COMPELLED TO BE CONNECTED: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, WORK-LIFE BALANCE, AND THE USE OF MOBILE WORKPLACE TECHNOLOGIES

by

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ABSTRACT

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Barbara J. Daley

This study is an ethnographic exploration of organizational culture, work-life balance, and the use of information and communication technology ("ICT") in the work and home settings. The researcher was embedded for nine weeks within the Information Technology ("IT") department at the corporate headquarters of a mid-sized manufacturing firm in the upper Midwest. The espoused values of the organization proved contradictory, one favoring work-life balance and the other requiring that employees be available to work anytime and from anywhere. The behaviors observed provided insight as to why employee actually used ICT after hours—because it was required of their role and/or because they were highly engaged employees. Consistent with the existing work-life balance literature, employees at the firm were largely responsible for setting boundaries between their work and personal lives and for controlling the ways in which the use if ICT impacted their own work-life balance. Employees used ICT in different ways depending on their role, their marital/family status, and depending upon whether or not they were senior management.

Further, this study provides insight into the degree to which organizational culture can be a factor in determining the extent to which people use ICT outside of work.

Culture did play a role in influencing ICT use at the firm studied, but not a central role. Rather, employees actively and continually *chose* to use ICT after hours, irrespective of work demands, the wishes of management, or any influence of culture. Further insight is provided by this study as to the role of organizations and Human Resource Development ("HRD") practitioners in regards to the creation and support of organizational cultures that favor more rationale usage of ICT and that cultivate work-life balance. HRD theorists are called to recognize the central importance of ICT within theory related to both organizational culture and to work-life balance. Suggestions for future research involve replicating this study in different environments, considering different demographic factors, and focusing on employee productivity as it relates to work-life balance and the use of ICT.

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DEDICATION

To Gretchen, Charlie, and Bennett, for joining me on this journey. You made it possible and worthwhile.

To my parents, for endowing me with a respect for education and for giving me the love of family.

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complementary coffee. I continue to marvel at the kindness and generosity with which you all approached this research project. It was my privilege and pleasure.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Background

Technology is ubiquitous and pervasive in our work and personal lives (Parkinson, 1998). While advances in technology and, specifically, information and communication technology ("ICT"), have provided more flexibility for employees, these same technologies have made it possible for employees to have access to their work virtually all hours of the day (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007). Technology thus paradoxically enables and constrains employees simultaneously (Philipsen & Bostic, 2010). To compound the matter, the rate at which employees are required to adopt and utilize ICT increases consistently (Golden & Geisler, 2007). Keeping up with technology and these changes presents a continuous challenge and, particularly, can be a source of strain on the work-life balance of employees (Frone, 2003; Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003).

Though technology is intended to improve efficiency and to simplify complex tasks while it promises to help us be more productive in general, many people report increased stress and anxiety related to their own experiences with technology (Goldberg, 1999; Kraut, Dumais, & Koch, 1989). While technology "enables us to work faster and smarter, it challenges us to respect privacy, to be inclusive, and quite simply—to keep up" (Parkinson, 1998, p. 3). Thus, the challenge of technology has moved beyond the willingness of employees to utilize it and instead has become a function of their ability to manage the continuous access they have to information and, particularly, to work.

Studies on work-life balance have mentioned technology as one factor in the work-life balance equation (Parkinson, 1998; Fenner & Renn, 2004; Boswell & Olson-

Buchanan, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Kossek, Lautsch, Eaton, 2006; Park & Jex, 2011) or have examined specific technologies like email or personal digital assistants (PDAs) as they relate to work-life balance (Schlosser, 2002; Golden & Geisler, 2007). However, there is scant research regarding the way(s) in which organizational culture relates to the use of ICT and the subsequent impact of this relationship on work-life balance. As the use of ICT continues to blur the lines between work and home and employees work more hours (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007), employees risk working nearly all of their waking hours, placing their physical and mental health at risk (Goldberg, 1999; Kraut, Dumais, & Koch, 1989; Kakabadse, Porter, & Vance, 2007) and potentially impacting the quality of their work (Parkinson, 1998). Employees are using ICT too frequently, for extended periods, and at the sacrifice of their health and non-work relationships. For the sake of the well-being of employees and to ensure that they are as healthy and productive as possible, it is imperative that we understand the impact of the use of ICT in organizations more completely.

On a very basic level, "we need to find out more about how people use technology, so that we can begin to determine both positive and negative outcomes of its use" (Schlosser, 2002, p. 408). Studying the pros and cons of workplace technology or specific use habits alone does not provide for us a holistic picture of the impact of technology on work and life. We need to understand an organization's culture because culture informs the behaviors of an organization's members around the use of ICT; culture can explain to us *why* employees use ICT. Further, I argue that because the ubiquity of technology has made it *the* singular game-changing factor that has turned any

notion of "balance" in the work-life balance equation on its head, we need to specifically investigate the impact of ICT on work-life balance.

The extant literature involving employees and the use of ICT focuses primarily on the ways in which ICT is used to communicate, collaborate, and share organizational knowledge (Schlosser, 2002; Golden & Geisler, 2007; Park & Jex, 2011). We learn from the organizational culture literature that culture greatly influences the way(s) in which people behave (Fletcher & Jones, 1992; Perlow, 1998; Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, & Shabir, 2012). An additional body of literature examines the impact of technology as one of several components that impact work-life balance (Parkinson, 1998; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008). However, none of these studies focus specifically on the relationship between organizational culture and ICT and its subsequent impact on the work-life balance of employees. To better understand these relationships, such a study is warranted.

Organizations tend to be more responsive to employees' need for flexible work schedules when their managers believe that not being responsive could have detrimental effects on the employees' and, ultimately, the organization's performance (Milliken, Martins, & Morgan, 1998). Employees whose organizations provide work-family benefits report greater commitment, less intention to leave the organization, and less work-to-family conflict (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). Therefore, an organization whose culture is supportive of such work-life balance efforts will be better positioned to develop and retain productive employees.

In years past, it was easier for employees to create boundaries between their work and home lives because, in most cases, work had to be done at a place of business.

Nippert-Eng (1996) argues that this work/home distinction is the reason that suburbs were created and why the exodus to them midway through the last century was so successful. The drive from urban areas where serious work was completed to the lush, open, and relaxing spaces of the suburbs represented a physical and psychological boundary between work and home. Prior to the advent of ICT and the ability to work anywhere and anytime, a suburban home particularly represented a space and place where an employee could make a clear separation between work and home, where someone could "get away from it all." Workplace technology and ICT have upended this escape.

Today, rather than leaving "work" behind at the office and viewing the "home" space as a refuge, employees are tempted to and, in many cases, *expected to* work from home—or wherever they are—just as readily as they have traditionally been expected to work from the office. There is no longer a distinction between "work" and home" or a break from work to allow for leisure; technology has blurred all boundaries (Schlosser, 2002; Fenner & Renn, 2004; Waller & Ragsdell, 2012). Assuming that some degree of work-life balance or harmony is desired, it is thus incumbent upon employees to actively create those boundaries which enable balance to occur. Further, because balance is often difficult to achieve, organizations need to assist employees in focusing their efforts on finding the unique level of work-life balance that is right for each employee and to create an organizational culture in which the balanced and sensible use of ICT is the norm.

Swanson and Holton (2009) define HRD as "the process of developing and unleashing expertise for the purpose of improving individual, team, work process, and organizational system performance" (p. 4). To the degree that HRD practitioners can

ensure that employees are placed in the correct jobs and that they have an adequate degree of balance necessary to be successful in those jobs, HRD practitioners can ensure that the organization is in the best position to improve and thrive. Perlow (1998) notes that the blurring of work and home domains brought about by the increase in workplace technology has made it "difficult to design jobs as a series of explicit tasks to be performed with appropriate incentives to ensure adequate output from qualified employees" (p. 328). Consequently, HRD practitioners should "use their skills in managing organizational change to identify explicit and implicit expectations placed on workers that are unnecessary, or create new resources that help workers satisfy the expectations of their career" (Gryzwacz & Carlson, 2007, p. 464). Thus, HRD is in the unique position of being able to impact both the short- and long-term goals of both employees and the organizations for which they work.

I argue that the findings of this study have both instrumental use and enlightenment use. *Instrumental use* means that the information garnered throughout the course of the study will be for "intended use by intended users [in which] concrete information is applied to a particular problem" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 20). In this case, HRD professionals and managers within organizations will better know *how* and *why* people use ICT and the ways in which they can leverage ICT more efficiently and/or to make the lives of their employees more balanced. I can also argue that this research has an *enlightenment use*, or that which serves "to improve practice by enhancing understanding of that practice" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 21). The more insights practitioners have about the principles behind their ICT practices and, specifically, their

policies and procedures surrounding the use of ICT, the more effective those practices can become.

This study aims: (1) to provide insight regarding any perceived or real differences between the organization's espoused values concerning the use of ICT and/or work-life balance and the way(s) in which these constructs are actually exhibited in the organization, (2) to discover if there is a link in the organization studied between the use of ICT and the consequent work-life balance of the organization's employees, and (3) to examine closely the link between the culture of the organization and its relationship to the use of ICT throughout the organization. An understanding of these relationships will inform the HRD practitioners that create and guide organizational cultures and their related policies and procedures, specifically those aimed at enabling employees to remain productive while maintaining work-life balance in their lives.

Research Questions

Prior studies demonstrate the ways in which ICT impacts employees. A mixed methods study by Parkinson (1998) relays stories of employees checking emails at midnight and, the next day at work, spending most of the morning catching up on still more emails. Arnold (2003) explains the irony of mobile phones in that, while they make us independent by enabling us to stay connected at all times, we are at the same time completely dependent upon them in order to perform our jobs and stay connected in our personal lives. Kakabadse, Porter, and Vance (2007) and Perlow (2012) share stories of people habitually sleeping with their smart phones next to them—ringer on—and panicking when said smart phone is not within arm's reach.

Management often purports to provide employees with ICT in the hopes that its very use will indeed provide work-life flexibility and increase productivity. Meanwhile, employees "perceive it as an impingement on their personal lives accompanied by a loss of discretionary time, on out-of-whack work-life balance, and elevated stress" (Kakabadse, Porter, & Vance, 2007, p. 81). Other researchers have made holistic explorations into the general impact of technology on HR professionals (Bell, Lee, & Yeung, 2006; deAlwis, 2010; Gardner, Lepak, & Bartol, 2003; LegNate-Hall & Mortiz, 2003). However, these studies do not explicitly examine the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT. Thus, this study sets out to answer three fundamental questions related to workplace technology and work-life balance as they pertain to employees of the organization studied:

1) What is the relationship between the espoused values of the organization surrounding the use of ICT and the actual use of ICT?
2) What is the relationship between the use of ICT and work life balance in this organization?
3) What is the nature of the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT in this organization?

Purpose of Study

Because technology is so prevalent in nearly every organization and impacts nearly every employee, it is informative to learn about the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT and the degree to which technology contributes—positively and negatively—to the work-life balance of employees. By examining closely these relationships, we can develop a greater understanding of how

technology is used and, consequently, how to maximize its use within organizations. Understanding the relationship between ICT and organizational cultures is important because organizational culture can impact tremendously the way(s) in which ICT is used. The development of organizational policies around the use of technology will be better informed, as this study sheds light on the creation of expectations and standards concerning employees' use of ICT while attempting to retain a degree of work-life balance for employees.

As noted, studies on work-life balance have mentioned technology in general as one factor in the work-life balance equation (Parkinson, 1998; Fenner & Renn, 2004; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2006; Park & Jex, 2011) or have examined specific technologies like email or personal digital assistants (PDAs) as they relate to work-life balance (Schlosser, 2002; Golden & Geisler, 2007). By and large, the current body of literature regarding work-life balance and/or the use of ICT places the onus of managing the use of technology squarely upon the employee. It is recommended that employees create *boundaries* (Clark, 2000; Frone, 2003; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005) or clearly *segment* their work and personal lives (Ashforth et al.., 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Olson-Buchanan, & Roswell, 2005). I argue that the pervasive and invasive nature of ICT most often makes the implementation of these work-life balance strategies difficult, if not impossible, in many instances. Further, I submit that *organizations* have an obligation to create a culture in which the sensible and balanced use of ICT is not just a belief that is espoused, but that the sensible use of ICT should be a core behavior that is modeled by leadership and managers.

As a Human Resources ("HR") practitioner and a budding Human Resource Development ("HRD") scholar, I have a keen interest in what makes individuals within organizations maintain productivity while achieving balance in their lives and, conversely, what factors serve to hinder such aspirations. Additionally, in my life as an HR professional and as a student, I have seen firsthand the tremendous impact that technology has had in the last 20 years on *how* we perform our jobs. In order to gain a better understanding of the role that technology now plays in our work lives, this study aims to shed light on the way(s) in which organizational culture influences the use of ICT and how the use of ICT impacts work-life balance so that HRD professionals and managers alike are better informed as to the creation and implementation of policies and practices surrounding the use of ICT in their respective organizations.

Significance of Study

This study aims to significantly impact both HRD research and practice. Workplace technology, unlike any factor prior, has blurred the lines between work and home and created an environment in which employees are continually forced to choose work over family—or vice versa. Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2009) call for a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the technology/work/home interaction. Such an understanding will provide insights into how employees and employers alike can best manage and maximize technology in the workplace. Critical to such an understanding is the degree to which employ*ers* create environments in which people feel compelled to be connected and/or work at all times versus those times during which employ*ees* proactively choose to be connected and/or work at all times on their own.

A key concept in the work-life literature is *work-family conflict*, which Greenhaus and Allen (2011) define as conflict that "occurs when role pressures from work and family are mutually incompatible such that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other role" (p. 166). At its basic level, work–family conflict describes the inter-role conflict that occurs when role demands in either the work or family domain are incompatible with role demands in the other domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Frone (2003) notes that when given a choice between work and family, we most frequently tend to prioritize work and focus the majority of our energy on it.

Thus, when mobile workplace technology forces employees to make a choice between their work and their personal lives, employees are continually choosing to place work above all (Perlow, 1998). In today's 24/7 world, work-life balance is very difficult to obtain. It is incumbent upon HRD professionals and the organizations for which they work to create organizational cultures in which people can remain productive while still maintaining work-life balance. My hope is that this study can inform HRD professionals and scholars as to how organizational culture relates to the use of ICT and the ways in which a culture that is conducive to work-life balance for employees can be achieved.

Theoretical Background

Cooke and Rosseau (1988) explain that culture develops as the result of cognitions acquired through the social learning and socialization that happens as people experience life in groups. This cognitive socialization is an interactive process in which people attach meaning to various behaviors or patterns of behavior that happen within a given organization and which lead to the social construction of an organization's culture. While the aggregate behavior of an organization is the product of multiple simultaneous

interactions amongst individuals, the collective social experience of all of these interactions determines a context for those interactions—the organization's *culture* (Denison, 1996).

Ultimately, an organization's culture epitomizes how the values of the organization are manifested in the behavior of employees. Schein (1990, 1992) explains a process of socialization in which new members learn from current members the basic assumptions and expected behaviors of the organization. Individuals who have internalized the culture begin to behave automatically and their behavior aligns with the values of the organization.

O'Reilly (1989) discusses how organizations use normative order to perpetuate culture. Norms are "expectations about what are appropriate or inappropriate attitudes and behaviors" (O'Reilly, 1989, p. 12). Within organizations, such norms tell members how to dress, how to address other people, how to deal with conflict or, relative to this study, how to use ICT.

O'Reilly (1989) notes that organizations generally have two sets of norms: those that top level management would *like to believe* were true and those norms that *actually are* true. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) reinforce this idea by noting that culture "can be treated behaviorally in terms of what people *actually* do (as observed) as opposed to what they *say* they do (as reported), or as 'norms' (the expected) versus 'practices' (the actual)" (p. 22). For example, an organization's leader may believe that the culture of the firm is one focused on a flexible work environment that is supportive of work-life balance, while the reality may be that employees are working tirelessly and struggling to establish a degree of balance in their work and personal lives.

Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) describe this phenomenon using the *theory of action*, comprised of two contrasting theories. The first, *espoused theory*, represents those values that are explicitly communicated by the organization and which are intended to serve as guideposts for behavior for members of the organization. Thus, members of an organization use espoused theories to explain or justify their actions. *Theories-in-use*, on the other hand, are those observable behaviors that illustrate that which is actually done within an organization. Within an organization:

> formal corporate documents such as organization charts, policy statements, and job descriptions often reflect a theory of action (the *espoused theory*) which conflicts with the organizations *theory-in-use* (the theory of action constructed from observation of actual behavior)—and the theory-in-use is often tacit. (Argyris & Schön, 1974, p. 15)

Within the context of this study, my aim is to uncover both the espoused theories and those tacit theories-in-use concerning the use of ICT so that I can determine to what degree they align and the nature of their relationship with the use of ICT.

When espoused theories match theories-in-use, there is *congruence* and members of the organization feel valued and content (Argyris & Schön, 1974). When there is *incongruence*, members of the organization engage in a corrective process of learning in which behaviors are changed to ultimately align with the espoused values of the organization. When considering the use of ICT within an organization, incongruence is frequently manifested in work-life balance situations in which the espoused values of the organization (i.e., a degree of work-life balance) cannot necessarily be observed in the behavior of the employees (i.e., they work constantly).

Accepting the general notion that people tend to behave in ways that will increase the likelihood of producing those consequences which they intend (Argyris, 1982), it is

helpful to consider single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris, 1976, 1982; Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978). Single-loop learning occurs when members of an organization detect that actions taken (*theories-in-use*) are incongruent with the organization's articulated goals and/or norms (*espoused theories*) (Argyris & Schön, 1978). This disconfirmation of theories-in-use leads to corrective action in an effort to achieve stipulated goals and/or to conform to the organization's norms. In single-loop learning, the norms or goals against which performance is measured do not change. Rather, the behaviors employed to achieve said goals change.

Single-loop learning creates an environment in which individuals act largely out of self-interest because their primary concern is the achievement of individual goals. This individual focus leads to an environment of competition in which control over one's environment becomes a primary focus (Argyris, 1974). In most organizations, people can abrogate responsibility for their actions because superiors are ultimately responsible for dictating action and, ultimately, for the consequences of those actions. Subordinates rely heavily upon procedures and rules to determine their behavior (Dick & Dalmau, 2000).

When people seek little feedback and behave in ways that stay within the boundaries of what is acceptable within the organization, single-loop learning occurs because that person only learns within the confines of what is acceptable within the behaviors that they have defined for themselves and to which they are accustomed—their own *theories-in-use*. Such people do not examine the validity of the goal that they are trying to achieve nor the ways in which they are attempting to achieve that goal; they simply continue to attempt to achieve those goals in the way(s) they always have

(Argyris, 1982). The risk of such behavior is that people will fail to find new and successful ways to achieve goals and, in the process, may become insulated and defensive as they struggle to maintain those behaviors which are known and accepted. Thus, single-loop learning works best when the goal is to maintain effectiveness within the range of an organization's current norms and goals (Argyris, 1976). However, if those norms or goals change, a new type of learning is required which is more adaptive and which allows for change and/or innovation.

Double-loop learning occurs when an organization's members question not only the ways in which they go about achieving their goals, but also questioned are the goals and norms of the organization themselves (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978). With double-loop learning, members are interested in everyone's success because it is acknowledged that the solving of problems ultimately benefits the entire organization (Argyris, 1976). Problem solving transcends competition and is evaluated by the degree to which the problem is solved and stays solved while building upon those problem solving capabilities already established through the group's single-loop learning (Argyris, 1982).

With double-loop learning, it is assumed that an organization's members have valid information, have the ability to make free and informed choices, and that they are committed to the organization and, thus, interested in its success (Argyris, 1976, 1982). Here, the definition of the problem and control over the environment in which the problem is solved is shared amongst members of the group. The focus of the group largely becomes the maximization of the contribution(s) of each of its members toward the aim of problem solving (Argyris, 1976).

In the context of the use of ICT, my aim has been to discover the degree to which an organization's members use ICT in ways that are modeled for them and/or prescribed to them (single-loop learning) as opposed to the degree to which individuals have the ability to find additional and novel ways to incorporate the use of ICT within the confines of organizationally prescribed behaviors in ways that are beneficial to both themselves and the organization. Because an organization's culture contributes largely to the way(s) in which its members behave (*what* happens), examining that culture provides insight into the reasons *behind* these behaviors (*how* and *why* these behaviors happen).

Table 1 summarizes the primary components of culture discussed and notes which attributes are expected to be explicit and observable in the field during the data gathering phase of this project and which attributes will be implicit and, therefore, will need to be ascertained through pointed questioning.

Table 1. Summary of Cultural Attributes by Theorist

Theorist	**Explicit/Observable Attributes**	**Implicit Attributes**
Schein (1984, 1990, 1992)	Artifacts	Values Assumptions
Hatch (1993)	Symbols	
Argyris and Schön (1978)	Theories-in-action (espoused theory)	Theories-in-use
O'Reilly (1989)	Observed Norms	Aspired Norms

The use of ICT and organizational value/behavior alignment can also be viewed through the lens of *organizational commitment*, which O'Reilly (1989) posits has three phases. In the *compliance* phase, a person accepts the norms of the organization as they are in order to fit in. During *identification,* an individual accepts the influence of the

organization in an effort to create a meaningful relationship with it and its members. Finally, *internalization* occurs when the individual finds that the values of the organization are congruent with his/her own and the relationship has become intrinsically rewarding. Once employees are at the internalization stage, they indicate their satisfaction with the organization by becoming more engaged with their work.

In the context of ICT, these three phases of socialization are critical to understanding how and why people use mobile technologies. It is my suspicion that people begin using ICT outside of work and during non-business hours because they are compelled to (compliance). Soon, because they want to fit in with others in the organization, their behavior around the use of ICT mimics that of others in the organization (identification). That is, if everyone else is connected and working via ICT at all times and anywhere, so will the newer employees. Eventually, employees resign themselves to working outside of regular work hours because their values around the use of ICT outside of work ultimately grow to align with those of the organization (internalization). This study will determine the degree to which this suspicion of mine is true.

While behavior can change day-to-day and is specific to a given context, how we generally think or feel about the organization ultimately reflects the culture of the organization (Schein, 1992). Employees must have confidence that their efforts will have a positive payout for both themselves and the organization if they are to remain engaged with and committed to the organization (Ritchie, 2000). Thus, clear communication of expectations surrounding the use of mobile technology is essential to ensuring that each employee is working on and meeting the goals that the organization views as important.

Definitions

ICT Defined

Though "ICT" was originally synonymous with "IT" ("Information Technology"), the term now refers to "the integration of telecommunications, computers, middleware and the data systems that support, store and transmit" (Murray, 2011, n. p.) information and communications across any number of connected systems. For the purposes of this study, I define *ICT* as those electronic tools, both portable and stationary, that are used in conjunction with an employee's job to communicate and/or to perform work either at a traditional work setting or away from such a setting. In the organizational context, *ICT* is more specifically used to generate, distribute, and store data and creates value for an organization by allowing its employees to share and manage that information from anywhere. Today, most employees achieve extremely flexible and portable connectivity through the use of a smart phone, though the use of laptop computers, tablet computers, and desktop computers is still certainly applicable for the purposes of this study.

