through the checks and balances, the way things are now, they come to a new light because it’s almost like the way that things are done, the upper management kinda the way that things are structured, they have to communicate. They have to.

This associate’s narrative demonstrates how much symbolic power is given to the structure of the organization. No matter how an employee feels about using the structure, they ultimately are led to “a new light” in which the structure represents an avenue of communication and therefore voice. This associate finds it difficult to even describe how

the structure causes that shift to occur within individuals, but is able to acknowledge that the changes is a natural part of the development of an organizational member because, “They have to.” Hence, associates become acculturated to the structure of the company over time until their perceptions of it are reoriented to accept it as an artifact of the organizational culture.

### *Structure as Direction*

The structure of the organization serves as an artifact of the organizational culture because of the direction it provides for employees. As discussed earlier, employees generally referenced the chain of command when describing their methods of dealing with problems at work. If problems arise in teams or with other members of the organization, employees universally report being comfortable discussing problems with their supervisors and with Human Resources. The structure of the organization, which directs employees from leads, to supervisors, to assistant managers, to Human Resources, was continually reaffirmed in answers to these questions, and employees emphatically claimed to be at ease reporting to their respective managers. The ease of that dialogue is valuable in this study because it indicates both that employees trust managers and supervisors and that employees feel comfortable knowing that the structure of the organization works in their favor. One employee explained, “First, we talk to the supervisor. Then if the supervisor cannot solve, if they cannot solve an issue, then you talk to HR, Human Resources.” The order of whom to talk to is dictated by the company, but the level of comfort with that order has come to exist because of acculturation to the use of that order. Field notes repeatedly mention that the answers to questions regarding who to turn to for help and what to do about problems at work were delivered without

hesitation or trepidation, indicating how quickly members are able to reference the structure upon which they rely.

Interview participants expressed a great deal of confidence in the open environment created despite the strict adherence to structure. One associate noted, “Sometimes you know when you have something that you want to express and all, and it usually involves a personal matter that you want to speak to your supervisor in private . . . and then you talk to your supervisor later on today or something. You can tell him whatever you want to tell him in private.” Employees do not feel as if their expression is limited or restricted by those to whom they must report. The fact that managers and associates are on the warehouse floor together a considerable amount plays into the comfort described. One associate pointed out that management on the floor was critical in encouraging employees to express themselves because, “sometimes you don’t wanna come to the office. Everybody knows, ‘Oh, look at, he go over there.’” The open access to channels of communication, coupled with respect for the cultural significance of the structure, draws associates into the accepting structure as a cultural artifact.

Organizational structure as a cultural artifact initially appears to be problematic. An associated explained, “We have an open door policy. If anybody has a problem or needs to talk, my supervisor is always willing to listen, twenty-four seven. So it has never been an issue.” This comment points to the paradoxical situation in which associates operate, as it implies that the associates feel as if the company will allow anyone to speak to anyone else at any point, despite the fact that the employees are not supposed to and, of their own accord, generally refuse to circumvent any piece of the organizational structure when attempting to express themselves. The structure of the organization is

therefore such a crucial piece of the organizational culture that employees often do not recognize the inherent limits it imposes upon their rhetorical position and ability. Their conception of openness is dramatically different from typical conceptualizations of open communication environments, but that difference is eradicated in the context of this international organization due to employee acceptance of the promoted lines of communication. In that regard, openness is structurally guided within the organizational framework, allowing employees to maintain the perception that their voice is respected and desired by the organization.

### *Teams as Structural Pieces*

The process of reorientation appears to arise from the ways in which individuals become involved in the structure of the organization. Upon entering the company, employees are immediately introduced into work teams. Unless promoted to a managerial position, employees are constantly a part of a particular team. Teams as a vital structural element of the company were thus consistently discussed by employees and managers. These teams consist of seven to twelve team members who are directed by a lead, or team leader, and become a critical component of the organizational culture because of their ability to tie employees to one another regardless of national or ethnic culture. These teams were the focal points of many responses by employees. One employee described his team as a unique part of the organization:

*Respondent 3:* my group is very loud out there, very loud . . . It is just, I guess the team, how everybody is so team oriented and the way we hang out and we stuck together through the rough times, especially right now with the work so slow, and hey we got it though.

This depiction points to the value employees place upon their membership in work teams.

The teams are a means of defining their roles within the organization and of identifying

with other associates. As pieces within the organizational structure, employees are installed into their teams and then into the larger scope of the organization. The structure of the team assists members in maintaining positive attitudes regardless of the economic success of the organization. Teams contribute to morale and to motivation, and inspire what one employee described as, “a real feeling of teamwork out there. At least in our shift, we try to promote that out there.” The use of teams for practical purposes has become much more idealistic within the company, as teamwork is “promoted” by those on the floor. The “team” is seen on a scale, ranging from individual teams, to workgroups, to entire shifts, generating a sense of purpose for associates and managers:

*Respondent 3:* We have started and we have a strong teamwork, so we have a team where we work together. We help each other out. If we are done and we see another team that is struggling, we will go and help, or vice versa, they will come and help us out.

The concept of the team is critical to the operation of the individual as well as to the operation of the warehouse as a whole. The teams allow employees to take ownership over their specific tasks while also connecting them to a larger purpose shared by other employees, moving them beyond ethnic or national cultural boundaries that might otherwise interfere with their work.

For many employees, teams have a practical value as well. One employee explained, “Yes, and I like the responsiveness of the team here because if they feel there is a problem or if they hear too many mutterings, you know people starting to mumble they are not too happy with other folks, they will address it.” Employees associate the use of teams within the organizational structure with ensuring that issues be resolved before they become larger problems that could disrupt productivity. Moreover, teams give confidence to associates that the structure of the organization operates to preserve the

positive work environment. Teams have become resources that both employees and managers find useful. Employees draw upon their team's role in the organization to identify their contribution, as well as the contribution of others within their team, to the overall success or survival of the company. Teams therefore contribute to the larger organizational culture by generating a sense of unity on both a micro and macro level and by preserving the environment of cultural openness in the organization.

*"Leads" as Structural Links*

The team leads serve a vital function in directing the flow of communication and providing support for employees. "Leads" reside at a critical juncture in the organizational structure.

*Respondent 6:* A "lead" is something under a supervisor, like a next level under a supervisor. Supervisor's main job is usually to be in the office, working on paperwork, write ups, anything like that. Leads are the people who run the floor, the people who are constantly watching the associates, who have to do any type of research for the associates.

As this respondent indicates, leads are assumed to maintain a great deal of responsibility and influence within the warehouse. Employees turn to leads for assistance, advice, and aid, as leads are empowered by the organization to manage personnel while at the same time retaining a closer relationship with team members than members of management.

One lead described this role in detail:

*Respondent 9:* Sometimes you can use your own judgment, but we always have to follow Komyo policy. You have to follow everything by the book for rules and regulation. But sometimes, you know, it depends on what kind of issue you run into, then you can use your own judgment and use your own tactics, how to accomplish that issue, but you want to make sure that the person who has the issue is on the same page with you. There is one goal and one track of mind that is most important.