As a result of the prolific use of ICT, the speed at which world of work operates has been transformed in ways that were inconceivable only a few short years ago. Only recently, a laptop computer was the standard for mobile connectivity. If a person did not complete his/her work while at the office, they simply brought the office home with them in the form of their laptop computer. Today, with the advent of smart phones, tablets computers, and wireless technologies that enable nearly constant connectivity, people can work virtually *anywhere* and *anytime*. While this ability to stay connected and in touch with one's work at any time seems like a tremendous way to help employees stay on top

of their work, the literature surrounding workplace technology provides evidence otherwise. By affecting work-life balance and adding mental and physical stressors, workplace technology can have a deleterious effect on employees' productivity and happiness (Turnage, 1990; Mahmood & Mann, 2000; Kakabadse, Porter, & Vance, 2007).

Organizational Culture Defined

For the purposes of this research, I prefer the straightforward and simple definition of organizational culture offered by Barney (1995): "a complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols that define the way in which a firm conducts its business" (p. 657). This definition is most useful because it encompasses all of the attributes present and necessary in nearly all of the other definitions of *organizational culture* (values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols) while it operationalizes the construct by broadly noting that culture is ultimately the way in which organizations conduct themselves and which is manifested in the behavior of an organization's members. Barney's definition of *organizational culture* reinforces the notion that culture is more than just that which is unspoken (an assumption) or that which may be made explicit (a belief); culture very strongly influences the ways in which employees *behave*.

Through the process of socialization and interaction, meaning is made by a group and a representative symbolic world—a culture—emerges. The organization's values and beliefs dictate how members of the organization should behave both in the present and in the future. Accordingly, I aim through this study to discover the degree to which the way(s) in which employees of a given organization utilize ICT throughout their entire

day—both during and after work hours—is dictated by the espoused and the implied beliefs of the culture of that organization.

Work-life Balance Defined

There is no singular and agreed upon definition for the term *work-life balance*. Several authors offer their own definition (Clark, 2001; Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001; Arthur, 2003; Berg, Kalleberg, & Appelbaum, 2003; Gryzwacz & Carlson, 2007). For example, Frone (2003) provides a very simplistic definition of *work-life balance* by noting that the most widely held meaning of the term is "a lack of conflict or interference between work and family roles" (p. 145). To complicate the issue, the terms *work-life balance* and *work-family balance* are very similar, though I find the term *work-life balance* to be more inclusive because it considers the importance of non-work roles outside of family (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). The demands of work impact the lives of those that do not have children or families in ways that are as important and meaningful as the impact on those that do. Therefore, in an effort to capture and account for all aspects of life outside of work, I will use the term *work-life balance* throughout this study.

For the purposes of this study, I will focus on the Gryzwacz and Carlson (2007) definition that views work–life balance as "the accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains" (p. 455). This definition brings up the important view that work-life balance (or lack thereof) is about the congruence of expectations surrounding the work and life domains and that each employee is not alone in his/her struggle to gain and maintain balance. Achieving balance is a dynamic and

fluid process that requires work and negotiation by all parties involved, including (most importantly, I argue) the organization for which one works.

Nature of Study

Qualitative research is an active learning process, the goal of which is to improve some social circumstance (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). It takes place in natural settings, uses multiple methods of data collection, emphasizes the context of that which is studied, is emergent (as opposed to constrictively predetermined), and is interpretive at its core (Wolcott, 1999; Rosen, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Creswell, 2007, 2012; Glesne, 2011). Van Maanen (1979a) offers that *qualitative* "is at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (p. 520). The product of qualitative research in which I am interested is a descriptive study that aims to describe some social phenomenon in order to contribute to the current understanding of it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Downey and Ireland (1979) emphasize the importance of both the method of research chosen and the setting:

> The most relevant of the presuppositions that determine one's research perspective is that methodological issues must always be answered within the context of a particular research setting. That is to say, methodologies are neither appropriate nor inappropriate until they are applied to a specific research problem. (p. 630)

Handwerker (2001) notes that "the best science tries to answer specific questions" (p. 11) as he stresses the importance of choosing the correct methodology based on the research question(s) at hand. Because my aim has been to learn more about a specific social phenomenon and with the perspective of these aforementioned researchers in mind, this

qualitative study was conducted in an *ethnographic* style. Rather than testing existing or new hypotheses, ethnographic research focuses on the production of descriptions and explanations of a given social phenomenon (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Because it is both a process *and* a product (Tedlock, 2000), ethnography has allowed me to dig deeper into the relationship between organizational culture, technology, and work-life balance in order to understand the phenomena in a way that is meaningful and useful to HRD practitioners and scholars.

Definitions of *ethnography* abound. Rooted in the Greek *ethnos* (people or cultural group) and *graphic* (to describe), ethnography uses culture as a theoretical framework for studying and describing a group (Glesne, 2011). Fetterman (1989) offers a simple and straightforward definition: "the art and science of describing a group or culture" (p. 11). Most definitions are in agreement that ethnographic research happens in the field (Wolcott, 1999; Brewer, 2000), uses multiple methods of data gathering (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), and is purposed to investigate a social phenomenon in order to discover its meaning (Wolcott, 1999; Brewer, 2000; Rosen, 2000).

My particular study, however, focuses on a specific setting and a specific element within that setting: that of an *organization* and its *organizational culture*. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) note that ethnography involves writing about groups of people and, more specifically, about their culture. Organizational ethnography requires its own definition in that it "is predominantly concerned with those social relations coalesced around a subset of goal-oriented activities" (Rosen, 2000, p. 43). For this study, I have focused on the Van Mannen (1979b) perspective on organizational ethnography, the aim of which is "to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular work settings come to

understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation" (p. 540) specific to their use of ICT and any subsequent impact on work-life balance.

This study is not an ethnography in the term's purest sense in that I did not spend an extended period of time embedded with a subject group nor did I completely and entirely immerse myself in the setting or with the study's participants (Brewer, 2000) as a social anthropologist might. Rather, I was a *participant observer* (Wolcott, 1999) that experienced, enquired, and examined alongside the participants on a more limited basis in an effort to more clearly understand their culture and their relationship to technology than I would have if using only interviews as a means of data collection. With the many and varied definitions and methods of ethnographic research in mind, Wolcott (1999) offers that you can "do" ethnography in any way you like, as long as you describe it as such. While he warns against poorly designed studies or studies that do not provide enough description, Wolcott realizes that, if situated correctly, such studies can make significant contributions to the understanding of the given social phenomenon being studied.

The common view among some researchers is that ethnography too often provides depth at the expense of breadth (Brewer, 2000). To some extent, this view can be true in that the sample size in an ethnographic study is constrained by time and place—one researcher can only be in one place at a time and for just so long. However, it is safe to assume that the ways in which human beings relate to ICT in their work and home lives are relatively universal and that the findings of this study will be applicable in other organizations. An ethnographic approach is particularly appropriate for this study because the study's primary focus is organizational *culture.*

One of the primary strengths of ethnographic research is that because the researcher is embedded with a group, it provides a picture of a specific culture from the perspective of the members of that group (as opposed to solely that of the researcher) (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). It is precisely because the ethnographer is embedded on site that he or she is able to witness a wide range of behavior and events from which meaning can be derived; a positivist researcher has no such advantage (Rosen, 2000). Unlike the journalist observer that aims to report on the unusual or even the shocking, the ethnographer looks to write about the prosaic and routine in the daily lives of people in order to tease out the meaning behind it (Fetterman, 1989). Symbolism, for example, (one of the main features of organizational culture to be discussed in Chapter 2) is largely ignored by the positivist researcher because it is difficult to decipher symbolic meaning from a questionnaire. It is through observation of that symbol and subsequent conversation about that symbol *in its natural and real setting* that its meaning is discovered and contextualized.

Chapter 1 Summary

Prior studies have already established that technology is ubiquitous and that it has both positive and negative impacts on the work-life balance of employees. It is also established that organizational culture directly influences the behavior(s) of employees within organizations. The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT and the subsequent impact of this relationship on the work-life balance of employees within a given organization so that measures can be taken to enable managers and employees alike to achieve the degree of work-life balance that they desire.

As the use of ICT becomes more pervasive and invasive, we risk creating a labor force that is perpetually connected virtually, working all of the time at the sacrifice of their personal and family lives and their ability to work effectively. The aim of this study is to enlighten employees, employers, and the HRD community in particular as to the role that organizational culture plays in the use of ICT and the impact that the use of ICT has on work-life balance so that all involved can make better decisions about maximizing ICT while maintaining some degree of balance in their work and personal lives.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Organizational culture is rooted in the values, beliefs, and assumptions held by members of that organization as well as the behavior exhibited by them (Denison, 1996). Culture represents patterns of behavior that those members exhibit in order to solve problems and, consequently, pass on to new members of the organization (Schein, 1984). There can be incongruence between an organization's explicit, espoused values and the behaviors actually exhibited by its members (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Since it epitomizes how the values of the organization are manifest in the behavior of employees (Schein 1984, 1990; Zheng & Yang, 2009), I argue that an organization's culture must impact to some degree the use of ICT within that organization. Ultimately, an organization's culture dictates for its members the expected and acceptable behaviors surrounding the use of ICT.

Work-life balance is an increasingly important area of study and is central to HRD because employees need to be freed from stressors and distractions in order to be effectively engaged in their jobs (Gryzwacz & Carlson, 2007). Significant advances in technology and the increasing ways in which employees use it in their work and personal lives have led to an environment in which people have the ability to work anywhere and anytime. When employees are engaged in work, it is frequently difficult for them to be engaged in their family and personal lives—and vice versa. Though the use of ICT brings with it opportunities for increased efficiencies, the prospect of working 24/7 frequently comes at the price of diminished work-life balance.

The aim of Chapter 2 of this study is to use extant literature to establish the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT and to examine the link

between ICT usage and work-life balance. This review of the literature was conducted primarily using Google Scholar, which connects directly with the primary databases ABI/INFORM Global, ERIC, and JStor. Using the search terms "work-life balance," "work-family balance," "ICT," and "organizational culture," a substantive amount of articles was returned: the term "work-life balance" alone produces 61,200 articles. Because there were so many hits for these search terms, each term alone was considered *too* broad; further searches used combined terms (e.g. "work-life balance *and* ICT") and served to refine the search to a degree that was more focused. After an initial review of the literature was done and the prominent theories for each construct became clear, subsequent searches using *border theory* and *HRD* were conducted, as well.

Articles and books were scoured for their relation to the topic of organizational culture and its relationship to work-life balance and ICT. Special attention was paid to include both theoretical and empirical works. Additionally, if articles had cited other work(s) that may be germane to the topic, those articles were also searched for and, to the extent that they could be retrieved, were examined. The tables of contents of books on these topic(s) were scanned; relevant chapters and/or articles within those chapters were read and noted. The resulting literature review comprises the remainder of this chapter.

First, using the work of several theorists to situate technology within the organization, I will define organizational culture and explain the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT. Next, I will explain how ICT usage relates to work-life balance issues within an organization. Using boundary theory, I will describe the ways in which employees manage their work and personal lives to maintain a degree of balance. Finally, I will detail how the use of ICT impacts the work itself as well as the

people doing the work. Ultimately, the aim of this study is to look further into the phenomena of the use of ICT in order to provide practical suggestions as to why and how HRD can assist in creating workplace environments that are more conducive to work-life balance.

Organizational Culture

> Management must accept the responsibility of not only sharing the values and behaviors suggested by the culture but also embodying these same values and behaviors. It is folly to expect employees' adherence to values and behaviors that are ignored by management. (Ritchie, 2000, p. 10)

Once the domain of anthropology, sociology, social psychology, and organizational behavior, the study of *organizational culture* is now a major focus in the field of organizational research, surpassing the once-prominent study of formal structure and bureaucracy (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983; Schein, 1990; Hatch, 1993; Denison & Mishra, 1995). The study of organizational culture has progressed from a nascent field in which sociology researchers developed the idea of an organization "as a social phenomenon that has its own features which distinguish it from an environment on the one hand and from the individual desires and predispositions of its members on the other" (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983, p. 469) to one that is now dominated by behavioral scientists working primarily in the field of management at business schools.

The history of the study of organizations ultimately begins with Frederick W. Taylor's *scientific management*, which came to the fore in the early part of the 20th century. Taylor used time and methods studies to ascertain how to get humans to perform the simplest of tasks in the most efficient and productive manner possible (March & Simon, 1993). Over the years, researchers began to realize the study of

organizations was largely a social phenomenon (Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1990; Martin, 2002).

Because an organization's culture outlines for its members which behaviors surrounding the use of ICT are expected and acceptable, logic dictates that culture should impact greatly the use of ICT within a given organization. Current studies discuss the impact of culture on technology, but primarily within the context of whether or not culture can positively impact the implementation of a given technology and whether or not employees will accept and use that technology (Harper & Utley, 2001; Park, Ribiere, & Schulte, Jr., 2004; Murugan, 2009). When it comes to the everyday use of ICT, not asked often enough are the questions "*Should* employees use a given technology?" and "*When* is it reasonable to expect employees to use a given technology?" By understanding more clearly how organizational culture informs the behaviors surrounding the use of ICT within a given organization, this study aims to help employees, managers, and HRD professionals alike create environments in which ICT is effectively leveraged while modeling and supporting behaviors that maintain a degree of work-life balance for everyone in the organization.

Organizational Culture Explained

If there is one thing that researchers of organizational culture agree upon it is that they cannot agree upon a definition of *organizational culture* or exactly how the construct should best be studied (Cooke & Rosseau, 1988; Schein, 1990; Barney, 1995; Kondra & Hurst, 2009). Within the context of organizations, the Merriam Webster dictionary defines culture as "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization" ("Culture", n.d.). Some definitions of

organizational culture are profoundly simple: "the character or personality of an organization… and 'the way things get done'" (Park, Ribiere, & Schulte, Jr., 2004, p. 107). Researchers have expanded upon this definition greatly, of course, but most definitions deal in some regard with the basic elements of values, beliefs, symbols, and behaviors.

Perhaps the most known and widely accepted definition for culture is that of Schein (Hatch, 1993; Yahyagil, 2006). Schein (1984) sees culture as "a pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration" (p. 3). Schein (1984, 1990) further explains that groups validate these assumptions and behaviors over time and deem them worthy to be taught to new members as a way to perpetuate both the organization and its culture.

Fletcher and Jones (1992) see culture as the ethos of the organization, the manifestation of the psychological and structural elements of an organization that impact both the perceptions and behaviors of employees. Shahzad, Luqman, Khan, and Shabir (2012) situate their definition temporally and spatially and see culture as "the gained knowledge, explanations, values, beliefs, communication and behaviors of large group of people, at the same time and same place" (p. 976). Regardless of the definition of culture that is employed, the key factor is that culture drives the ways in which people view the organization and their place in it and, consequently, their behavior.

For the purposes of this research, I prefer the straightforward and simple definition of organizational culture offered by Barney (1995): "a complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols that define the way in which a firm conducts its

business" (p. 657). This definition is most useful because it encompasses all of the attributes present and necessary in nearly all of the other definitions (values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols) while it operationalizes the construct by broadly noting that culture is ultimately the way in which organizations conduct themselves and which is manifested in the behavior of an organization's members. In this regard, Barney's definition is a concise amalgamation of the aforementioned definitions.

In order to discuss clearly the concept of culture, we must also be clear that culture is *not* synonymous with *organization* (Alvesson, 1987). Further, culture is not to be confused or used interchangeably with *climate*, which is limited only to those environmental attributes that are consciously perceived by the organization's members (Dension, 1996; Mahal, 2009). *Culture*, on the other hand, "refers to the deep structure of organizations, which is rooted in the values, beliefs, and assumptions held by organizational members" (Denison, 1996, p. 624). Through the process of socialization and interaction, meaning is made by a group and a representative symbolic world—a *culture*—emerges. The organization's values and beliefs then dictate how members of the organization should behave both in the present and in the future.

Theoretical Influences: Culture

Culture's Influence on Organizations

Organizational culture tells people how to behave most of the time. Because employees know how to act in a given situation in a way that is acceptable, they waste less time deciding the best course of action. Eventually, culture begins to pervade the way employees perceive, think, and feel and it is manifested in overt behavior (Schein, 1984). An organization's culture provides members of that organization a shared

understanding of the organization's beliefs and values that become necessary when there are no clear applicable rules or policies to dictate behavior in certain situations (Zheng & Yang, 2009). Further, a culture enables people to feel better about what they do, which increases their engagement around work. If people are associated with an organization with whom their values are congruent and that they feel values them, they simply feel better about working for that organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).

Schein (1984, 1990, 1992) offers that there are three levels of culture: observable artifacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions. *Artifacts* entail that which is more easily observable: the physical layout, the smell and feel of the office, the way people dress, the products the company produces, and the organization's annual reports (Martin, 2002). These visible artifacts tell us *what* employees do, but they do not provide us with information as to *why* employees do certain things (Schein, 1984). Taken alone, we cannot tell much from artifacts; they are separate bits of data that do not necessarily paint a complete picture.

Values represent the organization's norms, ideologies, charters, and philosophies. These attributes drive *how* people think about the organization. Values have to be clear and explicit; they have to stand for something and explain to employees how the organization aims to conduct its business. Management must pay a great deal of attention to the shaping of values to fit the business environment and the continuous communication of the values to employees (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Some values are obvious, often taken for granted, and more overt. For example, a firm can reinforce its espoused value of community involvement by providing employees with time off to volunteer within their community.

Overt values, their meaning, and their relevance to the organization should be known by each and every employee within the organization. However, it is the unconscious and concealed values that drive behavior that can help explain that given behavior (Schein, 1984). For example, it may be *unspoken* that a firm values face time in the office, which creates an environment in which people work long hours and stay at work longer than necessary in order to be seen at work. The motivation behind such behavior cannot be ascertained through observation; motivation is discerned through conversation (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). Thus, the charge for researchers is to talk with members of an organization to get at their unconscious values and to understand why they behave in certain ways. In the aforementioned case, for example, researchers could observe *what* employees were doing (working late) but only find out through discussion *why* employees felt obligated to work long days at the office (it was implicitly expected of them).

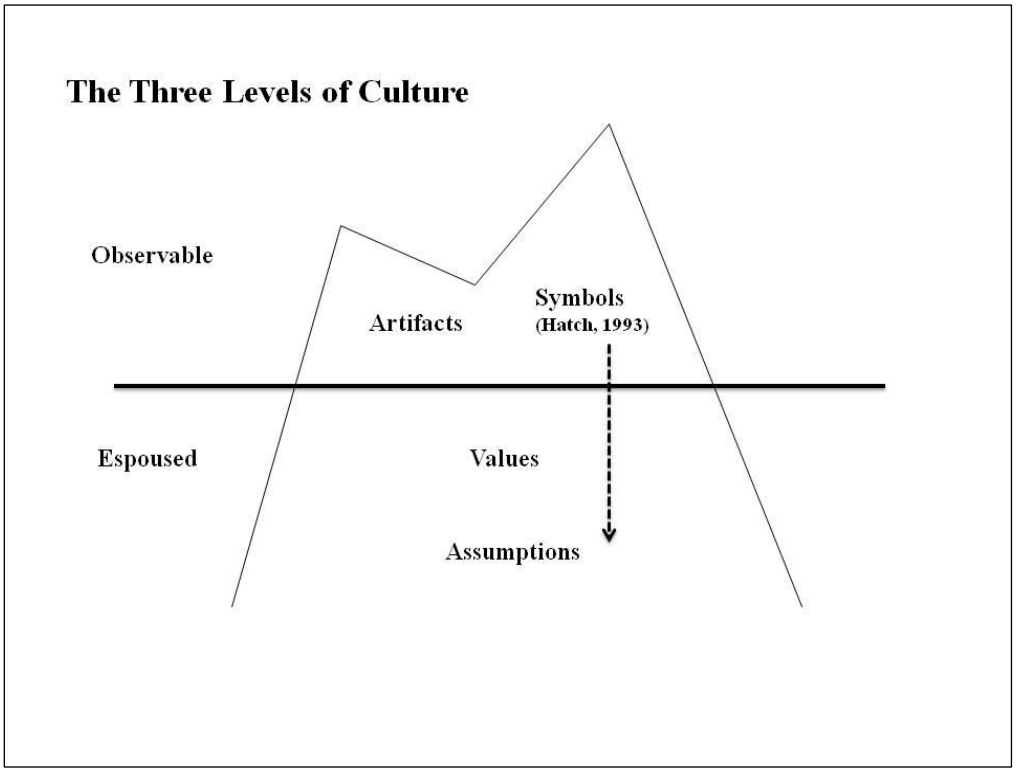
Lastly, *assumptions* are those thoughts and feelings that are unconscious and underlying and which determine the perceptions, thought processes, feelings, and behavior of those within the organization. The rites and rituals of the organization—those behaviors that become common and habitual—lead to the deciphering as well as communicating of cultural assumptions (Schein, 1992). Because assumptions are so inherent to the organization, they are very difficult to change. When situations arise that are incongruent with the assumptions of an organization, it is disorienting to the organization's members. For example, if the assumption within a given organization is that all of its members will be reachable via ICT at any given time, it can be upsetting when one organization member decides to ignore technology, even if temporarily.

Hatch (1993) argues that Schein's model, though it is largely viewed as the standard in organizational culture research, is incomplete because it views organizations as typically static and only considers artifacts, values, and assumptions. Hatch contends that Schein fails to draw on the symbolic-interpretive perspective, which provides deeper meaning to some artifacts by qualifying them as symbols. In the context of organizations, *symbols*—"anything that represents a conscious or an unconscious association with some wider, usually more abstract, concept or meaning**"** (Hatch, 1993, p. 669)—are essentially artifacts with much deeper meaning when considered within the context of a given organization. Fetterman (1989) notes that symbols "are condensed expressions of meaning that evoke powerful feelings and thoughts" (p. 36). Thus, symbols provide the ethnographer with deeper insight into a culture and a tool with which to further probe various cultural beliefs. Whereas Schein (1984) found that artifacts only tell us *what* people do within an organization, symbols provide more insight into *why* people behave in certain ways.

For example, a smart phone at face value and considered as an artifact may be representative of employees' connection to the Internet and their ability to communicate. When considered as a symbol, however, the ways in which the employees use that smart phone are considered and attention shifts from the physical form of an object to *how* it is used (Hatch, 1990). The smart phone—taken simply, a tool for communication—can thus come to symbolize rank and status, the degree to which there are demands on someone's time, or the level to which someone is engaged in their job depending on how that smart phone is used within a given organization.

Schein's approach to culture is informally known as "The Iceberg Model" in which an iceberg serves as a metaphor for that which can be seen and is above the surface (artifacts and symbols) and that which is not observable, yet provides the foundation and support for that which is seen (values and assumptions). Figure 1 below illustrates Schein's concept of culture and includes symbols (Hatch, 1993). The dashed arrow is representative of the ability of symbols to penetrate beyond that which is simply observed and provide insight into the values and assumptions of the organization.

Figure 1. The Iceberg Model of Culture (Schein, 1984, 1990, 1992)



By examining the symbols within organizations, we can gain insight into that organization's values and assumptions because symbols are essentially artifacts with deeper meaning. For the purposes of this study, the technologies utilized by employees served as symbols that represent one's connectedness to work and the value that an

individual places on that connectedness. That is, the way(s) in which each person interacts with ICT—their *behavior*—is emblematic of each person's prioritization and when it comes to choosing work over personal matters and vice versa.

Organizational Culture and the Use of ICT

Today, the "workplace" is no longer a discrete physical location and technologies that are increasingly affordable and sophisticated allow for employees to stay connected to work at all times (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). This continual connectivity has led to an increased amount of time during which employees work outside of traditional work hours (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Waller & Ragsdell, 2012). Recent estimates show that working parents spend an average of 64 hours (paid and unpaid) per week engaged in activities related to work (Schneider, 2011). The number of hours worked increases for parents in professional jobs and, particularly, for those in managerial positions.

While there is debate about the actual number of hours that people work each day and the degree to which it is a problem, workers are inarguably complaining of increased workloads and longer working hours (MacDermid & Wittenborn, 2007). Similarly, Kelly and Moen (2007) found that 44% of employees reported feeling overworked, overwhelmed, and that they did not have ample time to reflect upon their work in the past month. The feeling of being overworked and overwhelmed can increase as the use of ICT increases (Parkinson, 1998).

Though technology is intended to improve efficiency, is created to simplify complex tasks, and promises to help us be more productive in general, many people report increased stress and anxiety related to their own experiences with technology

(Goldberg, 1999; Kraut, Dumais, & Koch, 1989). Additionally, many employees have issues balancing work and life against the impulsive need to respond to ever-present emails, text messages, and cell phone calls. While technology "enables us to work faster and smarter, it challenges us to respect privacy, to be inclusive, and quite simply—to keep up" (Parkinson, 1998, p. 3). Thus, the challenge of technology has moved beyond the willingness of employees to utilize it and is instead a function of their ability to manage the continuous access they have to information and, particularly, to work.

Bolman and Deal (2008) argue that profound and fast "changes in technology and the business environment have rendered old structures obsolete at an unprecedented rate, spawning a new interest in organizational design" (p. 51). Though we are now clearly in a digital age, most corporate structures are remnants of the industrial age and found their genesis at the turn of the last century. Bolman and Deal (2008) make the case for less vertically-integrated, more flexible environments that are focused on *what* gets done as opposed to how or where things get done, offering that employees thrive in such environments. Thus, an organization that is rigid, has too many rules, and which is overly cautious and predictable is generally one in which people prefer not to work (Harper and Utley, 2001).

Summary: Organizational Culture

At its core, organizational culture informs members of organizations how to behave. Behaviors are then passed on to new members of the organization through the artifacts, values, and assumptions present in the culture (Schein, 1984). An organization's culture outlines for its members expected and acceptable behaviors surrounding the use of ICT. Often, there is incongruence between an organization's

explicit, espoused values and the behaviors actually exhibited by its members (Argyris & Schön , 1978; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985) when it comes to the use of ICT.

Work-life Balance

> Question: How does the organization know managers are doing their jobs and that they are making the best possible decisions?
> Answer: Because they are spending every moment at it and thus working to the limits of human possibility.
> Question: When has a manager finished the job?
> Answer: Never. Or at least, hardly ever. There is always something more that could be done.
>
> (Kanter, 1977b, p. 65)

The words above from Kanter (1977b) ring exceptionally true 36 years later. Remarkably, this observation was made in a time when work was primarily confined to a specific time and place, well prior to the advent of ICT that allow us to work anytime and anywhere. Today, the "workplace" is no longer a discrete physical location and technologies that are increasingly affordable and sophisticated allow for employees to stay connected to work at all times (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). This continual connectivity has led to an increased amount of time during which employees work outside of traditional work hours (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Waller & Ragsdell, 2012).

Though technology does allow for greater connectivity to work, great flexibility, and a resultant increase in productivity and efficiency, this integration of work and home life leads to a blurring of boundaries between these two aspects of each employee's life and, ultimately, comes at a price (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Park & Jex, 2011). As Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton (2006) note, employees "cannot move work into the home without changing their social relationships" (p. 364).

Workplace technology in the form of ICT, unlike any factor prior, has blurred the lines between work and home and created an environment in which people are forced to choose work over family—or vice versa.

Yet, in their analysis of four leading management journals—The Academy of Management Journal (AMJ), The Academy of Management Review (AMR), Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ), and Organization Science (OS)—over a 10-year period, Orlikowski and Scott (2008) found "that over 95% of the articles published in top management research outlets do not take into account the role of technology in organizational life" (p. 433). Related, Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2009) call for a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the technology/work/home interaction. Such an understanding will provide insights into how organizational leaders and employees alike can best manage and maximize technology in the workplace.

In his book on meaningful workplaces, Chalofsky (2010) notes that "work-life balance concerns the choices we make and the tensions we have to deal with in order to have a sense of completion in our lives. . . no one area of our lives should dominate so much that we cease to value the other areas" (p. 59). Organizations in recent years have begun to pay increasing attention to work-life balance issues. Those organizational initiatives concerned with work-life balance **"**are deliberate organizational changes—in policies, practices, or the target culture—to reduce work–family conflict and/or support employees' lives outside of work" (Kelly et al., 2008, p. 310). The research on work-life balance continues to grow as the topic becomes more important to employees and, thus, employers.

Work-life Balance Explained

There is no singular and agreed upon definition for the term *work-life balance*. Several authors offer their own definition (Clark, 2001; Kossek, Colquitt, & Noe, 2001; Arthur, 2003; Berg, Kalleberg, & Appelbaum, 2003; Gryzwacz & Carlson, 2007), while others referred to definitions from prior writings on the topic (Frone, 2003; Reiter, 2007). Frone (2003) offers a very simplistic definition of *work-life balance* by noting that the most widely held meaning of the term is "a lack of conflict or interference between work and family roles" (p. 145). Greenhaus and Allen (2011) define work-family balance as "an overall appraisal of the extent to which individuals' effectiveness and satisfaction in family roles are consistent with their life values at a given point in time" (p. 174). Similarly, Clark (2001) defines work-life balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict" (p. 349). Though I find these definitions valuable and valid, they mention members outside of a given employee's family in only a passive sense. That is, these definitions give the impression that the sole responsibility for and obligation to create and maintain balance lies solely with an employee.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, I will focus on Gryzwacz and Carlson's (2007) more inclusive definition that defines work–family balance "as accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his or her role-related partners in the work and family domains" (p. 455). This definition brings up the important views that work-life balance (or lack thereof) is about the congruence of expectations surrounding the work and life domains and that each employee is not alone in their struggle to gain and maintain balance. Achieving balance is a dynamic and fluid

process that requires work and negotiation by all parties involved, at work as well as at home. I contend that the organization shares in the responsibility of ensuring that employees are aware of and have access to those support systems which can help them achieve a degree of work-life balance while remaining productive. Over the years, the focus of such work-life balance initiatives has changed.

Work-life balance programs began as on-site childcare and sick child care in the 1980s and, in order to help resolve the conflict created by work-family demands in the modern world, have evolved into flextime, job sharing, compressed work weeks, shorter work weeks, and most recently, telecommuting (Arthur, 2003; Cummings & Worley, 2009). Regardless of their focus, the common thread with all of these initiatives is that (1) there is an effort to reduce work-family conflict with employees in order to minimize interference among roles, and (2) the creation of an organizational culture that is supportive of work-life balance is critical to the success of a given initiative. Employees in organizations that have worked to create such a culture tend to be more satisfied with their work and family lives and, consequently, more productive (Caligiuri & Givelekian, 2008; Kelly et al., 2008). Further, a study of 428 accounting professionals by Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) found that those employees that dedicated more time to family than to work reported a higher quality of life and more job satisfaction.

Today, a younger generation of workers is demanding that work-life balance be considered seriously within the organization(s) for which they work. Speaking on the demographic changes and the generational differences currently found within the workplace, Chalofsky (2010) says that although:

> the aging sector of the workforce is highly experienced, work-oriented, and stable in employment, younger employees are better educated, are more mobile, exhibit

> less organizational commitment, are entrepreneurial, are very technologically literate, and are much more interested in work-life balance than their parents or grandparents. (p. 62)

Thus, it is no longer unreasonable to expect some degree of balance between your work life and your life outside of work; whereas older generations may not necessarily agree with this notion, younger workers are insisting upon it (Greenblatt, 2002; Chalofsky, 2010). The younger generations agree that work should get done wherever they may be located—but not to the detriment of their overall quality of life.

Work-family Conflict

A key concept in the work-life literature is *work-family conflict*, which Greenhaus and Allen (2011) define as conflict that "occurs when role pressures from work and family are mutually incompatible such that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other role" (p. 166). While Greenblatt (2002) agrees that work-life balance is simply a lack of work-family conflict, she offers that achieving work-life balance depends not only on having the time, financial resource and control with which to do so, but also having the "physical, psychological, emotional and social resources available to help a person achieve balance" (p. 179).

Building on the work of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985), Cappelli, Constantine, and Chadwick (2000) note that there are three primary causes of work and family conflict: (1) there is a finite number of hours in a day, and an employee's focused attention in either the work or family role means that the other role will suffer to some degree or another, (2) roles required in each domain are different, and sometimes it is difficult to move fluidly from one role to the other; meeting requirements for one role may make it difficult to meet the requirements in the other, and (3) organizations go to

the trouble to create and implement family-friendly policies, but employees do not or, in some cases, are not allowed to, take advantage of those policies. The last cause is significant because it is difficult to determine the impact of work-life balance initiatives if, for any number of speculated reasons, employees do not take advantage of benefits and programs specifically aimed at engendering work-life balance (Frone, 2003; Kelly et al., 2008). I argue that organizations have an obligation to ensure that employees are aware of and are taking advantage of any work-life balance policies that are in place and any supporting mechanisms (i.e., work-from-home opportunities or flexible scheduling) that might be available to them and which might help reduce work-family conflict.

At its basic level, *work–family conflict* describes the inter-role conflict that occurs when role demands in either the work or family domain are incompatible with role demands in the other domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). As described earlier, this role conflict is at the core of work-life balance; employees use segmentation or integration to reconcile their work-life demands with their available time and resources (Ashforth et al., 2000; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Olson-Buchanan, & Roswell, 2005). Work–family conflict consists of two broad dimensions: work-to-family conflict (work interfering with family) and family-to-work conflict (family interfering with work) (Frone et al., 1997).

Either form of conflict can have a deleterious impact on work-life balance because the amount of time spent in one role takes away from the amount of time available for the other role and, perhaps more significantly, preoccupation with one role impairs the ability to function in the other role (McMillan, Morris, & Atchley, 2011). Frone (2003) notes in his research that work-to-family conflict tends to be more prevalent because we tend to prioritize work and focus the majority of our energy on it. Thus,

when the use of ICT forces employees to make a choice between their work and their personal lives, employees are continually choosing to place work above all (Perlow, 1998). As a result, in today's 24/7 world, balance is very difficult to achieve.

The Idea of "Balance"

A further complication surrounding scholarship and practice on work-life balance is that the concept of *balance* itself is not well-defined nor has a common and standard definition of the concept been agreed upon (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Frone, 2003; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Frone (2003) notes that people think that a universal definition for work-life balance is self-evident, but few go to the length of defining *balance* (Reiter, 2007). Balance is not a zero-sum game or an either/or proposition; it should not be defined simply as the absence of conflict (Hill et al., 2007; Chalofsky, 2010). Hill et al. (2007) advocate the framing of work–home benefits and interventions with the music metaphor of *harmony* as a way to conceptualize the coming together of various elements to make a functioning whole. Reiter (2007) rejects the idea that *balance* is about making sure your attention and resources are spread equally across the various facets of your life: "Although these definitions share the benefit of being 'one size fits all' type approaches that remove the complexity of person-specific variables of need, desire, and situation, the definitions lack 'real-life' applicability" (p. 280). Clarke, Koch, and Hill (2004) offer that balance is not something that happens without effort; balance is proactively achieved by employees (and, I would offer, with the help of their respective organizations).

Frone (2003) agrees that the shortcoming of traditional definitions of balance is that they focus on only work-family conflict and do not consider the additional ways in

which work-life balance can be fostered and/or impacted. Namely, employees deal with work-life issues through *facilitation*, which represents "the extent to which participation at work (or home) is made easier by virtue of the experiences, skills, and opportunities gained or developed at home (or work)" (Frone, 2003, p. 145). Similarly, Voydanoff (2004) views *facilitation* as "a form of synergy in which resources associated with one role enhance or make easier participation in the other role" (p. 399). Greenhaus, Collins, and Shaw (2003) argue that achieving balancing is critical to having satisfied, productive employees because: (1) balance buffers individuals from the negative effects that might be experienced in the work and family roles, and (2) it does indeed reduce work-family conflict. As people develop throughout their careers, they also begin to develop routines and further facilitation skills that enable them to meet the demands of the various roles in their lives.

With the concept of facilitation in mind, Greenhaus and Allen (2011) note that the definition of "balance" varies for each person. *Balance* is not necessarily a scale with a fulcrum in the middle, where work and family have to be equally proportioned. Rather, the point is that the goal for each person is to find that combination of work-to-family that is right for their particular job and family situations. Greenhaus and Allen (2011) note that one "must also consider that which they consider to be harmonious and not what they think are the societal expectations concerning their role(s)" (p. 175). A person must be true to that which they think is the right blend of work and family to create harmony *in their own particular situation*. Because one's priorities change over the course of one's life and career, what it takes to balance those elements of work and life that intersect will change, as well. It is important throughout one's career to continually evaluate the

various work and family roles they play and the extent to which one needs to be balanced against the other. *Boundary theory* has been used by scholars to describe in more practical terms exactly how employees create separation between work and home in order to achieve and/or maintain balance.

Theoretical Influences: Work-life Balance

Boundary Theory

Boundary theory is of particular use in explaining the ways in which people integrate their work and home lives because it aims to identify tactics that people can utilize and provides actionable knowledge that affords people the ability to control their own experiences (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). Given that particularly in recent years the lines between work and family have become blurred, it is no longer feasible to draw sharp distinctions between the two domains (Voydanoff, 2004). Golden and Geisler (2007) explain boundary theory as a construct that "intersects with the concerns of research on the relationship of individuals to organizations, extra-organizational influences on organization life, and intersections of public and private worlds in the workplace" (p. 519). The boundaries between work and life in boundary theory are permeable and flexible; what happens in one domain inherently influences what happens in the other (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000).

Boundary theory "provides a theoretical framework for understanding how people manage multiple roles by focusing on the boundary between their work and non-work roles" (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005, p. 243). Though the roles that we fulfill in our work and family lives each have a unique set of boundaries, it is important that we remain cognizant of the stressors that influence each role so that, in the act of balancing

one role against the other, our overall health and wellbeing can remain intact (Frone, 2003).

To transition between roles, employees use a number of strategies to navigate the temporal (related to time) and spatial boundaries (related to physical space) for each role (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005). Wilson et al. (2004) note that it has been said "that the greatest challenge for people with highly integrated roles is to create and maintain boundaries" (p. 186). Nippert-Eng (1996) calls this approach *boundary work*, and defines it as "the process through which we organize potentially realm-specific matters, people, objects and aspects of self into 'home' and 'work,' maintaining these conceptualizations as needed/desired" (p. 186). It is through this process that we determine which items to incorporate and when to separate work from home.

Employees tend to accomplish this role transition either through "*segmentation* (making clear distinctions between the roles) or *integration* (being flexible and transitioning easily between the work and family roles)" (Ashforth et al., 2000, p. 474). In our efforts to segregate, we purposefully create two distinct categories for "home" and "work." In turn, we do whatever we have to in order to maintain this distinction; this is done through the creation of *boundaries*. Segmentation tends to make transition between roles difficult because it requires a complete separation of tasks and attention; the concept assumes that you cannot focus on your job at all while you are focusing on your family or vice versa (Desrochers & Sargent, 2004).

Integration, on the other hand, generally makes transition easier because focus on both roles is constant to one degree or another (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005). However, the integration of roles makes it more difficult to determine which role should

be prioritized as role contexts change—attention and focus is fractured, which is often exacerbated by changing demands. There are three methods by which we can approach the process of integration (Nippert-Eng, 1996). First, we can heavily infuse those elements that we traditionally associate with "work" into the realm of "home." For example, some people set up home offices that can be used as designated space specifically intended for the completion of work while at home. Conversely, we can heavily infuse "home" with the elements that are typically associated with "work," like setting aside time at the office each day to call your spouse or children. Lastly, we can attempt to create and maintain a balance in our efforts to integrate, "interweaving both realms with ways of being, people, activities, and artifacts commonly associated with another realm" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 12). In other words, we can integrate work and home in an effort to achieve work-life balance according to the harmony-centric conceptualization of the term offered by Hill et al. (2007).

Workplace Technology and Work-life Balance

Kanter (1977a) spoke about the myth of distinctly separate worlds of work and family life and noted that a myth, by definition, is not a lie but, rather, something that we *wish* were true. In this case, we wish that the separation of work and home life was distinguishable and easy. If both worlds existed in completely distinct harmony, perhaps life would be simplified and the work and home realms would be easier to navigate.

Instead, Kanter (1977a) argues, we organize our lives based on an assumption that is long since outdated. Within this traditional paradigm, "work is assumed to revolve around a 'bread-homemaker model with a default solution expecting the 'ideal worker' to accept a 'forced compartmentalization' and subordinate all non-work elements and

activities to the demands of the job" (Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2001, p. 2). In a modern world in which ICT permeates, such an approach is certainly not possible or conducive to the achievement of work-life balance.

People with a proactive segmentation strategy, say Park and Jex (2011), are less likely to be distracted by work when with their families and vice versa. Still, there are times when permeable boundaries allow for one's desire for self-preservation and "staying on top of things" in either domain can supersede: "When employees, for example, anticipate urgent cross-role issues, it may be better to temporarily check their work-related e-mails from home or use the internet for family related arrangements from work to reduce anxiety about their cross-role issues" (Park & Jex, 2011, p. 149). In other words, we consistently use technology to cross our own established work-life boundaries; to do so is nearly inescapable. As a result, technology greatly impacts both the fundamental work that we do as well our personal lives.

Technology's Impact on Work

The first way in which technology has impacted employees is that it has changed the very nature of work itself (Parkinson, 1998). Technology is no longer a set of tools that we might leverage to accomplish certain tasks; the use of technology is *the definitive way* in which we communicate and accomplish tasks at work. Subsequently, technology is integrated into everything that we do within a given organization. We now use technology to communicate and work all day, every day. Further, as the focus of the economy continues to grow around the creation and dissemination of knowledge and information, the demand for knowledge workers that are astute users of technology will continue to rise commensurately (Marquardt and Kearsley, 1999).

Because such workers desire flexible work hours as opposed to working for fixed periods of time, "work" is now symbolically constructed as an *activity*; because workers desire flexibility in regard to work location, "work" is no longer viewed as a *place* (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007). Along with the increasing work flexibility afforded by workplace technology, however, comes increased working hours and an increasing obligation to feel that one should be working at all times. In their study of recent college graduates working in the law and accounting professions, Sturges and Guest (2004) found that even recent graduates, who have traditionally been willing to work any and all hours to make a name for themselves and "get ahead," have been drawn into situations in which technology enables them to work long hours that lead to an "unsatisfactory balance between home and work" (p. 17).

Fenner and Renn (2004) refer to this additional work enabled by technology as *supplemental work*, defined as "a form of distributed or remote work where employees engage in job-related activities at home and away from the traditional workplace" (p. 179). This is work that only a few short years ago would have been impossible to complete without being physically located in one's workplace; the ability to work anywhere and anytime means that we indeed *do* work anywhere and anytime. Land and Taylor (2010) note that the technological developments that have led to remote work:

> particularly mobile communications, also contribute to the erosion of the work/life boundary, allowing working practices to spill over into what would previously have been private spaces and times, such as family holidays, whilst simultaneously facilitating the kinds of flexible working arrangements that are said to support an effective work/life balance. (p. 398)

As a result, employees have created ways with which to deal with the increased hours which they work in an effort to establish and/or maintain a sense of work-life balance.

Parkinson (1998) explained that employees most often learn of new technologies in the work setting then go about figuring out how they can use those technologies to better manage their personal commitments. When an employee gets a smart phone for work purposes, for example, the email and calendaring functions of that phone can be and most generally are soon used for personal emails and appointments as well as those exclusive to work.

In a study concerning how people integrate home and leisure-related activities into their work lives, D'Abate (2005) argues that people engage in personal business on the job "because doing so helped them balance the demands from all three life realms both emotionally (i.e. maintaining a sense of balance in one's life) and within limiting time constraints" (p. 1024). D'Abate (2005) found that people use technology at work to make personal phone calls, send and receive personal emails, and surf the internet for personal purposes. All of the aforementioned examples of home and leisure activities crossing over to the work domain are examples of employees using workplace technology to gain balance in their lives. In light of these examples, it is important to note that there are many positive aspects to workplace technology that should not be overlooked.

Parkinson (1998) surveyed employees from 62 different companies regarding the use of ICT and work-life balance. She found that when asked how they feel about using ICT in general, 62% of respondents had a positive view of technology, 20% viewed technology in a negative light, and 17% held a neutral view. (It is interesting to note that these data are nearly 15 years old; given the incredible advancement of technology since the time of this original study, the results would most certainly be different were the

study replicated today.) After follow-up interviews with respondents, Parkinson (1998) was able to detail the positive and negative aspects of workplace technology which, I would offer, are still salient today. A summary of Parkinson's (1998) findings can be found in Table 2:

Table 2. Summary of Parkinson's (1998) Findings Concerning the Use of ICT

Positive Attributes of ICT Use	**Negative attributes of ICT Use**
Access to information at employees' convenience	Increased expectation that one is always available; employees can feel oppressed
Increased access to multiple sources of information enables employees to make better decisions	Organizational and individual norms must be developed regarding how to "log-off" in an environment where it is possible to work anytime, anywhere
Working remotely and with flexibility can decrease the stress associated with being disconnected from the office when away	More training necessary to teach employees how to utilize various technologies optimally and efficiently
Employees have access to workplace systems when they are absent for family-related or personal reasons	Increased employee expectation to stay connected (and, thus, working) while at home and/or while on vacation
	Increased feeling that one is never able to escape work
	The "anytime/anywhere" office can be intrusive, frequently in all aspects of life

In a much more recent study that focuses solely on the use of email in the work and home settings, Waller and Ragsdell (2012) focus on the behavioral and personal impacts of email usage. Though email allows for more deliberate communication and decision-making across time and geographies, it also makes interpersonal communication harder to interpret, relationships more difficult to start and maintain and, at a very basic level, it is frequently difficult for people to simply keep up with the volume of email they receive. The use of ICT, then, impacts people in a number of ways that warrant further examination.