The lead is responsible for resolving problems and with maintaining the “one track of mind” that the company promotes through its structure. Communication directed upwards from associates is almost always directed to leads before anyone else. In answering question three, one respondent stated, “Oh yeah, I would go to the lead. If the lead does not know I would go to the supervisor.” Another respondent furthered this sentiment:

*Respondent 33:* I would talk to my immediate personnel. It’s my team lead. You know, anything, any issues I have in my work or any problems with fellow workers, I would talk with my team leader. And then I go to the next scale.

The lead is an integral part of the communication system that employees refuse to overlook. Employees openly acknowledge that the first step in communicating ideas, concerns, or suggestions to the organization is the lead. Leads serve to fill knowledge gaps between management and employees, as they are, for the most part, promoted from within the associate workforce. This ensures that the workforce is represented in what are structurally managerial positions and provides opportunities for all national and ethnic cultural groups to attain structural power if members are promoted.

The lead position is one treated with a great deal of respect and admiration, as it is considered to be a reward for those who are capable and seasoned within the warehouse. One respondent claimed, “For as far as the work, we have very knowledgeable people out there, leads, and some of the workers as well I think might be ready for an opportunity.” The importance of organizational structure to the culture of the organization results then, to some degree, from the fact that employees are actively promoted to these semi-management positions. Employees aspire to demonstrate the capacity to fill a lead position and learn the appropriate practices and policies of the company in order to advance to that level.

This system creates a level within the organization in which the leads are perceived to be a part of the general workforce, making associates comfortable with them, despite the managerial elements of their positions. An associate confirmed this in his description of the leads with whom he worked most often:

*Respondent 29:* They'll, they don't, they treat you a little more like a friend than an employee. You're still an employee, but they treat you more like a friend. You know, they'll talk to you for a second, you know, laugh with you, then tell you to get back to work. But they're always willing to help you.

Leads are the closest to employees and, as this example makes clear, are in a position that is almost difficult for associates to describe because of the level of identification employees feel with the leads. They respect the leads position, but, simultaneously, feel comfortable and open with it because it is so close to their own. In that way, the lead position as a structural component is a crutch both for employees and for the company. The power structure of the company is perceived to have been built for and by employees, allowing them to exert some ownership over organizational operations. The lead position thus serves to help employees accept the organizational structure as an organizational artifact, one that is free of national or ethnic cultural designation.

Leads were equally important in answering interview question six, which posed, "Who was important in helping you figure out how to work here? When new people come in, who helps them the most?" This question was initially developed in order to determine if members of different national cultures turned to members of their own or similar cultures for assistance in acculturation. Universally, however, members pointed towards leads as those who were most important in this process. When asked who helped the most, for example, one employee simply said, "The leads." Another associate explained, "One of the leads Shawn or Miranda. Those are two of the bigger leads on the



cross dock.” Because of the experience presumed necessary to become a lead, the lead is considered a critical component in acculturating employees to the organization. High expectations exist for those who fill the lead positions:

*Respondent 21:* When it comes to the main training, you know, we get trained by the lead who should be knowledgeable for the whole or responsible for the whole department also when it come to like the process and all that. So, yeah, the lead is the one that’s making sure the new person gets trained and gets all the information that they need to be, that they need. All the tools, you know?

The success of the organization is dependant upon the leads dispersing information, or “tools,” to those who need it. Employee expectations are directly linked to the lead position regardless of who holds that position because they perceive it to be a conduit. Leads are supposed to be experienced and capable of handling almost any task or concern on the floor of the warehouse.

The value of the lead position, and the organizational structure in general, was made even clearer by respondents who noticed inequalities in promotions to that position. In the period before the personnel shift made within the last few years, one of the major problems the company faced was criticisms of favoritism shown by managers in promoting workers. One Pacific Islander male lead discussed a story in which favoritism of this type generated animosity:

*Respondent 6:* I would say that it was an incident where before I became a lead, there was a lead position that was open, well actually they posted it on the board, but technically it was not open because apparently someone had already gotten it, but because of Equal Opportunity, they are supposed to post it and still interview for it. So one of the management guys had said like, because I had been telling people like, “Oh, I am going to go out for this job, like I really want a lead position. I think I am good enough to lead. I am going to go out for this job.” So in this meeting, in one of our monthly associate meetings, he went ahead and announced like, “Oh yeah, the postings for the duller return is, Maggie already got it, but go ahead and go out for it anyway.” And, of course, like number one, I cannot battle it out with the upper management in front of all of the other people, and, two, he is not really so much as around every day.

The lead position is one that is highly valued among associates as much for its cultural significance as for the power attributed to it. It plays a key role in connecting associates to the organization and committing them to the structure that management has installed. To some degree, the criticism of favoritism still exists among workers. An El Salvadorian female who had been with the company over a year pointed out in regard to the lead and supervisory positions, “They always say there’s no favoritism, but you can just notice, you know?” Favoritism related to the positions becomes a violation of the cultural expectations and values within the organization.

#### *Summary of Findings*

This study sought to examine how the interplay of national cultures within the site of an international organization impacts the organizational culture of that site. More specifically, this study was concerned with uncovering how employees negotiated voice in order to overcome any muting that might occur and whether or not that struggle for voice was reflected in the organizational culture of the site. An important qualification for this research is that although the findings and implications discussed in this report were derived from the data provided by research participants, they are not necessarily true for this organization or for others. The experiences of the participants involved in the project may not accurately reflect the experiences of the workforce as a whole and cannot be truly generalized to other international organizations. However, the findings and implications of this research remain significant both for this international organization and for others because of the potential they hold for improving organizational communication processes or for improving organizational performance.

Ultimately, findings reveal that all national cultures at the site experience some degree of muting and, thus, take specific efforts to express voice. A great deal of the data pointed specifically to three linguistic categories that employees were capable of identifying as cultural signifiers: Spanish, Japanese, and English. Other languages, however, did arise and were considered by members of those linguistic groups to require increased voice. The need for voice expressed by participants is reflected in the ways that the organizational culture develops values and practices.

Analysis of resistance strategies within the organization revealed that naming and redefining were both utilized by Japanese cultural members. Japanese managers created or included manufacturing terms such as “Gemba” and “Coban” that employees used naturally to describe the environment of the organization. These were the only terms that decidedly originated in one culture and were the only Japanese terms that employees recognized as representative of the organization. Coding for active grouping revealed that almost all cultural groups engage in some degree of active grouping. The majority of grouping takes place on breaks, where the free space of the break areas is delineated, at least to some degree, by national culture, a symbolic means of denoting cultural unity and exhibiting voice.

Thematic analysis also revealed that two unique strategies for resisting perceived repression were present within the organization: rhetorical projection and linguistic form. Rhetorical projection involved the projection of displeasure or dissatisfaction onto non-specific others within the workplace. This strategy was used by all cultural groups except the Japanese cultural members when describing the pre-shift exercises, a Japanese ritual. Employees described this ritual as an imposition but connected the ritual to the Japanese

ritual, making this strategy a method of resisting a dominant group. Rhetorical projection was also found to exist on a more minimal level when discussing the break groups. Those groups, which serve as active forms of promoting cultural voice, are perceived by employees to be potentially damaging to their work life if they are included in them.

Linguistic form was revealed to be a strategy that manifested itself in the refusal or reluctance to engage in the use of a second language. Spanish was the primary language resisted against, despite expectations that English would arise as a member of this category. Native or primary Spanish speakers did not consider pressure to speak or understand English as a form of cultural oppression. Native or primary English speakers, along with speakers of other native languages, on the other hand, perceived the Spanish language as a repressive element of the workplace. Their reluctance or outright refusal to accept the Spanish language was demonstrated in attitudes and workgroups and was justified in a multitude of ways, a defensive attitude that only furthered the conclusion that these cultural groups felt that the Spanish language limited their voice.

Comparative coding revealed that the struggle for voice within the organization held serious ramifications for the organizational culture. Rather than spawning a culture of mistrust or unease, however, the culture of the organization was felt to be a positive and respectful one, particularly because of the acceptance of multiculturalism as an organizational cultural value and the perception of structure as an organizational cultural artifact. Though organizational members are in a perpetual act of negotiating voice, the ability to find space to engage in that struggle lent credibility to the finding that multiculturalism is a critical value of the organizational culture. Management has formulated policies that promote a multicultural atmosphere, and employees exhibit a

great deal of buy-in to those policies. At the same time, employees have promoted multiculturalism as a value to ensure that their own national culture is given the opportunity to express itself within the organization.

The structure of the organization was found to serve as an organizational cultural artifact. The structure of the organization provides a space in which organizational members can communicate freely and openly, a theme present in the majority of interviews. More importantly, the structure was found to represent a piece of the Japanese culture that employees accepted and felt was valuable. The structure therefore became a tie to the native culture of the organization. The structure was also revealed to be a means of connecting more directly to the organization, a finding bolstered by the importance of team membership and the lead position. Employees find a larger sense of purpose in the process that the structure of the organization represents than the actual tasks undertaken by their respective departments or teams.

In short, the negotiation of voice drives the type of organizational culture that develops and the elements of it that members consider to be critical to its existence. Overall, the respect employees feel that is shown by the organization to their cultural identities and individual desires results in an organizational culture that members accept. They invest themselves in the organization just as they perceive the organization to have taken a vested interest in them. As they become acculturated to the organizational culture, the vital roles that multiculturalism and structure play become increasingly clear. The culture is therefore entirely premised upon no single culture gaining too much overt influence and space continually being allotted for employee expression. Equally important is that the structure of the organization be preserved, both for the sake of

connecting the organization and its members to the native culture of the company and for the purpose of allowing members to sense a larger purpose in their roles. These two elements of the organizational culture at the site of this international organization differentiate it from the home organizational culture in ways that cause employees to express ownership over the organization. Thus, the site is seemingly able to manifest a unique organizational identity while simultaneously retaining subtle connections to the broader organizational culture.

## Discussion

This study was an exploratory effort to delve into national or ethnic cultural voice negotiation and organizational culture at sites of international organizations. International organizations face unique challenges and pressures given that they must operate internationally, forcing them to employ any number of national cultures. The values of these cultures (home, host, and any that work within the organization) may be dramatically different, yet all have a profound influence upon the operation of an international site (Hempel & Martinsons, 2009). The interaction of multiple national cultures within the boundaries of international organizations thus leads to interesting questions regarding the organizational cultures they develop.

A primary concern of this research was analyzing the assumption that “one national (headquarter) culture might be regarded as the ‘first among equals’ when contemplating which cultural background shapes the organizational culture as a whole and is therefore the source of the organization’s assumptions, values, norms, and artifacts” (Voelpel, Pierer, & Streb, 2006, p. 19). Research into international organizations has focused in large part on the ways that the home national culture of an organization manages sites in multiple countries, with a great deal of the research assuming that organizations must attempt to impose an organizational culture upon a work site (e.g. Lin & Kuo, 2007; Jaeger, 1989). This supposition was found to be inaccurate when examining the internal communicative processes of an international

organization site, as the organizational culture was more reflective of the multiple national cultures operating within the organizational frame.

Given that cultural voice is an inherent aspect of operating international organizations, this study also sought to uncover how voice was negotiated in this site by national cultural groups. That analysis required the identification of resistance and identity reinforcement strategies enacted by national cultural groups, and ultimately helped uncover two resistance strategies unique to this organization. These methods of expressing voice help groups to articulate a specific identity that is distinguishable from other groups within the organization. In that way, the negotiation of voice involves both establishing identity and consistently announcing a presence within an organization.

Research question one asked, “In what ways is “voice” negotiated by national cultural groups at the site of an international organization?” This question was answered through the identification of resistance and identification reinforcement strategies used by national and ethnic cultural groups within the organization. The revelation that all national and ethnic cultural groups, even those in managerial positions, engage in active voice negotiation through a number of different strategies with other national cultural groups lends credence to the argument that no national culture within this organization represents a singularly dominant cultural power, a finding that will be discussed in detail later.

Research question two posed, “How do organizational members of national cultural groups perceive organizational culture at the site of an international organization?” In answer to this question, it was revealed that organizational members perceived the site of the international organization to be open, accepting, and considerate.



Employees described the culture with words such as “friendly” and “nice” and shared stories that emphasized the comfort they felt within the work environment. Research question three was closely related to this, asking, “How do organizational members of national cultural groups perceive organizational culture developing at the site of an international organization?” In general, two important components of the organizational culture were highlighted by employees: multiculturalism as an organizational cultural value and structure as an organizational cultural artifact. These two pieces of the organization seemed to maintain a great deal of significance for employees and were crucial in their depictions of how and why the organizational culture of the site had come to be open and accepting.

The demographic information gathered by this study was critically important to its success. When asking individuals to self-identify the culture with which they associated, the interview sample was revealed to be a fairly accurate representation of the overall makeup of the site. The sample was stratified across organizational structural layers and across national cultural boundaries. This ensured that the opinions and experiences provided by employees were not weighted for or against any one national culture and allowed the researcher to delve into the perspectives of individuals at differing levels of organizational power. More importantly, given the findings regarding those groups that experience muting, the ability to tap into the cultural communication of the workforce became an imperative element of this study, as it helped to establish a means of evaluating those elements perceived to be contributing to organizational culture that were common among national cultures as well as those that were different. Conclusions were drawn from this research dealing with the level of connection

organizational sites have to the home organizational culture, muting of the home culture, hybridity in organizational culture, and the roles that multiculturalism and structure play in organizational culture. Implications for practice and theory are then discussed, followed by limitations and directions for future research.