Interestingly, the recommendations made by Waller and Ragsdell (2012) concerning how to change the way(s) in which employees use email are all focused on changing the behavior of the *employee*. The authors recommend that employees should learn to not forward non-essential emails, should try to reduce the number of emails they send overall, and should learn email management techniques. It is my contention that the organization—not the employees—need to take the lead in the sensible use of email or any ICT through policy, work-life support initiatives, and by the behavior of management.

Technology's Impact on People

The second way in which technology has impacted employees is that it has changed behaviors in and around work in a number of significant ways. Employees that are consistent users of workplace technology will frequently change their role identities in ways that more closely align with work, as employees engaged in such work-centric identity tend to have three constructs of identification in common: affective commitment, ambition, and job involvement (Fenner & Renn, 2004; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007).

That is, employees who identify closely with the organizations for which they work, that are ambitious and desire to "get ahead" in their careers, and that are highly engaged in their jobs will most frequently place work and the need to work anytime and anywhere above all else in their lives. Says Schlosser, (2002):

> These tools will provide needed flexibility to juggle work and family aspects of our self-identities, and provide the needed control to preserve this sense of self. However, in this fast-forward age, they may also blur traditional boundaries to such a degree, that the lines delineating our sense of self will become shadowy and inconsequential. (p. 401)

When work intersects with all aspects of life, employees find it difficult to separate their identity as "employee" from that of "father" or "husband" or "friend." Further, given the demands of the workplace and the intrusive nature of technology, employees find it exceedingly difficult to create functional boundaries that separate work and family (Park & Jex, 2011). Time and again, if given the choice between work and family, those employees with access to workplace technology most frequently choose work as they struggle to negotiate between work and family role expectations (Gryzwacz and Carlson, 2007; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).

In some cases, employees want to stay on top of their work and/or prevent major issues from developing (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007), while in other cases peer pressure and the demands of the organization compel them to stay connected (Fenner & Renn, 2004; Wilson et al., 2004; Waller & Ragsdell, 2012). Waller and Ragsdell (2012) note that the more senior the employee is within an organization, the more compelled he or she feels to check their email and/or stay connected outside of work. In this regard, there is in effect a disincentive to become successful. The reward for advancing in your career is a feeling of being further "owned" by the organization for which you work and an obligation to stay connected and be responsive at all times of the day and night. In many instances, the behavior of an employee's manager(s) drives the need to stay connected at all times.

Based on her qualitative study of a software development group, Perlow (1998) describes three techniques "used by managers to exert boundary control on subordinates: (1) imposing demands, through meetings, requests, reviews and internal deadlines, controlling vacations, and training; (2) monitoring by standing over, checking up on, and

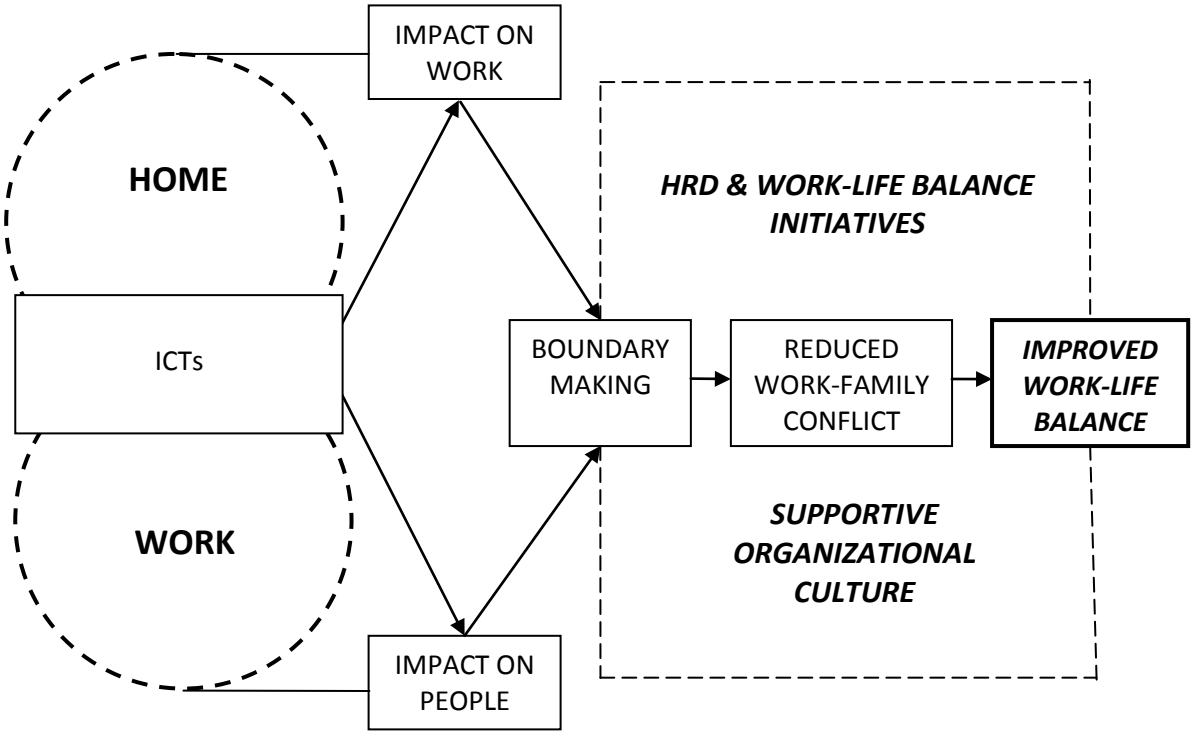
observing employees; and (3) modeling the behavior they want employees to exhibit" (p. 337). Put plainly, if a manager is overbearing and works 24/7 themselves, employees will feel compelled to do the same.

In a meta-analysis of studies concerning working families and the importance of workplace flexibility, Schneider (2011) found that though it is meant to increase flexibility for employees, telecommuting for long periods of time from home via email, Skype, or instant messaging **"**remains largely perceived by companies as being uncommitted and shirking office responsibilities" (p. 118). In March of 2013, the CEOs of both Yahoo! and Best Buy announced the end to telecommuting for their organizations in an effort to more closely track employee performance and in the hopes of fostering more innovation and collaboration (Kim, 2013). Thus, in these situations, an employee now must both physically appear in the office on a regular basis *and* stay connected outside of the office in order to appear engaged and productive to management.

Irrespective of the reason(s) why an employee allows work to intrude on his/her personal life, such intrusions create conflict with spouses, significant others, and family (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007). In a case study of 37 employees from a multinational service organization that focused on the usage of email by professionals, Waller and Ragsdell (2012) explain that "employees described feelings of anticipation, anxiousness, or urges which resulted in a conscious decision to check e-mails despite the negative implications associated with doing so out of office hours" (p. 169). Once this intrusion begins, employees begin to find ways to cope with the omnipresent technologies in their lives.

I have created Figure 2 as a synthesis of the literature that illustrates the impact that workplace technology has on work-life balance and how balance can be achieved and maintained. By it, I posit that the permeable boundaries of the spheres (Clark, 2001; Voydanoff, 2004) of home and work life are both interrupted by workplace technology, which directly affects both work life and home life, represented by the boxes "Impact on Work" and "Impact on People." Employees then utilize boundary making techniques to reduce work-family conflict (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005; Nippert-Eng, 1996), which ultimately leads to improved work-life balance.

Figure 2. Workplace Technology's Impact on the Home/Work Domains, Work, and People



Unclear in Figure 2 is whether or not the onus of creating or maintaining work-life balance is placed solely on the shoulders of the employees or if the organization has a responsibility to ensure that some degree of work-life balance is achieved and maintained. Thus, the driving factor behind the encouragement for and implementation

of these techniques should be HRD-driven work-life balance initiatives and an organizational culture that is supportive of such initiatives (Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005; Gryzwacs & Carlson, 2007; MacDermid & Wittenborn, 2007), represented by dotted box that encompasses all three efforts: boundary making, reducing work-family conflict, and improved work-life balance. These initiatives should provide employees with the tools to manage and maximize workplace technology while preserving a sense of balance in their lives.

This study aims to determine the degree to which an organization's culture, management, and HRD initiatives actually serve to implement and maintain work-life balance and the resultant impact of any such initiatives. To agree some degree of work-life balance, organizations must examine the use of ICT by their employees and determine how to effectively control that usage.

One commonly used but less successful method of controlling technology is through multi-tasking, or using technology to simultaneously complete a number of tasks, both work and personally related (Posen, 2013). However, employees that self-identified as multi-taskers reported feeling increased levels of stress and being less productive overall. Kossek, Lautsch, and Eaton (2006) explain that employees can experience positive psychological benefits of the increased flexibility afforded by technology, but the "most robust predictors of individual well-being were: (1) higher job control over where, when and how one worked; and (2) a boundary management strategy favoring the separation of work and family boundaries" (p. 361). Thus, an employee that must create boundaries must also decide to what degree they should be permeable in order to control technology in an effort to maintain a sense of balance.

Summary: Work-life Balance

Though some might argue differently, my assumption is that not everyone wants to work 24/7 each day. Yet, advancements in workplace technology have allowed for us to be able to work from anywhere and at anytime. Given Bennett's (2010) call to study "how technology is changing organizational design and the meaning of work" (p. 738), the aim of this study is to look further into the phenomena of the use of ICT while providing practical suggestions as to why and how HRD can assist in creating workplace environments that, while they utilize technology extensively, are more conducive to work-life balance.

Chapter 2 Summary

In Chapter 2, a theoretical foundation for this study was presented. First, Barney's (1995) definition of organizational culture was offered: "a complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols that define the way in which a firm conducts its business" (p. 657). *Organizational culture* informs the way that people behave through observable artifacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions. Second, *work-life balance* was elucidated using Gryzwacz and Carlson's (2007) definition that highlights the congruence of expectations surrounding the work and life domains and emphasizes that each employee is not alone in their struggle to gain and maintain balance.

Boundary theory (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005; Geisler, 2007; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009) was presented to explain the ways in which people integrate their work and home lives using *segmentation* and *integration*. Finally, the ways in which ICT impacts work and people were

presented. A call was made for further study into the interaction between these three constructs: organizational culture, work-life balance, and the use of ICT.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Philosophical Framework for the Research: Ethnography

"It is not the same to speak of bulls as to be in the bull ring" – Spanish proverb

This study was conducted in an ethnographic style. That is, while I did not embed myself in the field for an extended period of time as an anthropologist writing a proper ethnographic study might, I did adopt and incorporate the main features of such an ethnographic study into a nine-week observation and data collection period directly within an organization. While I hesitate to compare the experience of an organizational ethnographer to that of a bullfighter, the proverb quoted above is meant to convey what the two experiences have in common. Just as one cannot fully understand how it feels to stare down a raging bull unless one actually engages in the activity of bullfighting, the study of an organization's culture requires that the researcher be present with and actively involved *in that culture*. Both are dynamic and purposeful exercises that result in a different and deeper understanding of their respective phenomena than if one was to simply read or speak about them.

Wolcott (1999) asserts that, "the making of an ethnographer is in the doing, not in reading about it" (p. 15). My intent was to enter the field and interact directly with my study's participants in an effort to more clearly understand how they interact with and manage ICT. Being embedded within an organization has allowed me to ascertain specific information about the culture of the organization studied much more effectively than might have a survey or a series of interviews. Argyris and Schön (1978) emphasize the importance of understanding deeply the day-to-day functions and practices of an

organization in order to appreciate the difference between what those in the organization *say they do* and what actually *gets done*:

> In order to discover an organization's theory-in-use, we must examine its practice, that is, the continuing performance of its task systems as exhibited in the rule-governed behavior of its members. This is, however, an outside view. When members carry out the practices appropriate to their organization, they are also manifesting a kind of knowledge. And this knowledge represents the organization's theory-in-use as seen from the inside. (p. 16)

An ethnographic-type study allowed me to become an insider (if but for a short while) and uncover the organizational knowledge around ICT and its use.

Why Ethnography?

Definitions of *ethnography* abound. Some are very simple and straightforward: "writing about people" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 1). Other definitions focus more specifically upon the research aspects of ethnography: "a qualitative design in which the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs and language of a culture sharing group" (Creswell, 2007, p. 68). Most definitions of ethnography have several elements in common, however. Several definitions specifically call out the study of culture (Fetterman, 1989; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999); others focus on fieldwork as the operative data collection method (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Tedlock, 2000; Handwerker, 2001); while other definitions incorporate the notions of culture and fieldwork with an emphasis on interpreting *meaning* from the cultural data collected during fieldwork (Wolcott, 1999; Brewer, 2000).

There are many reasons that one undertakes an ethnographic study: to explore the factors associated with a problem in order to understand and address them (or to identify them when they are not known); to describe unexpected or unanticipated outcomes; or to

answer questions that cannot be answered with other methods or approaches (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The ultimate purpose of qualitative research in general and ethnography in particular is to learn "about some aspect of a social world and to generate new understandings that can then be used" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 4). The results of ethnography, then, are meant to be applied and to contribute to decision-making around policies and programs (Chambers, 2000).

Elements of Ethnography

While the purpose of ethnography is to learn intimately about a group of people in order to better understand that group, there are particular elements of ethnography that warrant further explanation. This greater understanding of ethnography will illustrate the relationship between ethnography and the purpose of my study. Table 3 below details the five primary elements of ethnography based on the work of LeCompte and Schensul (1999):

Table 3. The Primary Elements of Ethnography vs. Quantitative Methods in General (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999)

Ethnography	Quantitative Methods
Uses culture as a lens through which to interpret results. [STUDY OF CULTURE]	Uses a variety of theoretical and philosophical frameworks.
Presents an accurate reflection of the participants' perspectives and behaviors. [INTERPRETIVIST]	Focus is on *what happened*; difficult to obtain *why it happened*.
Carried out in a natural setting. [*IN VIVO* DATA COLLECTION]	Carried out in a laboratory or other contrived setting.
Involves intimate, face-to-face interaction with participants. [ETHNOGRAPHER AS INSTRUMENT]	Frequently blind and/or anonymous data collection; interest is in the data, not the person/people.
Uses inductive, interactive, and iterative data collection and analytic strategies to build local cultural theories. [ETHNOGRPHY AS PROCESS]	Research is designed up front and executed according to a script. Hypotheses are supported or not supported.

These five elements—(1) the study of culture, (2) the interpretivist framework, (3) *in vivo* research, (4) the ethnographer as the research instrument, and (5) ethnography as a process—are discussed in detail in the following sections.

The study of culture. In order to understand the behavior of individuals within an organization, "we must first be able to both appreciate and describe their culture" (VanMaanen, 1979a, p. 522). Culture is the paradigm through which we can study and interpret why an organization's members behave as they do. Wolcott (1999) asserts that it is only through discerning patterns of socially shared behavior that we can capture the underlying ideas behind a culture. He describes three schemata by which a culture can be studied.

First, we must conduct a *cultural orientation* by situating our research within the culture, explaining the attributes of the physical location and any contextual information concerning the organization that might be of interest or use. Secondly, we must uncover *cultural know-how* by observing members of the culture and how they operate within that setting on a day-to-day basis. In short, we must learn *how they do what they do*. Here, Wolcott (1999) cautions strongly about knowing when to stop collecting data—too much data is not necessarily good or necessary—the idea is to "bear in mind constantly the purposes for which an inquiry has been initiated" (p. 96). In other words, one should always refer back to the study's research questions and not collect data on anything that does not in some way relate to purpose of the research. Finally, we must discern *cultural beliefs*, or *why* people behave the way they do within a given culture. I will discuss these schemata further later in this chapter, as they inform my data collection planning.

Wolcott (1999) explains that the difference between cultural know-how and cultural beliefs may seem subtle, but this difference is a key element of a culture. To Wolcott, it is the difference between knowing *how* to do something and knowing *that* you should or should not do that thing in certain contexts. It is one thing, for example, for those in a culture to know *how* to use a given ICT. But, what if, for example, that given organizational culture has developed restrictions around *when* ICT should be used? What if that organization prohibits the use of ICT during meetings? It is the culture that ensures that the organization's members know *that* ICT use is permissible at certain times and in certain places and that there are times and places in which ICT is not to be used. It is these subtle distinctions about culture that I have been able to discern while embedded within the organization that has been the focus of this study.

Ethnography as an interpretevist approach. Though Glesne (2011) uses the term *ethnographic* interchangeably with *interpretivist* and *qualitative*, all of the terms to her refer to practices that "seek to interpret people's constructions of reality and identify uniqueness and patterns in their perspectives and behaviors" (p. 19). Interpretivist researchers believe that what people come to know about the world is constructed over time as people interact in a given social setting (Rosen, 2000; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). These constructs are not fixed and can change over time through dialogue and behaviors that lead to new constructs and new ways of behaving (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). An interpretive researcher attempts "to understand the social world as it is (the status quo) from the perspective of individual experience, hence an interest in subjective worldviews" (Rossman & Rallis, 200, p. 46) and is thus interested in what is going on between individuals and within a larger group setting.

Likewise, *culture* is a construct that is created by the process of many different individuals interacting and sharing activities. Since interpretivists believe that meaning can only be achieved through interaction, ethnography is a naturally complementary approach in that researchers must participate in the lives of those observed in order to fully understand how their particular meaning(s) behind their culture and views are constructed. Interpretivist research is an interactive experience. Unlike with positivist research approaches, in interpretivist research the lines between researcher and participant are blurred—both are seen as equal partners in the process of discovery.

Another goal of an interpretivist study is to first compare similar and dissimilar processes and phenomena discovered throughout the scope of the study and to then develop "workable and shared understandings regarding regularities in human behavior in specific settings" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 60). Geertz (1973) contends that there are three characteristics of ethnographic description: "it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involved consists of trying to rescue the 'said' of such discourse from its perishing occasion and fix it in perusable terms" (p. 20). In other words, ethnographic description is an attempt by the ethnographer to relay his or her interpretation of the cultural discourse observed in a way that is relevant and useful to a reader. My time in the field has allowed me to understand much better how the study's participants have developed their knowledge of ICT use and how they make meaning of the use of ICT each day.

Ethnographic study is done *in vivo*. Like many other qualitative methodologies, ethnographic research is conducted in the field—the ethnographer is expected *to go somewhere* to collect data (Wolcott, 1999). In an effort to obtain data firsthand, "raw

materials of qualitative study are therefore generated *in vivo,* close to the point of origin" (VanMaanen, 1979a, p. 520). The ethnographer is situated in the field in order to create a vivid and accurate reconstruction of the culture studied (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) in order to make meaning of it (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). It is precisely because the ethnographer is embedded on site that he or she is able to witness a wide range of behavior and events from which meaning can be derived; a positivist researcher has no such advantage (Rosen, 2000).

Tedlock (2000) contends that because of this close and prolonged exposure to the study's participants, "ethnographers can better understand the beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of their subjects than they can by using any other method" (p. 456). An additional and important advantage to being an outsider is that the ethnographer is able to uncover organizational knowledge that is so deeply ingrained in the culture that its members may not be conscious of it (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004) and attitudes and behaviors unique to the organization that its members no longer see them as remarkable (Anyon, 1997). Further, though considered outsiders, ethnographic researchers gain access to significant events to which those not on the inside of the organization are not normally invited (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). The ability to sit in certain meetings or attend awards ceremonies, for example, provides unique access to more information about patterns of behavior or other observed phenomena that can give further insight on the culture of that organization. By being situated in the field, I have been in a position to attend such key events and learn about the organization's culture.

The ethnographer as research instrument. Rooted in the Greek *ethnos* (people or cultural group) and *graphic* (to describe), *ethnography* uses culture as a theoretical

framework for studying and describing a group (Glesne, 2011) and is operationalized by the act of an ethnographer working in the field and noting in great detail that which is observed. Thus, a key feature of ethnography is that ethnographers rely upon *themselves* as the primary research instrument (Wolcott, 1999; Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Conversely, in quantitative empirical research, the instrument used to collect data is generally a survey or some form of quantifiable observation by which the researcher maintains a distance from the study's subject (for example, a linguist silently counting how many times a subject uses a certain word). In quantitative settings, there is no effort made to understand more deeply the experiences of the subject; the aim is only to quantify their behavior. In an ethnographic study, the researcher becomes part of the study setting to the degree that he or she can feel what it is like to actually be in that situation (Sanday, 1979). The information and perspective gained by being "on the inside" informs the researcher and answers research questions in ways that are not possible with other, more removed research methodologies.

Ethnography as a process. The final significant element of ethnography is that is viewed and executed as a *process* and not a series of distinct stages (Brewer, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In contrast, quantitative studies generally have a well-defined protocol that is carefully followed in order to ensure both reliability and validity. Even other qualitative methods follow scripts to some degree (an interview guide that must be followed, for example). But, ethnography is an iterative process by which the questions asked of participants can and should change as the researcher learns more about the organization and the duration of the study is dependent upon the researcher's instinct that

the research questions have been answered to satisfaction (Wolcott, 1999). Van Maanen (1979b) urges ethnographic researchers to constantly analyze and verify data while still in the field so that there is still opportunity to check that information across participants and across various situations while embedded in the organization. As is described in Chapter 4, I was able to engage in this process of constant analysis and confirming/disconfirming of data while in the field.

Research Questions

Handwerker (2001) notes that "the best science tries to answer specific questions" (p. 11) as he stresses the importance of choosing the correct methodology based on the research question at hand. Because of my focus on an organization's culture and because I have aimed to explore a problem deeply in order to better understand it, I argue that ethnography is the most appropriate methodology by which to conduct this research study. According to Fetterman (1989), the ethnographic researcher "enters the field with an open mind, not an empty head" (p. 11) and, before asking a single question of a participant in the field, must first begin with a problem. As noted in Chapter 1, this study sets out to answer three fundamental questions related to culture, workplace technology, and work-life balance as they pertain to employees of the organization to be studied:

1) What is the relationship between the espoused values of the organization surrounding the use of ICT and the actual use of ICT?
2) What is the relationship between the use of ICT and work life balance in this organization?
3) What is the nature of the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT in this organization?

Design Considerations

For a period of nine weeks from May to July, 2013, I embedded myself within an organization in order to conduct an ethnographic-style study and obtained data through observation, the taking of copious field notes, and informal interviews with study participants. Wolcott (1999) offers that just as the definitions of ethnography are broad, so are the ways in which ethnography can be executed—one who "borrows ethnographic techniques" (p. 41) is every bit the ethnographer as the purist. That said, though I only spent a short while in the field (nine weeks) relative to a "true" ethnographic study, I largely employed the same methods of data collection, analysis and presentation that a "true" ethnographer would.