### *Connection to the Home Culture*

An important element of this study was calling into question the influence of the home culture upon the organizational culture manifested at the site. Findings indicated that associates are aware and respectful of the ways in which the primary national culture had influenced the organizational culture of the company. Moreover, it became evident that a connection to that primary culture was a key factor in employees' understanding of their roles in the organization and in their conception of the purpose of the organization.

In answering research question three, which focused on perceptions of development of organizational culture by members of national cultures, one theme that arose was the reliance upon a tie to the home culture with an active imposition of its cultural values and norms. Employees expressed sentimentality for the Japanese culture and the organizational members that represented it. This sentimentality revealed itself in descriptions of Japanese cultural members by associates and managers:

*Respondent 16:* I think the big thing on that is that it depends on who you are working with and especially our three Japanese staff members, they all have good sense of humor and I think that that is very important. Even when there is pressure. Even when they are getting yelled at and I know they are getting yelled at, you know what I mean?

The description of the Japanese members in this respondent's depiction of her department was given without prompting by the researcher. She actively selected those members in her response, characterizing them in a way that was both culturally oriented and positive.

Other employees voiced similar feelings regarding the Japanese members of the organization:

*Respondent 5:* As far as the Japanese, they are mostly higher level, like our President is Japanese and we have a few other Japanese staff here. As far as Japanese staff here, I have no problem communicating with them or saying what we need to do or improvements, or where we are lacking, or whatever, I have no problems at all. As far as the Japanese as far as the President goes, there is certain things, I feel comfortable talking to him, holding a conversation, but operation things, that is not my place to discuss with him.

*Respondent 20:* The Japanese are really respectful, really respectful people, and they, they, I mean, I have conversations with the President and, you know, he knows who I am. And I think that's good in that aspect, but they want to see. They're really hands on, so they'll be out on the floor often.

*Respondent 35:* There is like a little gap or I don't know what it is, they are probably scared to speak to them because you know Japanese are not always walking around like (makes gesture) so they have the face on, but they are not mean . . .

Japanese cultural members were discussed with a great deal of respect and affection by employees, indicating not only that they felt connected to those organizational members personally, but that the national culture those members represented was somehow important to their conception of the organizational culture as a whole. In no interview responses were Japanese members of the organization described in a negative manner.

Most responses regarding the Japanese managers or Japanese culture fell into the same category as those above; they dealt with broad perceptions of the Japanese business culture and its role in the organization. The Japanese are “respectful” and “hands on” despite being at a “higher level” in the organization. The roles the Japanese members play are treated as above those of the majority of employees, but the Japanese members themselves are approachable and friendly, and many employees highlighted their intentional communication with those members. Thus, the Japanese members of the

organization, coupled with the structure those members are considered to have implemented, are perceived to be a symbolic connection to the home national and organizational culture of the organization.

This analysis corresponds with previous research that shows expatriates and policies directly related to the home culture to be a powerful element in influencing organizational culture at sites of international organizations (e.g. Beamer and Varner, 2001; Mattson & Stage, 2001). Share's (2006) research found that identifying with the primary national culture of an international organization helped employees develop a sense of ownership within the organization. Similarly, this study revealed that employees espoused a connection to the Japanese roots of the company based on a somewhat limited understanding of that culture. Japanese business culture frames the organization in the eyes of organizational members, helping them to orient themselves to what they believe to be the values of the home culture and to generate a sense of loyalty. Without the knowledge of Japanese business culture as a reference point, associates would not be as committed to the organization as this research revealed.

#### *Home Culture Muting*

This study, however, also corresponds with Sharpe's (2006) finding that the home national culture of the international organization is only appreciated to a certain extent. The importance of the home culture is mitigated by the perceived amount in which it forces itself into the daily working lives of employees. Cultures within the organization consider equitable demonstrations of voice by those in power to be acceptable, but any overt demonstrations of voice to be problematic. In other words, the perception of the Japanese business culture as valuable is contingent upon that culture refraining from

explicitly imposing itself upon employees. The resistance to the pre-shift exercises is a clear example of this feeling, as employees repeatedly connected the exercises to Japanese business culture and then to feelings of discontent.

Members of the native culture of the international organization who locate themselves at a site are therefore in a precarious situation. One Japanese manager explained his role in the organization and hinted at the difficulties experienced by Japanese members. He explained, “So I’m trying to do over here is the combine those two different culture together. You know, Japan has their good culture, US has their good culture, so I wanna combine.” The Japanese members of the organization recognize the need to let the organizational culture develop out of the influences of the host country and the multitude of national cultures employed. At the same time, they balance that need with the desire to maintain the Japanese cultural values and philosophies upon which the organization is founded. The negotiation they enter into with the other members of the organization forces them to silence themselves to some extent in order to foster what they consider to be a successful organizational site.

Thus, the relationship of an international organizational site to its native culture, and by extension the initial organizational culture, is a tentative one. On the one hand, that culture is a paramount and inescapable element of organizational life; conversely, any overt influence by the culture is rejected by organizational members as it is perceived to be the organization overstepping its bounds. Members of the home culture of an international organization are therefore the most empowered and simultaneously the most silenced due to the conflicting position in which they are placed.

### *Hybridity in Organizational Culture*

Research question two inquired into the type of organizational culture present at the site of an international organization. The organizational culture of this site is hybridized, incorporating many elements of various national cultures. This finding fits with the differentiation perspective of organizational culture presented by (Alavi, Kayworth, & Leidner, 2006), which articulates a framework in which all national cultures within an organization contribute various values and assumptions to the organizational culture which itself can take different forms in different locations. Scholars have argued that this perspective is problematic for organizational management due to the fact that, “values arising from different national contexts will lead to divergence across locations” (Hempel & Martinsons, 2009). In contrast, the results of this study lead to the conclusion that allowance for the interplay of values from various national cultures within the site of an international organization produces a much more acceptable and productive organizational culture for organizational members.

One employee explained, “Like I say, everything it’s a, you say culture, we can say that, yeah. And then Spanish culture too. Maybe it’s mixed, you know?” Another claimed, “It, it, it’s like two different cultures.” The organizational culture is a reflection of the variety in the workforce, making it difficult for employees to culturally describe the environment in which they work. When asked simply to provide characteristics of that environment, terms such as “fair,” “open,” and “they care” were used repeatedly. These terms serve as acknowledgements that the culture of the organization shows no preference to any one culture. Moreover, these terms indicate that the culture of the

company, at least to some degree, represents the values of the national cultures with which members identify causing them to positively describe the organizational culture.

Hybridity in this case does not mean that elements of all national cultures are observable in the way the organizational culture is constructed. Though elements of that culture do maintain recognizable national cultural origins, hybridity in this study is representative of the isolation from cultural identification. Kraidy (2005) argued, “hybridity is an association of ideas, concepts and themes that at once reinforce and contradict each other” (p. vi). Hybridity is found in instances where multiple cultures interact and negotiate expression, but no single culture truly suppresses others. Kraidy’s (2005) frame excludes the use of hybridity because of its generic use to depict any cultural scenario. In this study, however, hybridity is an accurate term because of the lack of national cultural identity found within the site. Despite its existence in the United States, its majority membership identifying as Latino or Hispanic, and its upper management positions being primarily filled by members of the Japanese culture, there is a distinct lack of any singular culture providing the majority of the values or assumptions that drive the organizational site.

The fact that the Japanese culture does not override other cultures within the organization is not lost on employees. In fact, the hybridity of the site is attributed in part to Japanese management not attempting to overly impose the organizational culture of the Japanese home upon the locale. An employee noted, “they understand that, even though we may be a Japanese company, we are in a different area. We are in America and business does not function the same way here. And they have allowed us that latitude.” There is a feeling that the Japanese culture generally does not impose upon employees

with the sole exception of the pre-shift exercises. This may, in part, explain the sense of muting that Japanese members of the organizational site expressed in interviews. Their voice, which arguably should be the most significant, is reduced to preserve the organizational culture of the site.

Whether this results more from the intentions of management or the pressures of organizational members is unclear. Drawing upon the discussion of characteristics of Japanese business culture offered earlier, it is possible that Japanese members self impose a degree of muting for the betterment of the collective. Rather than fully utilize their rational structural power within the organization, Japanese managers may recognize the need for other voices to be heard more clearly and, because of the general business culture from which they originate, silence themselves to improve the organization. The Japanese members of the organizational site are placed into a position where they must negotiate the larger U.S. cultural context while managing the multiple national and ethnic cultural groups operating within the organization. They resist the broader cultural context on some level while silencing themselves within the organizational culture of the site. In short, they become less powerful within the organizational site even though they maintain rational structural power. The hybridity of the culture is thus a derivative of the fact that the culture with the most potential to exert pressure does not do so, allowing other national and ethnic cultural voices to take priority. The environment in which these cultures find themselves is open and encouraging of identity negotiation, allowing a multitude of voices to be perceived simultaneously. The influx of multiple national and ethnic cultural influences into the site initiates an ongoing, discursive negotiation of organizational power, resulting in a hybrid organizational culture.



### *Structure, Multiculturalism, and Organizational Culture*

Though the structure of the organization was demonstrated to have a significant connection to the Japanese culture, the importance of that structure to employees surpasses its cultural roots and furthers the hybridization of the organizational culture. In making the case that globalization has generated hybridity in any number of forms, Pieterse (2009) claimed, “Usually necessity is the mother of hybridity” (p. 94). The structure, from members’ perspectives, offered the opportunity for any cultural member to express themselves. Because of the hodgepodge of cultures present within the organization, the structure serves both to give voice and to protect from oppression. In that way, the hybridity of the organizational culture is necessary for the various national cultures to find commonality within the organization.

In many ways, the structure of the international organization site removes national cultural influence from organizational culture by delineating the forum and manner in which employees and managers communicate. This can be related to Gelfand, Leslie, & Fehr’s (2008) argument for a global perspective on organizational behavior, as they claim, “The organizational context, including both organizational culture and the structure of organizational rewards, can provide a situation strong enough to override cultural effects” (p. 510). Their argument rests on the premise that organizational culture can serve as a buffer against the entrance of divisiveness due to national culture into organization.

Rather than completely homogenizing and unifying the workforce, however, this study demonstrated that the structure of the organization creates the space necessary for separate identities to exist and exert themselves. Employees and managers willingly

acknowledge the chain of communication and are attached to it because of the level of identification present between managers and associates due to internal promotions.

Teams operate constantly and lead employees to adopt the perspective of the team before their own when operating within the warehouse. Comfort with the structure becomes a natural result of this process and affects employee perceptions of the work environment. Associates observe a neutral communicative ground, with the exception of certain areas guarded by those who feel discomforted by the presence of languages other than English, and are therefore generally nonresistant to the organization and its directives. Though members do not constantly seek to enact their cultural identity, the mere belief that to do so would be completely acceptable satiates the drive for expression.

The structure of the organization preserves the capacity of national cultures to express themselves. The reliance on structure as a symbolic organizational cultural artifact plays a role in spawning the value placed upon the multicultural orientation of employees. Awareness of the multicultural makeup of an international organization has long been regarded as a key to effective managerial practices in international organizations (e.g. Lucas, 2006; Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006; Tihanyi, Griffith, & Russell, 2005), but the value of multiculturalism to this international organization surpassed managerial needs. Instead, multiculturalism is valued as a part of the organizational culture because it defines the organization. Organizational members ubiquitously described the organization in terms of its diversity. Without that emphasis on diversity, a fundamental element of the organization would be lost. One manager claimed, "I think it is not a lucky coincidence that we are the way we are now, as far as the ethnic mix. I think it is actually by design . . ." Employees are capable of expressing

themselves because they recognize that the multicultural atmosphere justifies all cultures professing their existence and identities. Cultural expression is supported, allowed, and valued by the organization, and the structure plays a critical role in that by removing the influence of any one national culture. It directs and channels communication for employees, leading to the conclusion that the organization paradoxically requires communication to flow in certain directions while being assumed by almost all employees to be “open.”

To some degree, questions of token voice arise from this paradox. If employee communication is directed by structure, it is reasonable to assume that their sense of an open environment is an artificial one, fostered by the organization as a means of exerting control. This argument, however, is countered in this study by the openness of managers and employees to one another as well as by the fact that cultural members of management are a muted group. First, this answer typified employee responses to questions of employee-manager relations, regardless of national culture:

*Respondent 8:* If anybody has a problem or needs to talk, my supervisor is always willing to listen, 24/7. So it has never been an issue . . . Upper management, Jimmy is my managers, and he has been the same way. Whenever I had a problem or issue, or needed anything, I was always welcome to go to his office and speak.

Managers encourage the openness of employees, and employees demand the ability to address managers, leading to the conclusion that the openness of the organization is not a means of intentional control. Second, the fact that Japanese managers express the most resistance indicates that they are the most isolated and excluded from the organizational culture. In many ways, employees exert control over Japanese managers, supporting the conclusion that tokenism is not at play.

The hybridity of the organizational culture therefore results from the interaction of cultures within the spaces created by the acceptance of the organizational structure, which themselves are modified by employees to become organizational cultural artifacts. Hybridity is derived from reduced overt control from national cultures in positions of organizational power and the acceptance of organizational structure as a means of securing space for the negotiation of voice. In that sense, hybridity is both the absence of a distinct national cultural identity and the acceptance of any national cultural voice.

#### *Implications for Practice*

One of the most important implications for practice that can be derived from this analysis deals with language policies in international organizations. A recurrent tension identified in interview transcripts was the conflict between the English language policy that both managers and employees claimed to exist within the company and the actual language practices that occurred within the warehouse. Several employees expressed dissatisfaction that the language policy was not enacted with more authority. One manager explained regarding the topic, “What can you do?” Language barriers were an issue many associates mentioned.. A number of native Spanish speakers described themselves as temporary translators at times, aiding in the communication of instructions and guidelines when managers could not make them clear. This practice created dissonance for English speaking employees who, as a result, perceived promotions to be less fairly awarded and the work environment to be less comfortable.