Relying upon my personal and professional relationships in the business community, I was able to secure a field site that was accessible and afforded me the opportunity to gather appropriate and rich data. My field work was conducted in the corporate offices of Standard Manufacturing Corporation ("SMC"), a mid-sized manufacturing firm in the upper Midwest. Being involved in research in a setting with which I am already familiar has been an advantage (Fetterman, 1989). Entering the field, I was largely familiar with and accustomed to the corporate setting and many of the rituals that go on within it, which made navigating the research environment easier. However, I made a strong effort to remain aware that I could not take familiar events for granted at the risk of overlooking items or events that might be important and, unless I specifically made note of them, might have risked going unnoticed.

The site of the organization in which I conducted my field work is comprised of 460 employees working in departments like Sales, Human Resources, Research and

Development, Engineering, and Accounting. Because the aim of my research has been to get to know a group of employees intimately, this study focused only on the Information Technology ("IT) group comprised of 28 employees. The IT organization is most appropriate for this study because its members utilize ICT on a regular basis and it has enough people to provide for ample observations, conversations, and informal interviews through which I can learn as much as possible about the organization. Further, the leadership of the group was extremely willing and able to accommodate my research needs.

Gatekeepers are those "who control access to information, individuals, and settings" (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 77) and are critical to the success of a study in the field (Whyte, 1955; Fetterman, 1989; MacLeod, 1995). I was fortunate enough to have an existing solid professional relationship with the organization's gatekeeper, an HR manager, which made gaining access to the site easy and enabled the study to run smoothly. Accordingly, I did my best to remember always that I was an invited guest of that organization (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Ethnography is by definition a longitudinal endeavor, a process whose aim is to understand organizational life. Such understanding is a function of time and can only be arrived at after extended exposure to an organization and the behaviors and routines of its members (Rosen, 2000). Rossman and Rallis (2003) offer that field work is never quite done, as there is always something more one can learn—however, when you get to the point at which you have satisfactorily answered your research questions and you feel you can tell a coherent story, it is time to leave the field. For me, this point came after nine

weeks in the field. During that time, I visited the field site as frequently as necessary and practicable, leading to a total of 23 distinct visits.

Throughout the study, I made an effort to approach my role of researcher as one of collaborator in the research process with those that I observed and with whom I had conversations about their use of ICT (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Because I was able to establish a close rapport and close relationships during the study, it was paramount that I maintain the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of participants throughout (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because people are reluctant to share information with those whom they do not trust, the integrity of the study has been largely predicated on these ethical considerations.

Sampling and Sampling Rationale

The sample for this study is a criterion-based sample and convenient sample. A criterion-based sample "involves choosing study participants or units because they possess characteristics related to the study's central questions" (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 235). Choosing an organization that utilizes ICT and whose members employ ICT outside of work hours fulfills the basic purpose of the study. A convenience sample is one that is readily accessible to the researcher and that also possess characteristics relevant to the study (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). I leveraged my personal and professional contacts in the business community to gain access to a population that was both accessible and appropriate.

According to Vishnevsky and Beanlands (2004), a sample size is rarely determined prior to a study's beginning. Rather, researchers include as many participants as they feel will be necessary in order to gain a valid comprehension of the phenomenon

being studied. That said, though there are 460 employees at this site, I chose to focus on a smaller group of 28 employees. This sample size not only sufficed for this research project, it proved to be both a manageable and rich data source in that I could get to know many of the members of the group quite well through the duration of the project.

Data Collection

Data collection for this project consisted of two primary methods: participant observations and informal interviews. Employing a variety of data sources was important because it allowed me to cross check results—field notes against interviews—as the study progressed (Sanday, 1979).

Throughout this study I acted as a *participant observer* (Wolcott, 1999; Angrosino & de Pérez, 2000; Brewer, 2000). Working as a participant observer requires that a researcher be present at, involved in, and making continual note of the routine daily activities of participants that are being studied and making particular note of "patterns of etiquette, political organization and leadership, social competition, and cooperation, socioeconomic status and hierarchies in practice, and other cultural patterns that are not easily addressed or about which discussions are forbidden" (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 91). While collecting data as a participant observer is not a passive activity, a researcher wants to be as unobtrusive as possible and particularly mindful that their mere presence changes the setting that they are studying—the less disruption of normal day-to-day routines caused by the researcher, the more accurate the observation and resultant description of that setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Also, a failure to maintain scientific objectivity could render suspect the data and the interpretation of that data (Angrosino & de Pérez, 2000).

Field Notes

The most critical of my data sources are the notes I have taken while in the field. While observing in the field, I used a note pad and pen to jot down notes in real time, as this method proved the most natural and unobtrusive. This approach worked particularly well for passive field observations and to create an accurate record of the physical surroundings and the observable aspects of organizational culture. I also used this approach to create a record of the meetings I attended and the side conversations in which I was involved. Sitting in a meeting to which I had been invited and placing a recorder on the table would have seemed odd and obtrusive. It would have seemed similarly strange if I had pulled a participant aside for a brief hallway conversation and done the same. It seemed more natural and sensible to write down my recollection of such a conversation without distraction as soon as possible after it had occurred (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; MacLeod, 1995).

Though such an approach is not perhaps as accurate as the use of a recording device, the tradeoff for such accuracy is more spontaneous and natural conversations and, thus, more authentic data. Also, my ability to recall and write down conversations from the field did indeed improve and increase as the study progressed (MacLeod, 1995). To ensure accuracy, I made a habit of retreating to a quiet area with my note pad and pen immediately after attending a meeting or having a quick hallway conversation to make a record of the event. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) caution that "memory should never be relied upon entirely, and a good maxim is 'if in doubt, write it down'" (p. 179). It is when first entering the field that the most dramatic differences between the culture to which the ethnographer is accustomed and the culture of the organization studied are the

most apparent; taking detailed notes from the very beginning of the project thus became all the more important (Schwartzman, 1993).

To create a record of an informal interview that I had with a participant, I used my note pad to write down my notes of that conversation as it occurred. I made sure to ask each participant that I was interviewing if they would be comfortable if I were to take notes on our conversation; none objected. At the end of each day in the field, I sat down to transcribe those handwritten notes into a series of Word documents, one for each day in the field. I used this opportunity to reflect upon my observations and write more thoughts about them in order to capture those thoughts while they were fresh in my mind. The transcribing of field notes also was an opportunity to check my notes for accuracy and to begin basic data analysis. As I came across items in my notes that required further clarification, I still had time in the field to explore those items further. When my basic data analysis exposed an area of interest, I could probe that topic further, as well.

Researchers employing an ethnographic approach rely on *thick description*, meaning a tremendous amount of detail regarding that which is observed and the application of conceptual structures and context to provide further information beyond that which is merely observed (Geertz, 1973). Therefore, my field notes for observation consisted of a sheet of paper with two columns. In the left column were the details of my objective observations. The right column included my thoughts about and reflections upon those observations. Van Mannen (1979b) refers to the contents of the left-hand column as "first-order" concepts. These are the observable, objective facts in an ethnographic investigation. The right-hand column of my field notes, then, contains "second-order" concepts, comprised of my subjective reactions to these first-order events.

It was in the second-order column that I incorporated the theoretical perspective of the study and in which the groundwork for my analysis of the data was laid.

Interviewing

When in the field, I was able to sit down for extended conversations with 15 of the 28 members of the IT team and two members of the HR team at SMC, ranging in length from 45 to 80 minutes. As a courtesy to participants and to ensure that their workday was not interrupted, all but three of these conversations were scheduled in advance. Schwartzman (1993) submits that one of the unique features of ethnography is that the ethnographic researcher does not assume to have come to the field prepared with the correct question or set of questions; those areas of interest that require more probing will reveal themselves as the study progresses. For this study, I employed informal, almost conversational interviewing, primarily because such an approach to collecting data is more natural and helped establish and maintain a healthy rapport with participants (Fetterman, 1989). Further, conducting informal interviews helped me organize each individual participant's perception of reality and, once compared to another, provided insights into the shared organizational values that ultimately inform behavior (Fetterman, 1989).

To ensure a natural, conversational tone, I did not employ a formal interview guide. Rather, I used a handful of standard questions and prompts that anchored conversations in the study's research questions (MacLeod, 1995). These questions were piloted in a series of prior studies and are detailed in Table 4.

Information was drawn from participants using *open-ended questions*, which leave "the response open to the discretion of the interviewee and is not bounded by

alternatives provided by the interviewer or constraints on length of the response" (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 121). Open-ended questions allow participants to interpret, while close-ended questions are useful when trying to quantify patterns of behavior (Fetterman, 1989). Open-ended questions are intended to allow for follow-up questions, which will ultimately lead to richer data and the emergence of more themes (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Table 4. The Study's Informal Interview Questions/Prompts

Informal Interview Questions/Prompts
Please describe for me the workplace technologies that you regularly use.
How frequently do you use these technologies (average hours per day)?
For what purposes do you generally use technology?
What general perceptions do you have about technology?
What is your level of comfort as a user of technology?
Do you use these technologies to communicate with your family?
In what way(s) has technology influenced or changed the manner in which you conduct your work/profession?

Through the course of asking open-ended questions, I refrained from trying to translate a participant's response into theoretical terms, guessing aloud what the participant is feeling, or interrupting the participant. Rather, I simply prompted each participant to expand upon what he/she is feeling or experiencing so that I could make a

record of it *in their words and on their terms* (Schwartzman, 1993). Wolcott (1999) says that the real art in ethnographic interviewing lies in getting participants "to talk without having to ask a lot of direct questions, and to frame the questions that you do ask in ways that make sense locally" (p. 213). The questions and prompts I used were intended to allow participants to talk as much as possible so that I was obtaining as accurate a record of *their* individual viewpoints and experiences as possible.

A Note on Organizational Documents: A potential final source of data for this project was intended to be organizational documents. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) warn against the perils of assuming that a culture possesses only an oral tradition—there is much that can be learned through formal and informal organizational documentation. For the purpose of this study, I had hoped to obtain copies of an employee handbook, any formal work-life balance policies, and any ICT usage policies that might be available. To my surprise, such documentation did not exist at SMC. Organizational documents were omitted from this study not because of oversight but because they were not available. A virtual employee handbook was in the early process of being created at the time of this study; it was not appropriate for me to use it in its partial draft form. SMC did not have any written materials regarding work-life balance or an ICT usage policy. Thus, this section serves as an acknowledgement that such documentation would have been employed for the study had it been available.

Data Collection Plan

As a newer researcher, I was better served entering the field with a plan for gathering data and in an effort to ensure that my research questions were answered as

completely as possible. Given the 8-10 week time frame that I had allowed myself, I utilized the following data gathering plan (Table 5):

Table 5. Data Collection Plan

Timeframe	**Data Collection Focus**	**Corresponding Wolcott (1999) Schema**	**Cultural Element Focus**
Weeks 1-2	General environment, general cultural artifacts and rituals	Cultural Orientation	Attributes of physical locations, description of context
Weeks 3-4	Environment specific to the use of ICT: - Use of ICT at work - Use of ICT outside of work - Attend meetings, observe ICT use - Informal interviews concerning ICT use	Cultural Know-how	*How* people within the organization do what they do
Weeks 5-9	Patterns of behavior regarding ICT use: - Does the organization have a rhythm concerning ICT usage? - Does anything unusual/unexpected stand out concerning the use of ICT?	Cultural Beliefs	*Why* people within the organization do what they do

My approach to data collection was fluid, as I had to work around the day-to-day business at SMC and I had to remain nimble and open to all possibilities. This plan was not intended to be followed perfectly linearly; it was intended as a series of guideposts to ensure that I effectively collected all of the data necessary to ensure that my research questions were answered. In the end, I did indeed follow the plan somewhat closely, as

the Wolcott (1999) schema helped me view the organization through the lens of culture and not focus singularly on ICT usage.

Data Analysis

Ethnographic Analysis is a Process

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) note astutely that "ethnography emphasizes discovery; it does not assume answers" (p. 33). Ethnography at its core is not a finite procedure or series of procedures; ethnography is an iterative research *process* in which continuous analysis and the reorganization of data to find new patterns of behavior can lead the fieldwork into new directions (MacLeod, 1995). Insight into research comes from total immersion in the data, followed by a sifting and resifting of that data until patterns make themselves known and we begin to make some sense of it (MacLeod, 1995; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). To help achieve such immersion, Wolcott (1999) recommends setting aside one day to organize and write for every day spent in the field and urges that it is *never* too early to begin writing, keeping in mind that the purpose of the research is to *report* our findings, not to stay in the field indefinitely. This advice in mind, I exited the field after nine weeks and began the process of analyzing the data.

Starting the Analysis

Creswell (2007) shares the belief with Wolcott that analysis of ethnographic data begins with description, moves on to analysis, and ends with the interpretation of the data. The first aim, they believe, is to paint the picture for the reader of a day in the life of the culture that is being studied so that readers begin to see that culture through the eyes of its members. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) recommend a process for initial analysis:

(1) *Revisit your research questions*. Remind yourself of the purpose of your study and of the problem(s) that you are attempting to solve. As you read through the data, keep this research purpose in mind to help guide your search for patterns and themes.

(2) *Scan the data.* Read it over initially to see if it is complete and what general impressions one gains from the raw data. Jot down notes and find which data are most striking or noteworthy. In particular, see which parts of the data relate to or even answer your research questions.

(3) From these notes, *sketch a rough outline of a system of classification*. Write down the salient findings. Note items of interest. It is from this outline that codes and themes will emerge.

Throughout these initial stages of analysis and while there is still time left in the field, a researcher should always be searching for alternative answers, disconfirming evidence, and other plausible explanations. "Alterative understandings always exist; you will need to search for, identify, and describe them and then demonstrate how your interpretation is sound, logical, and grounded in the data" (Rossman & Rallis,2003, p. 289).

Van Mannen (1979b) warns that the ethnographic researcher must be able to distinguish between *operational data*—those genuine activities and conversations observed while people go about their normal routines—and *presentational data*, which is the more idealized appearance that participants may put on when they know they are being observed. Knowing the difference between these two types of data also serves to add validity to the study, as a clear distinction must be made between that which is objective and that which is not.

Because analysis starts while the field work is in progress, the ethnographic researcher can go back into the field to seek out new and different data that solidifies existing interpretations or sheds light on new ones. Once the field work is completed, the work of coding can begin. Keeping the three stages recommended by LeCompte and Preissle (1993) in mind, I began the process of analyzing data informally while still in the field and formally as soon as I left the field. To aid in my ability to reflect on the analysis process and to keep an accurate record, I followed the advice of Friese (2012) and created a research diary. As I analyzed data each day, I made a detailed record of the process to which I could refer. The research diary proved particularly helpful each time I sat down to continue my analysis, as I knew exactly what I had accomplished the day prior, where I left off, and what needed to be done each particular day.

Coding

Brewer (2000) offers that analysis "can be defined as the process of bringing order to the data, organizing what is there into patterns, categories, and descriptive units, and looking for relationship between them" (p. 105). This process of organizing, categorizing, and labeling according to relationship occurs during coding. Coding essentially "forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780). My field notes were entered into ATLAS.ti for the coding process. Once in ATLAS.ti, I commenced upon an initial reading of the data, looking for areas of interest or recurrent words or events as suggested by LeCompte and Preissle (1993) above.

Fetterman (1989) recommends also looking for key events in the data, as well, as a researcher can use these significant incidents to explain a culture to another person. For

example, we can speculate that an organization that holds frequent and impactful recognition events values its employees. In this way, key events can become a metaphor for the culture as a whole. While at SMC, I was able to witness one such recognition event which led me to believe that SMC did indeed value its employees.

As I initially perused the field notes, I worked from a list of predetermined codes that I assumed would emerge through the coding process and based on my experience in my pilot study. For example, I correctly assumed that the terms "boundary setting," "working at home" and "role" would appear in an initial round of coding. Creswell (2007) refers to these codes that are known and searched out in advance as *prefigured* or *a priori* codes. Such codes may serve to reinforce or disprove the literature and the theoretical backdrop of this study, depending on the responses of the participants. Rather than starting with an extensive list of prefigured codes, I followed the recommendation of Creswell (2007) and began with a short list of five or six codes, an approach he refers to as *lean coding*, so that the process could begin more broadly and become narrowed and refined with each round of coding.

Using ATLAS.ti, I read the field notes again line by line, noting along the way which new codes were presenting themselves from the data. Creswell (2007) calls this process *open coding* and suggests that researchers keep an open mind while engaged in this process, so that codes that have not been thought of or that do not coincide with the literature might present themselves. During this process, I looked for codes that appear more frequently and patterns in the data. "It is in seeing patterns of behavior that themes emerge. Exceptions to such patterns represent variations on the theme that can also be worthy of note and rich sources of information" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 92). These patterns

of data get sorted into families or groupings of codes, from which themes can ultimately be identified.

For the second round of coding, I kept in mind that Creswell (2007) suggests that while coding, we "look for code segments that can be used to describe information and develop themes" (p. 153). To isolate such segments, I utilized the *thematic analysis* technique described by Creswell (2007), in which we "read through all the pieces of data coded in the same way and first try to figure out what is at the core of that code" (p. 187).

Table 6. Coding Dictionary: Primary Codes

Code/# of occurrences	Functional Definition
Role (33)	The work being done and/or the use of ICT at home is occurring primarily and/or solely because the participant's role at SMC requires that it be done
Boundary making (23)	A proactive effort on the part of the participant to create a boundary between work and home
Self-preservation (20)	Working from home and/or after hours to lessen workload the following work day
Self-directed learning (18)	Using technology during downtime at work and, particularly, while at home to further enrich one's knowledge concerning their profession (in this case, largely technology)
Drive (16)	Identification of what motivates a particular employee
Problem solving (16)	Specific mention of the act of solving problems as part of one's job and, particularly, the enjoyment derived from it
Expectation re: work (14)	Expectations regarding team or organizational goals and, specifically, that the work must get done
Cultural Shift (12)	Reference to the complete change in culture at SMC from a staid legacy company to a nimble, fast-paced startup.
Growth (10)	Reference to the tremendous growth—both in headcount and in revenue dollars—experienced at SMC in the last five years
Laptop just in case (10)	The compulsion to bring one's laptop home without a necessary real expectation that they will use it, but because they feel obligated to in case something should happen
Expectation for ICT use (9)	Specific mention of an expectation that ICT will be used after hours and/or from home in order to get work done
Technology as fun (9)	Using technology purely for pleasure and because one like it; participant would be using technology irrespective of their work

During this second round of coding, I began to see the various potential themes that were emerging and which I thought might have significance. After the second round of coding, a coding dictionary was finalized to ensure that the code definitions used were clear on consistent. Table 6 on the prior page is a sample of the coding dictionary that contains the codes that occurred most frequently.

The coding process continued for a third, albeit quicker, round of analysis. During this round of coding, my intent was not necessarily to create any new codes, but to check for the accuracy of the first two rounds of coding and to pay particular attention to those codes that were emerging as potential themes. After three rounds of coding, I felt that I had adequately identified all of the codes and the emergent themes present in the data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). At this point in the analysis, I ran a report using ATLAS.ti that summarized all of the coding activity. At the end of three rounds of coding I had entered 205 codes for which there were 770 occurrences. The codes with the most occurrences were *role* (33), *boundary making* (23), and *self-preservation* (20).

I next began to sort the data into the classified groupings which had emerged throughout the coding process. All 205 codes were sorted into one of the following seven families:

(1) **Getting Work Done** – Items related to the actual work done in the organization, talk of projects, ways in which people remain connected to work.

(2) **The Organization** – Descriptions of culture, teams, rituals, organizational artifacts, organizational identity

(3) **Culture/Cultural Shift** – In addition to codes that serve to explain or exemplify the culture, there were several references in the data to the "old"

culture versus the "new" culture as well as the continued cultural shift that was taking place at SMC.

(4) **Engagement/Drive/Motivation** – Several codes explain why people use ICT and explain why they stay connected to work.

(5) **Learning** – Much of the talk about after hours ICT work relates to learning, to the degree that a grouping of codes is justified.

(6) **Technology** – A very broad family, this refers to specific references to technology, how it is used, why it is used.

(7) **Boundaries/Boundary Making/Work-life Balance** – Somewhat self-explanatory, this family grouping relates to the efforts made by employees and by management at SMC to create boundaries between work and home. Included in this grouping are references to other work-life balance terminology (segmentation, integration), as well.

(An eighth family called "Study-related" was created as well. In this grouping, I placed codes that served as notes to myself concerning the actual conducting of the study. For example, "access to site" relates to any item that allowed me to further the study and "methodology" pertains to the collecting of data. These codes simply served to help my recollection of my field work and the data collection process.)

The next task at hand was to sort each of the 205 codes into one of these seven families so that I could begin using the *constant comparative method* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In the constant comparative method, items are coded in terms of a specific category and then compared to other items within that category. This intra-category comparison leads to further refinement and, if necessary, the creation of new

categories or sub-categories (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Using this process, I was able to eliminate six codes created during open coding that I found to be duplicative by merging them with other existing codes. For example, "transparency" was eliminated by merging it into "openness." I also modified the names of 11 codes in order to clarify their meaning. For example, "expectation" was clarified to "expectation re: work." From here, I used these newly revised groupings and the frequency with which each code appears to help verify which themes were evolving.

I found themes in two ways. First, there were codes that appeared so many times as to be significant and, perhaps, representing a theme in and of itself. For this project, I considered any code mentioned over 10 times as significant. The code "role," for example, appeared a significant 33 times and clearly warranted attention. Secondly, I arranged similar codes into groups that, when taken in aggregate, also contributed to a potential theme. For example, under the family "The Organization," I created three different groupings: (1) organizational traits, (2) cultural specifics, and (3) leadership. Once the codes were grouped, I further studied and culled them to see how they are interconnected and how they relate to each other within the framework of my three research questions.

Quality Control

In their most basic terms, reliability refers to the *replicability* of a study, while validity is concerned with its *applicabilit*y (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). The primary concern with a qualitative study's reliability is the consistency of its methods throughout its course (Miles & Huberman (1994). Reliability can be achieved by intercoder agreement, a process by which multiple parties code the data, then compare

notes on the process until agreement on code naming and the coding of passages is reached (Creswell, 2007). A partner to review my coding is a luxury to which, as a solo researcher, I do not have access. Rather, I depend on a thorough and complete description of my coding process so that there is no question concerning the process by which I conducted my analysis or arrived at its results. Miles and Huberman (1994) provide very pragmatic guideposts to determine a study's validity: "Do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people we study and to our readers? Do we have an authentic portrait of what we were looking at?" (p. 278). My aim is to answer these questions affirmatively to ensure the validity of this study.