This highlights an issue that has long existed for international organization. Allen (2008) argued that language policy is the most difficult challenge faced by multinational organizations, which must consider the cultural power implications of maintaining any

sort of language policy against the need for effective internal communication. This study takes that complication further by making evident the potential pitfalls of failing to follow through on a language policy. International organizations exist in a paradoxical situation in this regard, especially given the diversity of their sites. Luo & Shenkar (2006) found that organizational structure, strategic role, and presence of members from the organization's home country typically determine the language of an organizational subunit. This study confirmed that finding, as the low numbers of Japanese members contribute to the lack of Japanese language use, while the high numbers of Spanish and English speakers make those two languages dominant among employees.

International organizations must consider the balance necessary when implementing a language policy. Though a primary language streamlines communicative processes to some degree, enforcement of a language policy in this organization might result in increasing dissension from a large majority of the organizational population. The Spanish language is a symbolic element of cultural identity and stringent enactment of a language policy throughout the organization could jeopardize the work environment. At the same time, managers in this company were disconnected from the problems of the language policy. Though the policy was created to generate continuity, the lack of active enforcement became a cause of dissatisfaction for English speaking workers, an occurrence management had not predicted. That is not to say that a language policy should not be constructed; rather, the enforcement of such a policy should be determined according to the factors depicted by Luo and Shenkar (2006). This research has demonstrated that, although it causes some dissatisfaction among English speakers, the presence of the language policy is not in itself a source of discomfort for native Spanish

speaking workers. For that reason, language policies should remain viable options for international companies so long as organizations include a process to evaluate the impact of that policy on the attitudes and actions of the workforce.

This analysis also revealed a need for international organizations to emphasize intercultural awareness and training efforts. Employees within this company valued the organization's efforts to maintain a culturally sensitive workplace, regardless of whether or not intercultural tensions actually existed. The intercultural orientation of the company's policies and practices resonated with employees on a symbolic level, leading them to feel attached to and defensive of the organization as a whole. This research dispels myths regarding the complexity of international organizations operating in countries with dissimilar business cultures. Instead, this research demonstrates that companies willing to incorporate cultural training efforts into their frameworks as well as workplace policies that allow for local cultures to be expressed by organizational members have the potential to operate with a great deal of success.

Efforts, however, must be directed by multinational organizations toward preliminary training for cultural clash. In this study, Japanese members, although to some degree trained to work in the United States, still found it initially difficult to define their organizational roles because of business culture distinctions. Training programs for both sojourners and host employees must be designed by international businesses and recommendations for those programs must be included in international business texts. Such programs should, as this company makes clear, be ongoing processes rather than singular instances of training. Employees could be offered the option of participating in training programs dealing with particular cultures. Materials could be provided that offer

information on different cultures working within an organization, materials that employees help construct. Culturally themed events, though cliché, were mentioned favorably by respondents in this research and could also be considered as a means of cultural awareness training by organizations. In general, long term training should be implemented in order for organizations to maintain an environment that fosters multiculturalism. Rather than solely preparing employees for initial cultural clash or discomfort, this research demonstrates the necessity for international organizations to constantly remind members of the multitude of the need for cultural awareness. Long term training programs could fulfill that purpose and might also help to ensure that international organizations deal with reduced cultural conflict.

Another important practical implication is the need for international organizations to engage with organizational members on a meaningful level. This company was valuable to one employee because of several factors including, “The opportunities here. It is real, I think family oriented . . . Stable. Opportunities, growth.” This represents the overwhelming opinion of organizational members. It also signifies the level of attachment to the organization members experienced due to its openness and its policies that were perceived to be employee oriented. Even more so than other organizations, sites of international organizations must utilize policies that encourage openness and value employees if they are to succeed. The level of detachment from the larger organization could become extreme within this organization without such practices. The company’s past exhibited this, as one employee claimed, “I mean I was, probably my third year, I was kinda like a disgruntled worker . . . but then it started changing.” Other long-term

employees echoed the importance of the change in management and policy, indicating that their attachment to the company became much stronger afterwards.

In that regard, international organizations must focus upon fostering an environment in which national cultures have room for expression but do not impede upon the cultural expression of others. This is, of course, easier to argue than enact, but the importance of this was consistently revealed in this research. Employees simply seemed to enjoy their work more due to the fact that they felt culturally able to express themselves within the confines of the organization. International organizations face great challenges in managing the interchange of national cultures, but policies that recognize employee freedom result in significant improvements in morale and dedication. Ultimately, this research demonstrated that the strategies of resistance or negotiation that were so prevalent were positive elements of the organizational culture. Employees felt involved in the organization and therefore exhibited a great deal of motivation for what was often described as “simple” work. The act of negotiating voice within the organizational context tied members to the organizational culture because of the space they were provided for that negotiation, thereby increasing their willingness to participate in its processes. Thus, this study confirms the notion that focusing on involving members in organizational culture is a more beneficial strategy for businesses than attempting to change employees (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). More specifically, when dealing with jobs or industries in which work is routine or simple, connecting individuals to the organizational culture may provide them with a greater sense of purpose when conducting their ever day tasks. Thus, international organizations in similar cultural



contexts as depicted in this dissertation could focus on fostering a reasonably open environment for organizational members in order to improve long term success.

One of the most evident conclusions that arose from this analysis was the need for international organizations to seriously consider the level of autonomy given to sites in various geographical locations. This international organization struggled initially with being overly tied to the larger organization's policies, practices, and culture. After being given a greater amount of autonomy, the organization created a more stable working environment. The cost of that autonomy, however, has yet to be fully determined beyond the muting of Japanese cultural members. Organizations must consider several factors, including the number of expatriates to place within the organizational site, the level of similar policies to instill, and the power to be given to local managers. The findings of Newburry and Nevena (2006) supplement this implication, as they determined that the national culture which hosts the organization will play a large role in the amount of similarity desired by employees. Some national cultures prefer greater standardization and others, like the organization utilized in this study, are in locales where less standardization is expected. International organizations must take these factors into account and consider both the overt and subtle means by which they implement elements of organizational and national culture. Awareness of these issues will ensure smoother operations and less conflict at sites of international organizations.

Finally, as a corollary of the previous implications, international organizations ought to consider alternative means of tying sites to the larger organizational culture. Though it is important for international organizations to retain control over the branches they develop in foreign countries, explicit and overt control of those branches may not be

as successful a tactic as the subtle inclusion of organizational cultural elements. This organization did so through an emphasis on structure, a characteristic that was associated with the Japanese business culture. Regardless of whether or not that element of the organization was intended to serve as a reminder of the home business culture, the structure appeared to be ultimately accepted into the site's organizational culture as a cultural artifact because it could easily be attributed to the Japanese business culture. Employees thus seem to desire some connection to the home culture of the organization for identity purposes, even if their preference is for less standardization. International organization should therefore be focused on identifying alternative strategies for demonstrating the national culture from which the organization originates. Such strategies should avoid overly-imposing on organizational members but should be culturally recognizable and identifiable efforts.

This research seems to indicate that one effective method of attaching an organizational site to the home culture is to focus on broad connections to the home business culture. Employees in this organization provided fairly stereotypical depictions of Japanese business culture most likely because of a general lack of experience with it. Those depictions, however, were critical in helping employees find value in the structure and processes at work within the organization (such as Kaizen projects). Thus, efforts by international organizations to retain a cultural connection to organizational sites could be directed towards including general business policies which employees can identify as part of the home business culture rather than specific practices, such as the exercises, in which employees feel forced to participate. Examples of such policies might include the use of

culturally specific naming, as found in this international organization, or altering business hours to reflect those typically used in the home culture.

### *Implications for Theory*

This study of organizational culture within the site of an international organization was a valuable extension on both organizational culture research as well as muted group research. Both areas are important facets of the field of organizational communication, and both are rapidly changing as the face and nature of organizations change. This research has manifested significant theoretical contributions for each area that should be examined more carefully in future research.

First, organizational culture research has branched into numerous directions. The basic theory behind organizational culture, however, remains relatively straightforward: organizations develop cultures due to the constant actions and interactions of organizational members (Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005). Identifying how organizational cultures specifically develop and the types of organizational cultures that can be called into existence is a much more complex and contextually dependant issue. For instance, organizational cultures within international organizations exist in a tenuous state because efforts to manage them by members of the native national culture of the organization may inherently conflict with the national cultures employed by the organizational site. Thus, the perspectives of differentiation and integration cannot hold in their entirety in the context of international organizations, as elements of both were found in this organizational culture. Organizational culture within international organizations must be treated as a related but separate theoretical construct to organizational culture as it exists in non-internationalized organizations.

Hybridity in the organizational culture of this international organization was therefore a significant finding theoretically. Not only did the organizational culture in this study generate feelings of openness and acceptance among employees, it provided a great deal of explanation regarding how organizational cultures within international organizations can include elements of national cultures without alienating organizational members. Though this perspective has largely been applied to managerial culture in the past (e.g. Frenkel, 2008; Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006; Shimoni & Bergmann, 2006), this study has developed a means of perceiving hybridity in organizational culture as a result of spaces formed from the reduction of managerial national cultural influence and an increase in employee national culture recognition. This does not imply that organizational communication should focus upon the incorporation of elements of host business cultures into working environments; rather, the capacity to engage in cultural expression should be considered when examining the ability of sites international organizations to manifest hybrid organizational cultures.

In terms of muted group research, naming, redefining, and active grouping were selected as previous forms of resistance or identity reinforcement that characterize muted groups based upon the work of Houston and Kramrae (1991), Allison and Hibbler (2004), and Meares et al. (2004). Two new forms of resistance and identity reinforcement were uncovered in this research that serve as extensions from muted group theory. The first form, rhetorical projection, is a safe means of resisting cultural muting. Cultural members are removed from incrimination through this tactic, something that in the contexts of organizations may be particularly important to employees and managers. This form of resistance indicates that muted groups must, in some cases, utilize resistance strategies

that are more subtle than other articulated methods in order to avoid penalization by the organization. This is perhaps the most significant theoretical finding in terms of the application of muted group theory to the field of organizational communication. Given the constraints naturally imposed upon organizational members by organizations, the most significant being that the organization can ultimately choose to terminate employees for myriad reasons, “safe” forms of resistance deserve a great deal of attention when dealing with potential group muting within organizations.

The strategies drawn from muted group theory and used in this dissertation research were discussed both as potential forms of resistance and as means of identity reinforcement because of their use as proactive forms of voice. Based on Bowers and Ochs (1971) rhetoric of agitation and control, instances of resistance within organizations fall into the category of rhetoric of agitation, meaning that only the clearly resistive elements of this research can be called agitation. However, it must be remembered that social protest rhetoric, such as the type described by Bowers and Ochs, is typically overt in nature, as groups make clear their displeasure with hegemonic forces. In contrast, it should be assumed that organizational members can often not afford to overtly resist. Instead, resistance from organizational members must, as rhetorical projection appears to demonstrate, be subtle and detached from any particular member or group else members risk retribution in the form of sanctions or termination. It may well be the case that each form of identity reinforcement found in this research was in actuality a covert means of expressing resistance against perceived dominant powers. In that regard, these tactics may indeed fall into the classification of rhetoric of agitation, despite their dissimilarity from other tactics in that category. Moreover, from a postmodern perspective, an ongoing

process of resistance in organizations, both in a proactive and reactive sense, by all national or ethnic cultural groups fits with the discursive and situational struggle to attain power. This would make strategies of resistance much more difficult to identify in organizational settings but would make it equally important that efforts are directed to do so. Muted group theory in organizational studies should take the time to detail both how resistance within organizations is necessarily and fundamentally different from resistance in other contexts and how resistance strategies within organizations are articulated.

The second form of resistance and identity reinforcement found in this research, linguistic form, is specific to multicultural organizations or settings and, though in line with some previously uncovered elements of muted group research, extends the theory in organizational settings to consider how language and voice are inextricable interrelated. The primary language spoken within an organization may account for a great deal of the perception regarding whose voice has primacy. At the same time, language serves as an easily grasped target against which groups may direct resistive efforts, as linguistic form makes clear. For that reason, organizational communication research should focus upon language in international organizations as both a symbol of power and a symbol of resistance

Finally, conceptualizations of openness in organizational environments must be reconsidered in light of these research findings. The organization examined in this research provided employees with what was generally perceived as a communicatively open work space. In reality, however, the acceptance of the organizational structure as an organizational cultural artifact inherently limited the true openness of the organization. Employees directed communication through appropriate channels both because of the

association they made between the structure and the Japanese business culture and because of the comfort they felt with those who held structurally significant positions. This calls into question for organizational communication scholarship the importance of true organizational openness (which might never exist due to the nature of organizations) versus organizationally generated perceptions of openness. In either regard, the distinction between is a meaningful theoretical consideration resulting from this study.

### *Limitations*

The limitations of this study rest primarily in the impacts of demographics upon the findings and the method of investigation selected for the project. The inclusion of multiple sites of this international organization into the study might have been useful in terms of generating comparative data. The company maintains several locations in the United States. These locations are in extremely different geographical regions, as one is located in the Midwest portion of the country and another is located in the Southeast section. Conducting these same interviews at those sites might have improved the internal generalizability of the study, as it would have helped reveal how the experiences of employees at the Chino location differ from the experiences of employees located elsewhere. It might also have shed light on the impact distance from the United States headquarters has upon organizational members at both managerial and employee levels.

Second, conducting these interviews in another Japanese-based international organization could also have provided insight into whether or not the muting of Japanese cultural members is isolated to this company. Comparative data, though not a necessity in qualitative research, could have been accumulated regarding this particular national culture's experiences. It would also have added depth to the supposition that national

cultural members in the minority at an organizational site, especially a linguistic minority, are more likely to find difficulty expressing voice. Neither of these issues, however, compromises the findings of this study which are specific to this site but which signal larger conclusions and implications valuable for practitioners and future research.