Creswell (2007) argues that rather than strive for reliability in a qualitative study, one should simply seek *credibility*. Therefore, I acknowledge and detail in Chapter 4 my own biases about given subject matter relative to the study as part my ethnographic report (Fetterman, 1989). LeCompte and Schensul (1999) assert that ethnographic research is scientific in that it is "rigorous, systematic, repeatable, and logical" (p. 38) while it is not constrained by preexisting instruments or assumptions concerning the problem at hand. Ultimately, the "scientific merit, or *rigor*, of a study is determined by evaluating how closely the researcher adhered to the research methods" (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004, p. 237). I primarily employed two methods to ensure credibility for this study: *thick description* and *triangulation*.

Thick Description

The term thick description is generally attributed to Geertz (1973) from his seminal work on the study of culture. As defined by Rossman and Rallis (2003), thick description "details physical surroundings, time and place, actions, events, words, and

people on the scene… [it] can suggest or hint at intentions and meaning" (p. 275). They also note that because ethnographic research is ultimately conveyed to the reader through the etic view of the researcher, highly detailed thick description is required to properly and accurately preserve the emic perspective of the participant(s).

In contrast, the positivist researcher operates under the assumption that each relevant process within a given study can be reduced to dependent and independent variables which, in turn, can be captured through a questionnaire and analyzed using statistical techniques. Instead, ethnographic research focuses on interpretation, using thick description to examine both the behavior and to derive its meaning (Rosen, 2000).

My aim was to employ as much thick description as possible while taking notes in the field. Petchauer (2012), for example, makes a practice of first situating his subjects in their setting, providing a thorough description of the physical environment, as well as a tremendous amount of detail concerning each of the groups he has studied. In the case of my study, providing such detail has ensured that I have captured as accurate a picture as possible of the participants (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004) and the organizational culture in which they operate.

Triangulation

To further ensure the accuracy of my data, I engaged in triangulation throughout the course of my data gathering and analysis. In its simplest form, triangulation is the checking of one source of information against another in an effort to eliminate alternative explanations for a given phenomenon (Fetterman, 1989). Miles and Huberman (1994) provide an extremely clear definition of the concept:

> Triangulation is not so much a tactic as a way of life. If you self-consciously set out to collect and double-check findings, using multiple sources and modes of

> evidence, the verification process will largely be built into data collection as you go. In effect, triangulation is a way to get to the finding in the first place—by seeing or hearing multiple instances of it from different sources by using different methods and by squaring the finding with others it needs to be squared with (p. 267).

As I observed and asked questions of my participants, I made it a point to constantly analyze the data by cross-checking my notes for contradicting evidence so that I could go back into the field in search of data that either confirms or disconfirms a given piece of information (Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). For example, I first learned that SMC had no work-life balance policy or no ICT usage policy by asking a handful of employees and one manager about such documentation. To ensure that their claims were accurate, I went straight to the source: my gatekeeper in HR, who was able to confirm that no such documents existed. Through this process, I was able to validate data as well as learn valuable insight into the culture of SMC.

Other Strategies for Quality Control

As my field work progressed, I was able to use as a form of validation *member checking*, in which the researcher solicits the view of participants concerning the researcher's interpretations. There were a handful of situations while I was transcribing my notes during which I felt that additional input or clarification from a participant would be helpful, so I sought such feedback. In one case, I simply needed to ensure that I had accurately recorded a participant's marital and family status. In another, I felt that I needed to probe more deeply into a participant's technology usage at home, so I shared with him my notes on our conversation. We used those notes as a springboard for further discussion.

Chapter 3 Summary

Because the primary research question of this study involves organizational culture, an ethnographic approach is the most appropriate data collection method for it. By embedding myself in the field and taking copious detailed notes regarding what I have observed and the conversations that I have had with study participants, I have been able to capture the ways in which organizational culture relates to the use of ICT and the subsequent impact of this relationship on the work-life balance of the employees studied. By carefully analyzing the data to see which codes emerge, I will answer the aforementioned research questions in Chapter 4 of this study report. The use of thick description, triangulation, and member checking has served to ensure that those findings are reliable and valid.

Chapter 4 – Results

There are two purposes to this chapter. The first aim is to create an understanding of the cultural context of SMC and its people as it relates to the theoretical basis of this study. I will provide a description of the organization and the physical layout of SMC, paying particular attention to the areas in which I conducted my study. I will then describe the participants of this study using demographic information, my own observations, and the data I collected during the informal interview process. Next, I will offer an analysis of the organizational culture of SMC as I experienced it, looking particularly at the cultural artifacts and symbols that inform the values and assumptions of the organization. The second aim of the chapter is to identify, define, and explicate the themes at which I have arrived through a thorough analysis of the data collected while in the field.

Description of the Organization

History and summary of the organization. Standard Manufacturing Corporation ("SMC") began in 1924 as a small upper Midwestern company that made a handful precision manufactured industrial products. With a boost in production spurred by World War II, SMC's product line expanded and a few key products emerged. For a number of decades, the firm was solidly successful, but rather content to produce the same iconic but limited line of core products. Over the years, SMC was owned by a series of different entities and eventually moved its business and manufacturing facilities to the suburbs. At the dawn of the 21st Century, increasing competition brought about by globalization led the firm to a crossroads: continue its slow but steady growth or upgrade

its product lines and manufacturing facilities to become a global competitor. The decision was made to execute the latter strategy.

In 2005, SMC was sold to a holding company out of Hong Kong. This parent company immediately switched the focus at SMC to product innovation and manufacturing efficiency. Whereas SMC used to offer only a small handful of new products in a given year, the firm soon was releasing up to 70 new products annually. Consequently, in 2008 all manufacturing was moved from the Midwest-based facility to the Peoples Republic of China (the "PRC", as it is known around SMC). Today, the headquarters of SMC is no longer a manufacturing facility; it is strictly a professional office environment. Accordingly, 95% of the 460 employees working at this SMC location are exempt (salaried) professional employees.

Physical layout. From the outside, the corporate headquarters of SMC is unremarkable. It is a low-slung, one-story brick building with ample windows and tasteful landscaping set in an almost rural industrial park-type setting. From the outside, one might not know if this was a factory building or, perhaps, a warehouse. As you enter SMC, you are greeted by a small lobby that contains four chairs—two on each side of the door—and two small end tables. On the end tables is marketing literature for SMC and some potted plants. In front of you, perhaps 20 feet away, is a dark wood reception desk accented by stainless steel. On either side of the desk are two deeply tinted glass doors, through which one enters a corridor that, going straight, leads to an atrium. On the left-hand side of the beginning of the corridor is the Finance Department and past that, Marketing. To the right is the HR Department and farther on, the offices of SMC's executives.

The corridor that ultimately leads to the atrium is, in effect, a museum that chronicles the evolution of SMC from its founding in 1924 to the present day. On the walls of the corridor are various SMC product offerings from the past along with small plaques describing nine decades of company growth. I learn that the engineers from SMC contend that these pieces of SMC equipment on the wall are not just relics—they are still operational and could perform as good as new today if tested.

The "museum" corridor ultimately opens into a large atrium, which is well-lit with natural lighting from four large sky lights above. The room is large, perhaps 100 feet by 300 feet. Scattered throughout the center of the atrium are a series of couches and chairs which are used intermittently throughout the day by employees of all sorts for impromptu meetings, to take phone calls, or to just "hang out" and work. At the near end of the atrium is a large conference room, big enough to fit perhaps 30 or 40 people. Worthy of note is that three of this conference room's four walls are glass, earning this room the title "The Fish Bowl." On the one opaque wall of the large conference room is a projection screen, toward which all of the seats are pointed in a classroom-style setting.

The atrium also contains a floor display of SMC products, perhaps 10 feet in front of the glass conference room. The display is assembled to appear as the wall of a retail location in which you would find SMC products. The remaining walls of the atrium are filled with pictures of customers using SMC products in various settings and contexts. In a hallway alongside the cafeteria is a display of the SMC manufacturing facility in the PRC. The display consists of a photo of the new facility at which Chinese SMC employees live in dormitories and work at manufacturing facilities spread throughout the

lush, sprawling modern campus. Just in front of the cafeteria is yet another display of a dozen or so larger SMC products.

The entrances to the various work areas that branch off the atrium have large windows upon which are transparencies of construction sites and various other settings in which SMC products are used. These transparent pictures allow for some degree of privacy for the offices and conference rooms on their other sides while still allowing in the natural sunlight from the four large skylights in the atrium. Each work area is clearly labeled: Brand Marketing, Finance, and Information Technology.

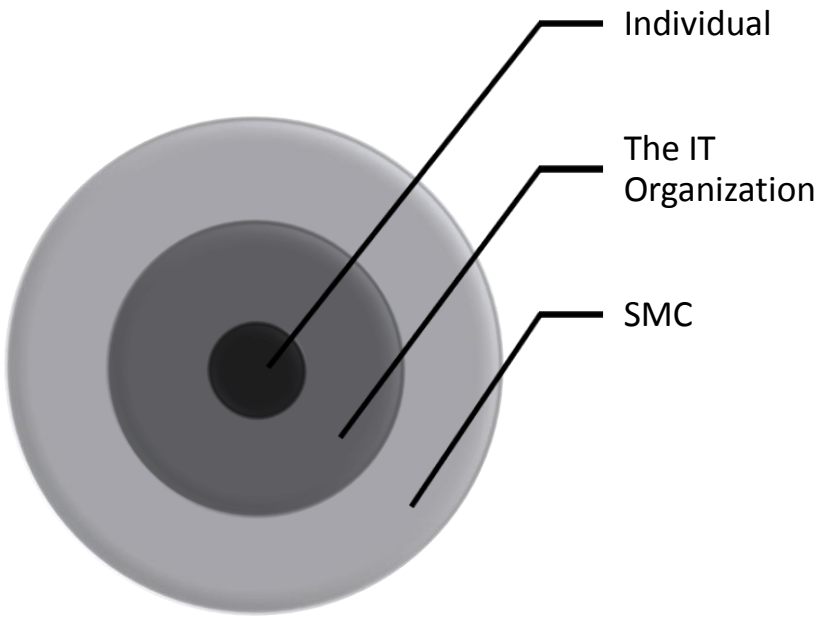
The area in which I have conducted my research, Information Technology ("IT"), is accessed by walking past The Fish Bowl, turning to the right, and walking through a short corridor. This corridor opens up into a large room in which all 28 IT employees reside. With stark white walls, brown carpeting, and a mix of cubicles in the center of the space surrounded by offices that line the walls, this physical space is not unlike any other corporate office space; it is unremarkable and general office space.

Description of Participants

On one hand, the primary unit of analysis used for this study is the individual, as I am clearly interested in the way(s) in which each individual experiences ICT. At the same time, one of my primary aims is to define and analyze the group's culture and its subsequent relationship with ICT usage. Therefore, a second primary unit of analysis is the entire IT group itself. From the aspect of my time embedded on site as a researcher, I am examining to a somewhat lesser degree the entire organization, a third unit of analysis that is relevant only in that it creates a cultural context for the IT group. It is important to understand the history of the organization, the constraints and opportunities that currently

define its strategy, and the overall direction of the entire organization, as this information informs the culture of the IT group. Figure 3 represents the way in which the primary unit of analysis, the individual, is nested with the IT organization which, in turn, is nested within SMC as an organization; it is not possible to examine one without encountering aspects of the other.

Figure 3: Units of Analysis at SMC



Mary, the HR Manager and gatekeeper for this project explained to me the demographics of the SMC employee base on a very broad level: it is largely male and largely young. Mary explains to me that in the largely male employee force, there is "hardly anyone over 50." I requested aggregate demographic information but was told that a new HR System reporting feature was being developed and that current reporting features of their system would lead to unreliable data. Mary informed me that generalities would have to suffice. That said, I can confirm from observation and my own

experience while at SMC that Mary's synopsis of the employee population of SMC is accurate: it is indeed a largely male-dominated, youthful workforce of approximately 460 employees.

The group on which I focused my research, the IT group, was a collection of 28 employees, 25 of whom were male and three were female. (Note: an initial aim of this study was to determine if gender differences played a role in the use of ICT. Through the course of my data collection and analysis, I did not find any marked differences in ICT usage between men and women. Such a small number of female employees in the group perhaps made it impossible to find differences.) A total of five members of the IT group had been at SMC for more than 5 years and had an average tenure of 23 years. The remainder of the group had been in IT at SMC fewer than 5 years. The participant matrix (Handwerker, 2001), Table 7 below, provides information about each participants' demographic information as well as a brief synopsis of their relationship with technology.

Table 7. Participant Matrix

Name	***Job Title***	***Gender***	***Family Status***	***Technology Usage Summary***	***Technology Usage Outside of Work***	***Preferred Technology/ Technologies***
Alan	Desktop Analyst (Infrastructure)	Male	Married	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email frequently, engages in self-directed learning	Carries two iPhones
Betty	Business Analyst (Business Operations)	Female	Married	Uses technology primarily at work	As minimal as possible, "hates" technology	Desktop computer at work
Bonnie	Sr. Analyst (App Dev)	Female	Married, child(ren)	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email and social media continuously	iPhone, iPad, two laptops

Name	*Job Title*	*Gender*	*Family Status*	*Technology Usage Summary*	*Technology Usage Outside of Work*	*Preferred Technology/ Technologies*
Carl	Sr. Manager (Infrastructure)	Male	Married, child(ren)	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email, stays on top of work	Phone and laptop
Charlie	Sr. Manager (App Dev)	Male	Married, child(ren)	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email and social media continuously, engages in self-directed learning	Prefers phone over all else, uses laptop only at work
Eli	Vice President, Director of IT	Male	Married, child(ren)	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email and social media continuously, engages in self-directed learning	Uses phone and laptop equally
Gary	Software Programmer (App Dev)	Male	Married, child(ren)	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email continuously, engages in self-directed learning, creates programs "for fun"	Heavy iPhone user, uses laptop and desktop(s) at home
Jack	Supervisor (Infrastructure)	Male	Married, child(ren)	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email, stays on top of work, engages in self-directed learning	Heavy iPhone user, uses laptop at home when necessary
Jim	Lead Developer (App Dev)	Male	Married	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email and social media continuously, engages in self-directed learning	iPhone all day for work, builds and rebuilds desktop(s) at home

Name	*Job Title*	*Gender*	*Family Status*	*Technology Usage Summary*	*Technology Usage Outside of Work*	*Preferred Technology/ Technologies*
John	Desktop Administrator (Infrastructure)	Male	Married	Heavy user, connected at all times	Works as little as possible from home, but engages in self-directed learning, builds & tests computers "for fun"	Phone, home desktop, game systems, laptop only when on call
Matt	Sr. Developer (App dev)	Male	Married, child(ren)	Uses technology primarily at work	As minimal as possible	Puts phone away once home, leaves laptop at work
Nate	Desktop Adminstrator (Infrastructure)	Male	Not married	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email and social media continuously, engages in self-directed learning, fixes computers on the side, gamer	"Constantly in front of my laptop," also uses iPhone
Stuart	Program Manager (Business Operations)	Male	Married, child(ren)	Uses technology primarily at work	Checks email occasionally from home	Leaves laptop at work
Susan	Sr. Analyst (App Dev)	Female	Child(ren)	Uses technology primarily at work	As minimal as possible, helps kids with homework on iPad	Leaves laptop at work unless special circumstance

Name	*Job Title*	*Gender*	*Family Status*	*Technology Usage Summary*	*Technology Usage Outside of Work*	*Preferred Technology/ Technologies*
Tom	Systems Administrator (Infrastructure)	Male	Married	Heavy user, connected at all times	Checks email and social media continuously, engages in self-directed learning, builds computers, gamer	iPhone, brings work laptop home mainly to "play", uses digital camera as hobby
Kristina	Vice President of Human Resources	Female	Married, child(ren)	Uses technology primarily at work, checks email regularly from home	Uses laptop at home occasionally if required for work	Carries cell phone at all times
Mary	HR Manager	Female	Child(ren)	Uses technology primarily at work, checks email & social media from home	Updates firm social media efforts and uses laptop to recruit from home	Uses work laptop for work and personal, carries cell phone at all times

(Note: pseudonyms are used for all SMC employees.) Notably absent from the participant matrix is mention of race or ethnicity. Because all of the participants were Caucasian, these attributes did not impact the study.

Not coincidentally, a great number of these employees came to work at SMC because they had worked directly with or were recommended by the Vice President and Director of IT, Eli. Eli was a 42-year-old affable and bright young leader of the IT group. He had been at SMC for three years and was brought in to completely turnaround what

was a moribund and low-performing group. In our first meeting, Eli told me that he used to work for a stable, conservative insurance organization just prior to working for SMC. He thought he was a bit crazy to leave such an environment for SMC – he turned the job at SMC down twice before he finally accepted it. I asked him what made him decide to finally join SMC. Eli explained that initially, it was the challenge and the promise to greatly impact a unique organization: a 90-year-old company that was renewing itself and was essentially in a start-up phase. "Now," said Eli, "in 2013, SMC is emerging out of that start-up phase. There are now 1,400 employees total around the world. SMC is becoming a good-sized manufacturing organization both in terms of its revenue and its headcount. It's an incredible place to be." To accommodate this turnaround, Eli had hired a large number of employees with whom he's worked at other organizations. These employees primarily fall in to one of the two primary groups in the IT department.

First, the Application Development group consisted of 11 employees that, as the name implies, developed and maintained the software applications upon which SMC ran its business. The people in this group had titles like Web Developer, Senior Analyst, and Software Programmer. The second group of 13 employees was called Infrastructure and was charged with building and maintaining the networks, hardware, and systems upon which the SMC business software ran. Among other titles, members of this group were known as Desktop Administrator, Systems Analyst, or End User Services Supervisor. The remaining three of the 28 IT employees worked on a small project team that reported directly to Eli. Of the 28 IT employees working at SMC during my time in the field, I was able to have substantive and extended informal interviews with 15 of them.

Because I valued their input concerning culture and wanted to learn about their insights as to all issues concerning my research, I also interviewed my two primary HR contacts at SMC, Mary and Kristina. The two women also serve as comparators for the three women that I interviewed from the IT team (the only three women on the team). Had I noticed any patterns or themes emerging from the interviews with five women that seemed in any way specific to gender, I could have investigated such themes further. No such themes emerged.

Cultural Analysis

For the purpose of analyzing SMC's organizational culture, Schein's (1984, 1990, 1992) Iceberg Model as described in Chapter 2 is used. Schein operationalizes his theory of culture using three levels: *observable artifacts*, *values*, and *basic underlying assumptions*. By first discovering an organization's cultural artifacts through observation and then asking questions to learn more about their meaning(s), we can come to understand an organization's values and assumptions. Hatch (1993) argues that *symbols* provide even deeper meaning than cultural artifacts and can perhaps tell us why people behave in certain ways. During my initial days in the field and throughout my time at SMC, my aim was to discover and describe these cultural elements as observed in the organization.

In this section, I will identify several cultural artifacts that, when combined with data collected during my conversations with SMC employees, explain how each of these elements of organizational culture—*values*, *underlying assumptions*, and *symbols*—ultimately create the culture at SMC. Though I will at times be describing artifacts (i.e., furniture, style of dress) and physical locations (i.e., the atrium and the cafeteria) that are

common to all SMC employees, this analysis is intended to describe the culture of the IT group specifically.

Values. In Chapter 2, we learn that *values* represent the organization's norms, ideologies, charters, and philosophies and explain *how* people think about the organization. Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) use the term *theories-in-use* to describe those observable behaviors that illustrate that which is actually valued in an organization. There were a number of such behaviors on display at SMC, each of which contributes to the organization's unique set of values: operational excellence, pride, openness, and comfort.

Operational excellence. Several times throughout my tenure as a researcher at SMC, I heard managers state that the primary goal of the IT department was to be "world class," a mantra exemplified by the leadership of Eli and repeated by him often. Over the past three years, the team had undergone a transformation from an ineffectual support group to one that was intent on adding value to the business partner with whom they worked. Eli explained to me:

> The biggest problem with this department was *attitude*. When I arrived at [SMC], the IT department did not see itself or act as a business partner to the rest of the company. Nobody in the IT department was passionate about their work and nearly everybody had antiquated skills. The IT department was the butt of jokes. It did not add any value.

Eli next explained that it became apparent to him as soon as he arrived at SMC that he would need to work on improving the overall skill set of the team. As he explained that he does frequently, Eli turned to The Gartner Group, an IT research and advisory company, for a model by which to improve the skills of the group. Gartner classifies skills into three competency groups: behavioral, business, and technical. The behavioral

skills, according to both Eli and Gartner, are the most difficult to find and develop, but the most valuable. Eli reminded me that behavioral skill was the area in which his group excelled the least. The other two competencies—business and technical—could be developed, but were predicated on the behavioral skills being in order. Eli made it clear in our discussion that constant learning and continuous improvement were required in order for the team to achieve operational excellence.

The strength of Eli's message of becoming "world class" was clear during a meeting in which I sat led by Carl, the manager in charge of Infrastructure, and attended by his direct reports. Carl was announcing organizational change involving the restructure of the way that desktop support delivered its services:

> When I came here with Eli a few years ago, we came here to transform this IT department around people, process, and technology. Our goal remains to be a world class IT organization. This has meant that turnover, change, and bringing in new skills have been necessary. Further, our charge from the executives has been to be more strategic and less tactical. With the business asking for 24 by 7 desktop support, we have to do something.

The constant reminders that the IT organization is striving to be "world class" and the specific prescription for organizational excellence—improved people, process, and technology—create a culture in which people feel obligated to continually improve themselves and the way(s) in which they perform.

Pride. In the main, employees at SMC were proud to work there and took great pride in the products that they created. I was struck immediately by the short "museum" hallway leading to the atrium that told the story of SMC and showcased its legacy of products. I noted on my first visit:

> This "museum" makes an impression on anyone that sees it. The initial feeling I got was that it conveys pride in the firm, as well as a strong feeling of a legacy. It

> seems very important to the firm that their products are seen as durable, of high-quality, and of great use to people by their very nature.

During this first visit, I also noted that SMC products were on display throughout the building. The atrium was filled with actual products, while the walls were adorned with pictures of customers using SMC products in their intended settings. These constant reminders of the SMC product line demonstrated that real people found real utility in SMC products and served to instill and maintain a feeling of pride in the work done at SMC.

Many of the employees with whom I spoke beamed with pride about the team on which they worked or the work that they were doing. Amy, the receptionist, showed me a photo of her and a co-worker taken at an event held the prior fall to celebrate SMC reaching $1 billion in revenue. "I had no idea we could get there," she told me, "but we did!" Amy was clearly proud to be on a team that accomplished such an aggressive goal. When describing her co-workers, the rest of the senior management team at SMC, Kristina (VP of HR) described these peers as "the best of the best" as she explained how each of her peers is an expert in their field and knows the industry extremely well.

While Gary, a software programmer, described for me at great length the corporate directory that he created as an iPhone application by special request of the CEO and which was now utilized by the entire organization, he was beaming with pride. Tom, a systems administrator, could barely contain his pride and enthusiasm as he gave me a tour of the SMC data center. He carefully pointed out each component of the data center and, particularly, those which he had installed and/or maintains. Tom explained that he did much of the data center work after hours or on Sundays because he felt that it was important that it be done and because the more he learned about the systems at SMC, the

more valuable he could be to the organization. People were proud of SMC as an organization and were proud of the work that they did there. Such pride led them to work hard and, at times, work extra hours to make sure that they maintained a level of work of which they could be proud.

Openness. Throughout my time at SMC, I experienced a very open and transparent culture, perhaps best evidenced by the organization's willingness to allow me to enter their building at will, observe, ask questions, and take notes. My field notes from my first day at SMC describe how I experienced this openness immediately:

> Mary goes out of her way to make sure that I am comfortable and feel at home while I'm at SMC. It is really quite remarkable the degree to which I have been provided access. I have been told that nothing is off limits to me and that I should see myself as an employee of SMC. I am not sure how other researchers are made to feel as their engage at their field sites, but I feel extraordinarily fortunate.

The openness at SMC certainly made conducting field work at the site easier. When I met Kristina, the Vice President of Human Resources, at her office for an extended informal interview, she opted to move our conversation into the atrium where all employees could see her. She told me that she liked to get out of her office so that employees could see her and feel more comfortable approaching her at any time. Such openness is a signal to employees that executive management cares about their thoughts and opinions and wants to keep open the lines of communication.

Kristina was also incredibly open and candid with me during our conversation. When discussing her personal history with the organization, she told me how her first job at SMC was not at all what she had hoped it would be. Her manager at the time was near retirement and she was brought in to ultimately replace him, but the intervening time was unpleasant for Kristina: "I did not like working here at all," she said. "I kept looking for

work to do, but there wasn't enough work to go around. My manager didn't give me enough to do. I was bored and I hated it." Encountering such brutal honesty early in my field work—and from a senior leader in the organization—made me realize and appreciate early that people at SMC would not be guarded in their dialogue.

Some of the most obvious signs that SMC valued an open culture are the physical attributes of the building. First, The Fish Bowl, the aforementioned large, nearly all-glass conference located in the atrium, was designed so that all employees could see which large meetings were occurring at any given time. I frequently walked by The Fish Bowl to see presentations projected on the screen at the front of the room for all to see. It is almost as if there was not to be any secrets at SMC; all employees were to be empowered by knowing what was going on within the organization. There was also a lack of opaque walls at SMC. Many of the conference rooms and transitions from one part of the building to the next were frosted glass. Such construction not only allowed natural light to seep into as much of the building as possible, it also gave the building an airy, open feel.

Additionally, some of the work space in the IT department at SMC was deliberately open based upon the work done in that space. For example, the four members of End User team, who spend much of their time engaged in conversations with internal customers and with each other, worked in a large, four-person cube that was approximately 20 feet by 30 feet and had eight-foot high walls. Each team member sat in a corner of this area. In the middle of the area was a large table at which the team members collaborate and frequently worked together. On Visit #17 of my field work, I noted the dynamic of this space: "The End User team works busily in their giant open

cube, the four of them talking back and forth, comingling work conversation with talk about their lunch plans and some good natured trash talk." Such openness created closeness and facilitated collaboration throughout the workday.

Comfort. One of the first things that struck me about SMC was the effort made to make employees comfortable. The atrium and attached cafeteria area were perhaps the best example of this effort. Scattered throughout the center of the atrium were a series of couches and chairs that were used intermittently throughout the day by employees for impromptu meetings, to take phone calls, or to just "hang out" and work. In my field notes from my first visit to SMC, I describe the atrium as "a living room for the entire organization." In the cafeteria was found complementary coffee, which was available to SMC employees from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm each day. Employees could frequently be found with a cup of coffee meeting in the atrium or chatting as they walked back to their work areas.

Dress at SMC was a comfortable casual, with jeans and polo shirts everyday staples for both men and women. Of course, some people chose to dress up at times, but the vast majority of employees that I came across were dressed casually and for comfort. Oftentimes, employees wore shirts emblazoned with the SMC logo, a further extension of the pride they felt for SMC.

Within the context of my fieldwork, I was also a benefactor of this emphasis on comfort. On my first visit to SMC, I was given a badge and shown to my own cube in the HR department. Mary walked me through the building, showed me the restroom locations, and made sure I had all of the supplies I might need to conduct my research. I dressed casually each day to fit in with the rest of the employees. Likewise, I was invited

to partake in the complementary coffee, which I did often, and to use the atrium space whenever I wanted, which I did on each of my visits to SMC.

Eli also went out of his way to ensure that I was comfortable and that I had all that I needed to successfully conduct my research while at SMC. He introduced me to key members of his team and invited me to his staff meetings. The first staff meeting of Eli's that I attended was the Tuesday after Memorial Day. As an icebreaker/team building exercise, Eli asked each person around the table to share their stories about the holiday weekend. Eli asked for "the highlights" of what each person did for fun. Each team member shared a little bit about how they spent the Memorial Day weekend. After his formal team wrapped up, Eli asked if I would like to share my weekend, as well. I took him up on the offer and shared very briefly details of my weekend with my family. This inclusion was a conscious effort by Eli to make me feel comfortable with his team and vice versa. It was a gesture that I appreciated immensely.

These efforts to make employees comfortable are indicative of a leadership team that genuinely cares about people. Relative to this study, when efforts are made to ensure that people are comfortable both physically and psychologically in their work surroundings, this caring can naturally extend to include a concern for the hours employees work and, by extension, the ways in which they use ICT to conduct that work.

Underlying assumptions.

Assumptions are those thoughts and feelings that are unconscious and underlying and which determine the perceptions, thought processes, feelings, and behavior of the organization's members (Schein, 1984, 1990, 1992). Assumptions involve those behaviors that become common and habitual and are frequently very difficult to change.

When situations arise that are incongruent with the assumptions of an organization, it is often disorienting to the organization's members.

In the years since being purchased by a parent company and fundamentally changing their strategy from one of maintaining the status quo to one of accelerated growth and global competition, the employees of SMC have seen some assumptions change while other assumptions have evolved. There were three fundamental assumptions uncovered in the data analysis that contribute greatly to the culture at SMC: that all employees of the firm operate as though at a start-up, that the continued growth of the firm will be problematic, and that employees have differing views on the cultural shift that had occurred.

Operating as a start-up. The primary assumption under which management and, as a consequence, employees at SMC operated was that the firm, though a nearly 90-year-old-company, operated as a start-up. An early interaction that I had with Eli explained this assumption best. Eli was often energetic and animated in his discussions about SMC's business. He was very passionate about the firm and its growth. My field notes from one particular day show how he was positioning for me the current status of the business:

> Eli gets up abruptly, and heads from the small conference table in his office over to his desk. From the book shelf above his desk, he pulls out a book. He shows me the cover of "Managing Transitions" by William Bridges and starts fumbling through the pages. Eventually, he lands on a schematic that details the life-cycle of an organization. He explains that, prior to its acquisition by its parent company, [SMC] had become complacent. It had a solid brand, was well known in the industry, but it had no plan for growth. It had begun to focus on things internal like process and bureaucracy rather than on things external, like the competition and the innovation required to excel. "The company," he says, "had become complacent, slow, and bureaucratic." Turning again to the Bridges organization life cycle diagram, Eli explains that as an organization gets to the "Institutionalized" phase as [SMC] had, there are really two options: 1) death, or

> 2) renewal. By being purchased by their parent organization and bringing in all new management, [SMC] chose renewal. The proof of the success of that decision, says Eli, is in the numbers. When he started at [SMC] in 2010, the company pulled in $400 million in revenue. Now, 3 years later, they are at $1.2 billion in revenue. Their goal is to make $2 billion by 2015. Eli has no doubt that they will do it. The interesting aspect of this life cycle choice of Renewal, says Eli, is that the culture required of it mirrors almost exactly that of a start-up. So, innovation, growth, and speed-to-market are key concepts.

In light of the demographics discussed earlier, the impact of this assumption that SMC was to operate as a start-up was that there was essentially a bifurcated IT group: those employees that enjoyed the slower pace of an aging firm and those employees that embraced the speed, agility, and hard work required to succeed as a start-up. Eli explained to me that most of the employees that were not comfortable working in a start-up environment had already left the company. When I asked him specifically how many people remained on his staff had been resistant to the changes, he told me that he was unsure about five of the 27 people on his staff. Eli was unclear as to whether or not these five people were truly comfortable with the "new" environment at SMC and what was required of them in order to successfully operate in that environment.

This idea that SMC operated as a start-up was not exclusive to the IT group; it had permeated throughout the entire organization. The field notes of my conversation with Kristina, the VP of HR, during which I asked about her thoughts on the culture at SMC, echo exactly what Eli had discussed with me:

> I explain to Kristina that I'd like to start our conversation in broad terms about [SMC] culture and then get down to specifics about her department and her thoughts about workplace technology. As promised, I begin with a very broad question. "So, how would you describe [SMC]'s culture?" Kristina responds, "It's a start-up culture, really. Our whole aim is to move quickly, eliminate red tape, free people up to get things done. The 'old' [SMC] was slow and methodical. There was a lot of bureaucracy. We're really trying to be the opposite of that."

One of the interesting implications of this start-up approach is that there was not yet at SMC—five solid years after the change of business approach—a culture that could be formally described or defined by management. Though Eli and Kristina could speak very candidly about framing the culture at SMC as a start-up, neither could articulate to what sort of culture the firm wished to aspire. Further, when I asked to see a mission or vision statement or any sort of document that would articulate the culture at SMC, Kristina informed me that no such document existed:

> I tell her [Kristina] that I've noted that there is no mention on [SMC]'s web page of their culture or any sort of mission or values statement. Kristina confirms this as correct and says that the omission is deliberate. She says, "We don't have anything out there yet. We don't want to put out something that isn't yet true. We want something that employees can believe in, that they know to be true. When we get to that point, we'll put something out there." She explains that what they have done instead is communicate to the employees the 5-point strategy the details how they want to grow the business. This strategy is listed on the intranet, but Kristina admits that most employees could not find it if asked. I ask her if she could tell me what the 5-points of the strategy, she says she'd have to look them up. Kristina says that everyone knows that their aim is to focus on the professional users of their products and that the strategy supports that aim.

I expressed my concern about this omission in my field notes:

> The decision to not publish anything about the culture baffles me. Everyone here seems so proud of the culture. There is always talk about how fast-paced and exciting it is to work at [SMC]. Thus far in my field work, people for the most part have beamed with pride when talking about working at [SMC]. It seems odd to me that the executive team would not at least publish something at least to which they hope to aspire. Waiting until you have achieved a culture without defining it first is like waiting to drive to a destination without having a map or a final address in mind. You'll eventually get somewhere and, if you're lucky, it will be close to where you want to be. My guess is that the execs don't want to be constrained at this time by any defined culture. If they just keep telling employees "it's a start-up" and "it's really fast paced", the employees will keep working hard. Any talk about culture would indicate a mature environment and might represent ideals to which they cannot live up.

Thus, one of the issues with running so fast and so hard is that it is difficult to take the time required to reflect and to decide what sort of culture would best suit SMC in the

long term. The firm seemed very adept at creating and executing a business strategy that had come to almost guarantee growth and profitability, but they had not yet been able to clearly articulate the kind of firm they wished to be as they continue to grow. Put plainly, they know *what* they want to be—bigger and more profitable—but they do not seem to necessarily know *who* they want to be. Throughout my time in the field at SMC, employees expressed in various ways their concerns around constant growth and the speed at which they were forced to work and change.

Assumed problems with continued growth. Karlsson and Nordström (2012) note that one of the primary challenges in start-up companies is that as new projects arise, the attention of employees can be strained as they are spread too thin and often forced to choose between competing objectives. The nimbleness and agility required to innovate, increase time to market, and enhance customer service often comes at the expense of employees and is paid in the form of long and strenuous hours. My discussions with employees provided the insight that since SMC had adopted a start-up approach, there was increasing concern about the ability of employees to maintain such a pace and, thus, an assumption that continued growth would be problematic. Even Eli, who was consistently upbeat and optimistic about the business, was not convinced of the firm's ability to maintain such growth:

> Well, our organization is really not like any other culture for which I've worked. We're really an outlier. Very basically, our company has posted record results in recent years. We just met yesterday and our CEO told us that we have beaten the prior year's sales month-over-month for 40 consecutive months. And not by a little. By *a lot*. So, the question is: How do you maintain that sort of growth and production?

In a follow-up conversation I had with Eli, he noted that he had specifically built a team that functioned at a high level by recruiting employees with a start-up mentality—those

that want to work long and hard to create something great. Eli says that this aspect of SMC's culture is what makes it great, but it can also serve as its Achilles heel as you can only sustain this type of growth and productivity for so long.

Employees within the IT group also vocalized their apprehension about continued growth. My field notes on a conversation I had with Jim, a lead developer, note his expressed concern about the rate of growth at SMC.

> He [Jim] says, "It's tough to stoke growth and stay lean at the same time." He hopes that as the firm grows, so does the IT team so that it can support the business properly. I ask him if seen this before, having aggressive growth not supported by commensurate headcount. He nods, "Yes. At a firm I used to work at, we were growing like crazy, but we were expected to do more work with the same amount of people. It gets crazy."

Employees at SMC recognized that the pace at which they worked was not necessarily sustainable given current staffing levels. Thus, the primary impact of the cultural shift to a start-up phase at SMC has come at the people level.

As mentioned, the long-term employees that worked at the "old" SMC have either moved on or become accustomed to the "new" culture. However, Eli expressed to me a different concern—that the employees that have been a great fit for the organization while in a start-up mentality may not be such a great fit as the organization grows. Some people do not do well with increased process or bureaucracy and feel constricted by a larger organization. Eli says that some of these issues have already emerged with some people in his group that do not like the increased amount of meetings or the new processes and policies that are inherently required as an organization grows. He suspects it will continue to be an ongoing problem and one that will grow in scope as the firm continues to grow.

Differing views of the cultural shift. It became clear as I talked to a variety of employees within SMC that many had varying viewpoints as to the whether or not the cultural shift that had occurred at SMC was going to continue to be a positive development. For many, there was a concern that the continued operation as a start-up culture would eventually impact business capability. For an IT department that has set as its benchmark the goal of being a "world class" organization, to prospect of jeopardizing core capabilities because an organization grows too quickly can be harrowing. Eli explained to me how growth has already impacted SMC's ability to perform optimally:

> As you grow, you need buy-in from more people, more groups. You need to focus on cross-platform capability. As an example, [SMC] currently cannot produce enough of one of its staple accessories. Demand is by far outstripping supply. The sales force is doing a great job of taking orders for this product, but production cannot keep up with the demand. The various groups involved—sales, engineering, supply chain—are not talking closely enough to head off this problem. The issue could have been easily avoided, but because of such rapid growth, it just got out of control before anyone knew it was such an issue. So, while demand for a product is a good thing, our inability to meet that demand is going to cost millions of dollars and, potentially, some customer relationships.

This example cited by Eli demonstrates that while growth of a business is generally good, such growth also requires a measure of planning and coordination in order for the business to operate smoothly. As workloads grow, for example, the hiring of additional employees needs to be considered.

Betty, a senior analyst, shared with me reasons why employees might not trust that management will make adding staff a priority. When I asked Betty about the culture at SMC and how they have changed specifically since the cultural shift, she replied, "Until recently, it was a culture of fear. There were lots of layoffs, so there was fear of the unknown. I mean, they were laying people off left and right." Employees of SMC that were around during this period may have reason to think that senior management

might not in the future have the ultimate welfare of employees in mind or that adding staff might not be a senior management priority.

Of course, not all aspects of growth are indeed negative. The move to a start-up approach has served not only to grow the business incredibly effectively, but it has also allowed for the growth of employees. My field notes from my extended conversation with Kristina, the VP of HR, serve as an example of how employees have increased their skill sets and have been very pleased to be working at SMC during this period:

> I ask Kristina about herself next, how she feels about her position at SMC. She says, "This job is way beyond my expectations when I started working here. I really enjoy this job. There are days when I enjoy it less than others [laughs], but overall it has been really great. I have always been a very detail oriented, analytical person. So, this role has been a stretch for me. I'm learning new things all the time. At the same time, my attention to detail is really helpful in a lot of ways. It's a good balance." I ask her if she sees herself working at SMC in 5 years. "I don't see why not. The way things change, it won't even be the same place anymore, so I will just grow along with the organization."

Kristina sees the organization as a work-in-progress with which she can grow. Similarly, Betty also let me know that she had kept the changes in perspective and had realized that, though not perfect, things were better now than they were when the cultural shift first occurred. She said, "The growth has been good. Things are much more settled now. Now, nobody says, 'Am I going to have a job next week?' It's much more stable." Only time will tell if the issues of staffing levels and workloads will be addressed as the rapid growth at SMC continues. In the meantime, employees are understandably anxious about the ultimate impact of this incredible growth.

Symbols. Revisiting Schein's (1984, 1990, 1992) Iceberg Model, we are reminded that through cultural artifacts and conversation, we can derive an organization's values and underlying assumptions. Hatch (1993) posits that symbols are those cultural

artifacts that provide a deeper meaning into these values and assumptions. She defines *symbols* as "anything that represents a conscious or an unconscious association with some wider, usually more abstract, concept or meaning**"** (Hatch, 1993, p. 669). During my time in the field, I came to recognize several symbols that typified the culture at SMC.

The first notable symbols at SMC have already been mentioned: the ample displays of products in the "museum" hallway and throughout the atrium. The SMC products on display in the "museum" hallway served to remind employees of the rich history of the organization and served as a source of pride. Walking through the hallway into modern office space each morning, employees were invited to feel pride in the products they provided and the work that they did. Meanwhile, the new products on display in the atrium, while also a source of pride, symbolized the new spirit of growth and innovation that had permeated throughout the organization. My field notes offer my thoughts on the symbolism present in the atrium:

> The atrium, it appears, is the "heart" of the organization. It is a crossroads through which everyone has to pass and at which many people meet. Throughout the entire building, employees are constantly reminded what it is that SMC does and how people ultimately use their products. I find it a unique juxtaposition in that this very industrial manufacturing company has a very modern and sleek office. Whoever designed this building recognizes that dichotomy, as well, and is able to constantly remind SMC employees what it is that SMC does without compromising the quality or modernity of the corporate headquarters.

The juxtapositions present in these product displays—new and old, legacy and modernity, iconic products and innovation—simultaneously and uniquely represent SMC's past, present, and future.

Another symbol that I found noteworthy was the wall of the cafeteria, which contained a huge mirror on which was attached a picture of each employee that worked in the building, sorted by department. A sign below the chart welcomed new employees.

This chart was not only intended to welcome new employees, it also created a sense of comfort and belonging for all SMC employees. Around the corner from this wall was the aforementioned picture of the manufacturing plant in the PRC. It was a large and sterile aerial shot of the entire modern campus. To the lower right of this photo was another photo which pictured an anonymous female Chinese laborer working in a factory setting assembling one of SMC's signature products. When taken together, the collection of Midwest-based employee photos and the pictures of the Chinese facility symbolized two stark dichotomies. First, SMC was a large company that was still small enough to feel local—for the time being. This feeling of intimacy may fade if and when the Midwest site becomes too large for a picture of each employee to be hung on the wall. Secondly, the photos of the manufacturing site in the PRC symbolized that SMC is a truly global company that within which a world of time, space, and cultural difference separates manufacturing from the other enabling functions of the organization. Relevant to this study, this world of difference is bridged by the ICT that allows for emails, conference calls, and video conferencing to keep the operation around the world running.

Thus, also serving as a symbol were the laptops and iPhones to which virtually every SMC employee had access. Each employee that I talked to carried a phone, most of which were iPhones. Three of the 17 employees that I interviewed carried two phones, one personal and one for work. Throughout my time at SMC, I saw employees walking through the hallways to meetings carrying laptops, sitting in meetings or the atrium with laptops, and leaving with their laptops each day. While at work, the laptop served as the primary means for accomplishing work for many employees. It was not uncommon for

me to attend a meeting during which each employee present had in front of them their laptop.

In this regard, the laptop serves as a symbol of connectivity and productivity throughout the workday. Most worthy of note regarding laptops, however, is that nine of the 17 employees that I interviewed told me a version of this scenario for laptop use after work: they brought their laptops home out of a sense of obligation, but they very infrequently—if ever—used their laptops at home. If these employees chose to stay connected after hours, they generally used their cell phones. They brought their laptops home with them "just in case." Jim, the lead developer, put it this way:

> I bring it home, but mostly out of habit. My last job required that we bring our laptop home, so I just still do it. There have only been a handful of times that we've had to use it—maybe a few times per year. I can do everything else that I need to do through my phone, really. Usually, it's just email. Worst case, I could even do most of the web stuff that I do using my phone.

Since Jim was the eighth person that had told me about bringing their laptop home with no real intention to use it, I made this comment in my field notes:

> Yet another person that brings their laptop home with no real intention to use it. The laptop is the back-up plan, brought home out of a sense of obligation. It seems like an odd habit to me. Why the charade? Perhaps it's more so the site of everyone carrying out their laptop each evening that brings a sense of comfort to all involved. Employees feel good because they are reachable in the rare case of an emergency, managers feel good for the same reason and because the capital that the firm has invested in each employee is being utilized (even if only in spirit).

As senior managers and VPs within the organization, both Eli and Kristina shared with me that their philosophy was that if the organization made the investment to provide employees with ICT, then those employees had an obligation to utilize that ICT to be available if and when the employee should ever be needed. While Eli referred to an employee iPhone as a "leash," Kristina said "We pay for the phone, so we really do

expect people to be on call." Thus, cell phones and laptops symbolized the reality that the workday could potentially never end at SMC. If a situation should arise or a manager request that work get done after hours or if an employee elects to do work from home, ICT facilitates this work—anytime and anywhere. As Nippert-Eng (1996) noted, ICT enables work to no longer be a place to which we go, but an activity that we have the potential to do all day, every day.

Summary: Cultural Assessment

While in the field at SMC, I was able to discover cultural artifacts that have allowed me to identify the primary values of the organization: openness, pride, operational excellence, and comfort. These values blended to create an environment in which employees were invited to work hard in an encouraging, comfortable environment. Meanwhile, through conversations with employees I learned of some underlying assumptions that impact the culture at SMC: that all employees of the firm operated as though at a start-up, that continued growth would be problematic, and the various employees' differing views on the cultural shift that had occurred. These assumptions serve to create a culture that was fast-paced, in a relative constant state of change, and in which some employees were not necessarily comfortable working. ICT served as symbolic of the fast-pace and constant connectivity often required to perform successfully in this environment.

Themes

After three rounds of coding the data and the additional work of sorting predominant codes into families had concluded, themes in the data began to emerge. The data were ultimately sorted into three major themes, each with several sub-themes. These

major themes are: The Importance of Role, Employee Engagement, and Employee Boundary Setting. In this section, I will thoroughly explicate each theme and its sub-themes. A discussion relative to how these themes serve to answer the three primary research questions of this study is then found in Chapter 5.