Another potential limitation is the use of the interview method of data collection. Though a wealth of information was uncovered in interviews, employees may have been hesitant to reveal particularly negative experiences within the organization or may have been uncomfortable discussing experiences at a setting within organizational walls. The researcher went to great lengths to ensure that these sentiments were not present during interviews, but an ethnographic approach might have better served to reduce any feelings of hesitancy or uncertainty among participants. Overall, however, participants seemed entirely confident and comfortable in the stories and explanations they provided leading the researcher to conclude that any anxiety was overcome by the majority of respondents.

Finally, the major changes that participants indicated began roughly three years ago may have influenced the findings of this study. Hirschman's (1970) model of exit, voice, and loyalty is useful in explaining why this may be the case. Given that the organization engaged in a restructuring process that altered existing processes and power structures, individuals with negative or contrasting views may have chosen to exit the organization rather than continue to participate in it. Exit is referred to as a last resort for individuals who feel as if the company for which they work refuses to acknowledge them. Because the restructuring was such a significant changes (as evidenced by the number of references made to it by interview participants), it is possible that those employees who remained with the organization were those who already felt privileged



and who were further empowered through the change process. Thus, individuals with potentially valuable information and perspectives regarding the international organization may not have been included in this study. Given, however, that three years has passed since that restructuring, it is reasonably safe to assume that the data does provide a fair representation of the majority of employees currently employed by the company. Thus, though this limitation may impact the findings of this study to some degree, the experiences of interview participants concerning their time with the company (particularly over the past three years) should provide sufficient ground upon which to draw conclusions.

#### *Future Research*

The endless advancement of globalization makes research in this area critical to the future of organizational communication. As organizations expand into new national culture contexts, understanding the ways those cultures negotiate and express voice becomes increasingly important for practitioners and scholars alike. Moreover, gaining perspective on how organizational cultures affect and are affected by that struggle for voice holds boundless potential value for organizations. Future research should be directed towards expanding the scope of group resistance strategies within organizations, comparing organizational culture variations within international organizations, and studying larger, more diversified international organizations.

This study successfully identified two, previously unexamined methods of voicing resistance to perceived cultural muting: rhetorical projection and linguistic form. The first type is a safe method of resisting, as it displaces resistance from the individual or culture expressing it. The second is a form of resistance that would seem isolated to multicultural

or international organizations. Thus, future research should move in three directions. First, efforts should be made to analyze organizational populations for new group resistance methods, particularly forms perceived to be safe. Muted group theory has largely been used in cultural contexts, but resistance from any group may occur in organizations. For that reason, organizational communication scholarship should turn its attention to uncovering how resistance strategies are formulated and expressed within the power structures imposed by organizations and how those strategies may or may not be different than strategies used in cultural contexts. Second, research should focus on differentiating the contexts in which resistance strategies appear. International organizations are presumably more likely to face issues related to linguistic form. In that regard, connecting context to muting through resistance could play a pivotal role in the development of theory. Third, a quantitative study could be designed to confirm or disprove that the two forms of resistance and identity reinforcement found in this international organization occur in others. Surveying the workforces of several international organizations for these strategies could provide valuable data regarding whether or not they are unique to this organization. More importantly, such research could help international organizations become more capable of identifying policies and practices with which employees are dissatisfied but feel unable to change.

Next, research in international organizations should focus upon uncovering if and how organizational culture varies from site to site. This study confirmed through the voices of participants that the Japanese concept of organizational culture was not entirely utilized at the United States location. A connection to the home culture was, however, perceived by organizational members and was considered to be a vital element of the

company. Thus, future research should survey various sites within an international organization and attempt to uncover how valuable members consider it for elements of the home culture to be prevalent in their work environment. Confirmation that such a desire exists among employees of international organizations could help guide organizational theorists in their understanding of international organizational culture. From that point, scholarship should work towards identifying the point at which cultural representation by the home culture transitions into cultural oppression.

Finally, larger, more diversified international organizations should be analyzed in this same fashion. The organization studied in this project was purely a logistics company. One of its goals, however, is to continue to expand and diversify its operations. Many globalized organizations are highly diversified, with each branch serving a different and potentially unrelated function in the larger organizational context. In that way, each branch is distanced from the others in terms of location, population, and purpose. Research into how these factors impact the transition of organizational culture among organizational sites could produce findings that reveal the relative importance of attachment to organizational purpose. Studies should focus upon large organizations with multicultural populations and gauge the level of connection national cultural members feel to the organization as a whole. Coupled with an analysis of cultural voice, insight into the globalizations ramifications on national cultures and organizational cultures could become clearer.

#### *Final Note*

This study took an exploratory approach to analyzing sites of international organizations as sites that host hybrid organizational cultures due to the varied national

cultural associations of their members. This research developed a set of findings that provide a great deal of ground upon which future work can be premised. As globalization continues and an increasing number of organizations become internationalized, it will become increasingly critical that a detailed picture of how organizational culture is developed at sites of international organizations be constructed. Members of all national cultures working within the boundaries of international organizations will be profoundly impacted by future strides in this field. Practitioners and scholars of organizational communication and any of the myriad of related fields should continue in the vein of this research in order to fully evaluate the ramifications of global organizations.

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## Appendix A

### Data Coding Sheet

Code A: Redefining – the alteration of the denotation or connotation of terminology related to policies, practices, or organizational roles among members of a national or ethnic culture group.

Code B: Naming – the active creation of unique terms used for particular actions, situations, or items by a national or ethnic cultural group.

Code C: Active grouping – the intentional gathering of members of a group without organizational sanction or for exclusionary purposes.

Code D: Rhetorical projection – the placement of feelings upon a group while distancing oneself from that group

Code E: Linguistic form – expressed displeasure or lack of concern for any language



Appendix B

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WESTFAUL

PAGE 02/02

09-02-2007

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS  
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying information

	Principal Investigator	Advisor	Third Investigator
Name:	Clifford Jackson Hataway, Jr.	Dr. Tom Harris	
Department:	Communication Studies	Communication Studies	
College:	Communication & Information Sciences	Communication & Information Sciences	
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Address:	P.O. Box 870172, 478 Phifer Hall, Tuscaloosa, AL., 35487		
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E-mail:	Hataw003@bama.ua.edu	tharris@ua.edu	

Title of Research Project: An Examination of Organizational culture and muted Groups at Sites of International Organization

Date Printed: Funding Source: None

Type of Proposal:  New  Revision  Renewal  Completed  Exempt

Attach a renewal application

Attach a continuing review of studies form

Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page

UA faculty or staff member signature: \_\_\_\_\_

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review:  Full board  Expedited

IRB Action:

Rejected Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Tabled Pending Revisions Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved Pending Revisions Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved—this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subject

Approval is effective until the following date:

Items approved:  Research protocol: dated

Informed consent: dated

Recruitment materials: dated

Other: dated

Approval signature  Date 7-9-09