Theme 1: The Importance of Role

Of all of the codes that were generated throughout the analysis process, the code "role" was by far the most predominant at 33 occurrences. As I learned more about the culture at SMC and how and why employees use ICT, it became apparent that much of what drove their habits around the use of ICT was related to their roles within the organization. Whether or not an employee worked on the Infrastructure team or the Application Development team also largely determined whether or not an employee felt obligated to remain connected and/or working after the normal working hours of 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Further, other factors related to role determined the extent to which employees in fact used ICT after hours. In this discussion concerning role, I will first explain how roles clearly define the need for ICT use in the IT department at SMC. I will then describe how expectations around these roles determine after hours ICT use. Finally, I will explain how employees, while in their roles, use ICT as a means of self-preservation.

Roles define the need for ICT use. In my first meeting with him, Eli (the VP of IT) provided immediate perspective on the importance of *role* concerning the work done in his group and, most importantly to this research, the ways in which ICT is used to accomplish that work. It was in this conversation that Eli referred to a cell phone provided by SMC as a "leash":

> I ask Eli to explain to me his views on mobile technology usage. What are his expectations for his employees when it comes to after hours usage of technology? How connected does he expect his employees to be? Eli's immediate response is, "Well, that really depends on the role within each group. Developers, for example, don't really need to be that responsive. They might read up on things at home a few nights a week. They are often teaching themselves new technologies on their home computer, but that's because they want to. They're passionate about what they do. So, it's work related, but it's not work related." I interject, "So, it's not compulsory for developers?" "Exactly." Eli continues, "Our Ops/Infrastructure group, however, is on call on a rotating basis. They are expected to respond immediately if a system goes down or if something breaks. But, we don't have these types of emergencies too much, so it shouldn't interfere that much for them. So, we don't expect every employee to be 'on' every night, but we do expect them to be responsive when it's needed. We pay for this device for them for that reason [holds up his phone]. In that respect, it's a leash to some extent. Again, it's very rare that we absolutely need someone. But when we need 'em, we need 'em."

It is clear from Eli's comments that whether or not an employee is on the Infrastructure team or the Application Development team largely dictates the degree to which the use of ICT after hour will come into play. It is notable that, while he positions a cell phone as a "leash" and hints that its use is compulsory when needed, Eli is careful to note that use of such devices needs to be kept within reason; employees should be compelled to action only when there is a legitimate business need to do so.

Similarly, Charlie, one of Eli's direct reports and the manager of the Application Development team, explains why his team is able to be sparing in its use ICT after hours:

> Since this is the corporate office, we make sure that things are up and running from 7:00[am] to 5:00[pm]. So, occasionally, a system will go down after hours and will require our attention—but that's very rarely… Yes, there have been times when we're in the middle of an implementation or an upgrade and we've had to stay late or come into work on a Saturday, but it's pretty rare that we have to do work outside of working hours. This is a nice work environment. We try to keep the emergencies to a minimum.

It is not necessarily any sort of edict from management but, rather, the type of work done that spares the Application Development team from having to consistently work after

hours. Thus, after hours use of ICT by the Application Development team is kept to a minimum. When I asked Matt, a senior developer on Charlie's team, about his use of ICT, he explained that he refused to get an iPhone for work and that he worked from home as little as possible. When I asked him if this stance has ever posed a problem for him, he said "No, it's been perfectly fine. I've never had any conflicts arise. It's not the assumption in my role that I need to be reachable at all times." Matt is clearly aware that his role essentially excuses him from having to be connected at all times.

Betty is a business analyst that has been at SMC for 14 years. She told me that she has a "love/hate" relationship with technology. In short, she loves the old AS/400 machine on which she does her work, but she hates newer technologies like desktop computers and cell phones. Betty explained to me very clearly her stance on both her role and the way(s) in which ICT plays into that role:

> [Betty] pulls out her cell phone, an older flip phone that appears to do nothing beyond make calls and text. Betty says, "This is my phone. This is what I use. It's not a smart phone. It just makes calls. And I send texts once in a while—that's handy. Part of it's because I'm cheap. But more so, it's because I don't need it. I'm a programmer, a developer—I don't need that fancy stuff." I ask if anyone from [SMC] management has ever offered or requested that Betty get a company-sponsored iPhone. She says, "No. And I don't want one. Nobody is going to die if they don't get an email answered before I get in at 8:00am. People sometimes email during outages, but that's not the norm. Like I said, they can always call me on my phone if they need me."

By acknowledging that "nobody is going to die" if she does not immediately respond to them, Betty is also acknowledging that her role provides her the ability to draw such a distinction between that which requires immediate attention and that which does not. Betty's colleague, Susan, a senior analyst, was also able to draw a clear distinction between that which needed to be done at home and that which was required for work:

> I ask Susan, "How often do you interface with technology at home that's not work related?" "I try to stay away from it as much as possible. Maybe, I'll use some technology with the kids. I'm not a phone person at all. My daughter has an iPad, so I'll putz with it once in a while. But, this is my job. I do the best I can while I'm here. When I'm away, I don't need to be checking my phone or whatever."

Again, Susan's role allows her to leave her work at work. There were times, however, when both Betty and Susan were required to use ICT and work after hours. When I probed both women for a bit more information, they did reveal that there were situations that required them to work after hours. When I asked Betty if she could ever imagine a time during which she would use ICT from home, she said:

> In 14 years, I haven't ever needed to access anything from home. I don't know why I'd start now. But, last night I did have a conference call with Hong Kong, so I just came in to the office here to make sure that I could connect OK… It's a big 2 year project and this is the second conference call we've had in those two years. That's not bad at all. So, I don't mind.

Betty went on to explain that she came into the office because she so disliked trying to call into a conference call from her home computer or a laptop, so she found it easier to come into the office to use a phone. In Betty's case, her dislike of modern technologies required that she actually avoid using ICT from home. Were her role different and were she required to join after hours conference calls more frequently, Betty might be forced to learn how to use ICT more adeptly.

Susan, on the other hand, brought her laptop home on occasion for special projects or when the software that she supported was being upgraded. She said, "For certain projects, you have to work on them after hours. The branches ship out orders until 11:00 at night, so it limits the window that we can work, particularly if we need to take something offline for an upgrade or fix." As adamant as Susan was about not wanting to work from home, she just as easily recognized that there were times when

doing so was required; she gave no indication whatsoever that she found these times annoying or inconvenient. Susan explained that she would simply bring her laptop home on those evenings and do the work that her role demanded of her.

The colleagues of Betty and Susan on the Infrastructure team do not share the ability to use ICT only sparingly. As the team that is primarily responsible for making sure that all SMC networks (data and telephone) are always up and running, the roles on the Infrastructure team require that they use ICT nearly around the clock at times. In the IT world, such an environment is called "break-fix." Put plainly, when something related to networking or computing breaks, it is the Infrastructure team's responsibility to fix it.

When I first met with Jack, a Supervisor on the Infrastructure team, he was embroiled in such a break-fix scenario. We were schedule to meet at 11:00 one morning, but when I approached his office, Jack was awash in a "break" issue. Staring at his computer monitor as he waved me into his office with his left hand, Jack had someone on speaker phone and his cell phone in his right hand. He explained that a phone line had gone down and looked up long enough to ask me to come back at 11:45am. I did so and, even though the issue had not been resolved yet, Jack graciously agreed to chat with me. My notes from that conversation set the tone:

> I come back at 11:45. Jack gestures for me to sit down at his office. He says, "I'm waiting for a call back from AT&T. We've got a phone line down. I can't go anywhere until this is cleared up." I ask him if he'd like me to come back at another time, but he assures me that there is no better time than the present. I start our conversation casually by asking Jack if his days are generally like this, if he's reacting to a breakdown of one sort or another. He says, "Yeah, days are like this, but not all the time."

Jack next explained to me how the Infrastructure team worked. Throughout the day, calls came into a help desk that was staffed by six employees in the Midwest and another two

contractors that field international calls. While the amount of work to which these employees need to respond is dependent upon what might happen to "break" throughout the day, Jack tells me that the work is constant and requires attention around the clock. In addition to working in a 24/7 environment, a fundamental difference between the Application Development team and the Infrastructure team was that members of the Infrastructure team shared on-call responsibilities so that they could respond to outages that happen after hours. My notes on Jack explaining the process to me:

> I ask Jack what happens during outages. "For that, we wear a pager. We have someone on call and we rotate that responsibility." I ask: How often do you have to be on call? "About every fifth week. And when I'm on call, the pager doesn't go off that often." I ask him to clarify if the pager notification is initiated by a system or if some other person needs to initiate a page. "A system initiates it, but we can also initiate a page if someone is not responding to a phone call when there's a serious problem. That is used even less often—very rarely."

These comments from Jack demonstrate that while some effort is made to minimize the impact of being on call, there is clearly an expectation that Infrastructure employees are reachable at all times.

Alan, who supervised the desktop team, was one of the employees that shared call duty. He explained to me that even though he only carried a pager when he was on call, which was about every 5 or 6 weeks, he still always carried his work phone with him just in case an issue were to come up with which he might be helpful in solving. Alan explained that as a member of the Infrastructure team, he always felt a need stay on top of all issues at all times.

John, a desktop administrator, explained to me the compulsion to be connected to work: "Yeah, the [Infrastructure] guys feel that they need to be connected at all times. They feel obligated to make IT look good. You feel compelled to be connected." From

my field notes: "There seems to be not much difference between being on call and not being on-call—you are utterly reachable either way and the expectation is that you will respond." Thus, while exploring the phenomenon of being on-call, it became apparent to me that for members of the Infrastructure team, being on-call was really just a formality; those not on-call were still on top of most issues. The Application Development team and the Infrastructure team had differing approaches to expectations around work, as well.

Expectations regarding after hours work. Central to ascertaining the degree to which people feel compelled to work after hours was an understanding of the expectations that were set by management concerning after hours work and the use of ICT to complete that work. Since role primarily dictated if and when an employee was compelled to work after hours, managers played a critical role in conveying the message as to the degree and frequency with which employees could be expected to use ICT to do so. My field notes on my initial visit to SMC with Mary (HR manager) set the tone for overall work expectations:

> Mary shares that this is a professional environment and 95% of the employees working at this SMC location are exempt. Because they are salaried, there are no set hours; people tend to come and go as they please. Mary says quite plainly, "Nobody cares when people come and go." However, Mary does share that there is an expectation that employees will be on site during the hours of 9:00am and 4:00pm to the degree that it is possible.

On the surface, such flexibility sounds appealing. However, even with such offered flexibility, there was still an expectation of availability. One might not be *at* the office but, because of such easy access to work via ICT, one can never really get *away from* the office. My comments in my field notes convey my skepticism that such an arrangement is beneficial to work-life balance:

> Mary's comments about the ability of employees to come and go as they please naturally lead me to question the consequent expectations around ICT usage. If you come later or leave earlier, are you expected to be connected? When can other SMC employees reasonably expect to get in touch with you? Is there a time that you can just turn off your ICT?

These questions were answered as I observed and spoke with more SMC employees. For example, before I had the chance to speak with Alan, the supervisor of the desktop team, Eli had told me about Alan's work habits:

> Eli goes on to tell me about Alan, one of their support techs who "beloved" [Eli's words] by the executives. He is support for all of the [SMC] execs and for those of their parent group. He is extremely knowledgeable and responsive and in two years has ingratiated himself to the top management. Eli says he is bringing up Alan because he is an exception. He is called upon frequently and is basically expected to drop everything for the executives. Because of his performance thus far, Eli notes, Alan has nearly doubled his salary in the two years in which he has been employed at [SMC].

Irrespective of the expectations set for employees by managers at SMC, we learn from Alan that what was truly valued and rewarded was an employee that was willing to drop everything and do anything to be as responsive as possible. When I did get a chance to speak with Alan, he shared with me his views on the expectations of his job:

> I ask Alan how he stays connected and stays on top of things. He says, "From 9:00 to 5:00, I'm really diligent about staying connected. Then I listen for the phone until about 9:00pm. The executives all have my personal phone number and they don't hesitate to call me. I'm more than willing to always be available. But, I just had a week where I didn't get a call from one of them (the executives), so it's not all the time." I ask Alan for more details about how his nights after work usually go. He says that he checks his email once or twice per night… Then, he tells me a story about one of the types of issues to which he responds. He says, "Last weekend, the head of Sales was having an issue with his hot spot [wi-fi connectivity]. It wouldn't work. Now, this is the head of Sales. I probably wouldn't have dropped everything on a weekend for just any employee. But, he called my phone and we got the issue resolved. He was up and running within 90 minutes of calling me." He continues, "Really, I feel like I work until about 10:30 [pm] most days. Once I go to bed, I don't look at my phone until 7:00 the next morning. I guess it's a unique support model, but I don't mind."

We learn from his comments that Alan essentially worked around the clock, particularly if someone from a high level within the organization required his services. Though this was largely an informal arrangement that had evolved in the two years that Alan had been employed at SMC, it was now the expectation that he would be available for work whenever needed. Jack, a supervisor for the Infrastructure team, shared a view similar to Alan's regarding staying connected. I took notes while Jack explained to me that his job required continuous coverage:

> I ask Jack, "So, if you have to keep an eye on things, how do you do that after work hours." He points to the iPhone on his desk. "I use this," he says. "I can tap into all of our systems using my iPhone, my iPad, or my laptop at home. But I'm always checking on things using my phone. I also take my laptop home every night. My philosophy is that if the organization provides you with a laptop, the expectation is that you take it home every night."

Like Alan, Jack felt compelled to be connected in order to fulfill his job duties and he used an array of ICT in order to do so. Similarly, Nate, a desktop administrator, explained to me how hiring managers frequently requested a computer to be built for a new employee without regard to the four-to-five day lead time that they were supposed to provide Nate's End User team. He said:

> Sometimes, hiring managers will put a request in at 4:45 on a Friday afternoon to have a build ready for a new employee the following Monday morning. This past weekend I worked both Saturday and Sunday to fulfill requests like this. I could have pushed back, but it needs to get done either way. So I just do it. The customer was still not happy—he expected the build to be ready on Friday, not first thing Monday—but we still got it done. Yeah, this whole last batch of builds that I did, nobody gave proper notice.

In this case, the unreasonable expectation of internal customers greatly impacted Nate's after hours ICT use. Nate was not necessarily given a choice as to whether or not he needed to work over the weekend; his role dictated it.

In contrast, though the Application Development team did not require its members to be formally on call, there was still an expectation that they would be available for work when needed. Charlie, the manager of the team, explained the expectation(s) to me:

> "My team makes sure that we all have each other's cell number—they're available in Outlook—just in case. But there is no expectation that people stay by their computer at all times. I check my email on my phone every now and then. I may respond to something if needed. As a manager, I stay on top of things. But I don't expect my team to do the same. They can take care of almost everything the next day. And, if it's urgent, I'll call them." Charlie explains that the handful of times at which there has been an after-hours issue, he has not had any trouble reaching his team, since all of them carry a cell phone of some sort and, as a last resort, their home numbers are listed on the Outlook directory.

Charlie makes an effort to be the first line of defense against working after hours for his employees, but it was largely because of their roles and the function of the group that he was able to put off until the next day any after hours work they may have encountered. Thus, even with managers from both teams trying to control the workflow, the constant stream of emails, text messages, and pages at SMC did not stop. Several employees told me about how, in an effort to keep up with work, they felt compelled to stay connected.

Self-preservation. The use of ICT presented a paradox for employees at SMC. These same technologies that afforded employees flexibility by allowing them to access and receive work at anytime and from anywhere also provided these employees with the choice to stay on top of that work—anytime and from anywhere. Accordingly, several of the employees with whom I talked at SMC made specific reference to their use of ICT after hours in order to "stay on top of things" or so that they would not start the next workday with a number of unanswered emails that had accumulated throughout the night. I began to code references to this phenomenon as "self-preservation," as I viewed these

efforts as an attempt to do just that—to preserve whatever sense of being in control or on top of one's workload was possible.

Alan, the Desktop Supervisor that supported the executive team, explained to me why he felt compelled to stay connected when he was away from the office. In my notes from my conversation with Alan, I wrote:

> He said that he takes his laptop home, but he rarely uses it. I ask, "Why do you take it home, then?" He responds, "For my own sanity, mainly. In case something goes wrong, I'll have it. Also, for the ease of the next morning. I can clean out my email the night before and I don't start work with an inbox full of emails." I ask him if he's ever able to get away completely, like when on a vacation. He says, "I will try to communicate ahead that I'll be out of the office. I'll try to disconnect. But, do I want to come back to an unmanageable mountain of email?... I can fix things right from my phone—that makes a difference. My usage is very dynamic. I try to stay on top of things. If there's an issue, I want to get it buttoned up. I won't go hunting for work, but I'll address it if it comes up."

Alan recognized that if he did not make an effort to clean out his mailbox, he would only be asking for more work to be waiting for him when he came in the next morning. Similarly, Tom, a systems administrator, told me about the instant messages (IMs) that he regularly received from his colleagues after hours. I asked Tom if these people from work were IMing him for work-related issues. He said, "Some of the time. Some of the time we're just catching up. But work will come up, too. I don't really draw clear lines when it comes to work. I bring stuff home so that it makes my day easier the next day." Again, Tom made a habit of bringing work home and, though the workload may not necessarily been onerous each night, his thought was that whatever he could accomplish at night represented that much less work from which he would need to catch up the next day.

Similarly, Mary, the HR Manager, was very deliberate about her use of ICT after hours to stay on top of her work. She said, "There are so many little things that I do to

catch up for myself at night, a lot of administrative stuff so that the next morning I can hit the ground running. I never have to work on anything for more than an hour." Like many of her SMC colleagues, Mary used the technology to stay on top of things, for *self-preservation* purposes. If there were small administrative tasks that she could take care of while watching television or addressing another matter, it made sense to Mary to get these items out of the way so that she could spend more time recruiting the next morning.

In a twist on the self-preservation phenomenon, Nate, a self-described techie and heavy user, told me of his habit of falling asleep in front of his laptop each night. Sometimes, Nate would be using his laptop for work, but not necessarily to respond to an issue. Again, from my notes:

> I ask him what he's generally looking at when he falls asleep. He says, "I'm generally watching YouTube videos or reading an article for work or just reading." I ask, "Do you ever fall asleep doing work?" He says, "Sometimes, but only in the sense that it's something I'm reading…an article… for work. I'm used to multi-tasking. Sometimes things pop into my head for the next day, so I make a note for myself or I take care of it right away so I don't have to do them the next day."

Here, we see how Nate could be proactively engaged in work-related items and, in an effort not to forget about them, he felt compelled to stay connected to work and address or make note of those items immediately.

The manager of the Application Development team, Charlie, took a slightly different view of using ICT for self-preservation. He emphasized that he did not make a habit of doing much work at home but, rather, he glanced at his phone every now and again to keep up with email. He said that he instinctively checked his work email on his iPhone about once every hour from the time he got home—usually between 5:30pm and 6:00pm—and the time he went to bed—usually 11:00pm. Charlie tended to prioritize

items that were not emergent. If such items could be quickly and easily addressed, he would do so from home. If an item requires more attention but could wait until the next day, he would address that item the next day. In my notes, I commented on Charlie's approach:

> "Even for a manager, Charlie is not particularly on edge after hours. The work that he does do from home is largely the work of *self-preservation*—that is, staying on top of email so that there are fewer to answer first thing the next morning."

In this regard, using ICT wisely after hours proved a benefit for Charlie.

Though not related directly to the IT group, I did witness an episode involving the HR group with whom I sat and who I got to know throughout my field stay at SMC that is worthy of note. This episode involved Alice, the Payroll Administrator, and Kristina, the VP of HR. I wrote:

> At noon and as I sit writing notes, Kristina comes up to Alice's cube and asks, "Hey... do you think that you'd be able to take care of something from home for me tonight?" Kristina explains that it's pretty mindless work but it is pressing. Alice doesn't hesitate to say yes, asks a few details about the work to be done, and goes about her business. I follow up with Alice about this episode a few minutes later. Alice says that she works from home about three times per week on a regular basis. There is too much work for her to get done during the day and she works in a cube, so she is constantly interrupted by people needing things. Where as she used to stay at work until 6:00 or 7:00 at night, now she gets up early in the morning and completes her work from the prior day at home so that she can spend time with her kids at night. I ask her what technology she uses, she points to a laptop parked in a docking station which she says she takes home every night. She says that she really appreciates the flexibility, that it's "really awesome" that she can work from home. Is this "awesome" or does she need more help? It seems like she has too much to do and she is being taken advantage of. Oddly, when I talked to Alice about her workload, it did not seem to occur to her at all that she might have too much to do. She seemed genuinely grateful for the flexibility afforded her.

Alice's case is perhaps an extreme example of self-preservation. She simply had too much work to do and utilized ICT to extend her workday and complete her work from

home. Most concerning was that getting up very early before work to complete work from the prior day was a regular pattern for Alice, not an exception.

The use of ICT from home in the interest of self-preservation presented an interesting paradox. At the same time that employees were using ICT from home to "stay on top of things" and/or so they would not have to address these items first thing the next morning, these employees were giving of their own time at home in order to do so. When given a choice between work and family, we frequently choose work and focus the majority of our energy on it (Frone, 2003). The employees at SMC often chose work over family without necessarily being aware that they were doing so.

Summary: The Importance of Role

As I got to know the IT group at SMC intimately, it became abundantly clear to me that the workloads and approach to ICT use of the Application Development team and the Infrastructure team were extremely different in that the *roles* in each group drove the need to use ICT, particularly after hours. Whereas the Application Development team was able to complete the vast majority of their work during normal business hours, the Infrastructure team worked in a 24/7 support environment that required that compelled them to be connected and on top of work at all times. Accordingly, employees in each group approach ICT use as a means for self-preservation differently, as well. Those in the Application Development team felt less compelled to be connected after hours, while members of the Infrastructure team used ICT from home to stay on top of their work and, if possible, to get ahead of it.

Theme 2: Employee Engagement

The more I observed and interviewed IT employees at SMC, the more apparent it became that I was working with a group of employees that were highly engaged with their work. Many of the employees that I got to know at SMC worked after hours and strived to improve themselves simply because they were highly engaged and driven to do so. Macey and Schneider (2008) note that "employee engagement is a desirable condition, has an organizational purpose, and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy, so it has both attitudinal and behavioral components" (p. 4). Engaged employees are more passionate about their work, often become absorbed with it, and tend to show higher levels of job commitment.

Attitudinally, engaged employees tend to bring a positive disposition to work and their behavior coincides with this attitude—they work harder and more effectively when more engaged (Little & Little, 2006). Such engagement is relevant to this study because most of the IT employees at SMC turned to ICT as a way to stay involved, to find work solutions, and remain as best informed as possible about their work. Accordingly, I found three forms of evidence that indicate that IT employees at SMC were highly engaged: (1) their affinity for technology, (2) their predilection for problem solving, and (3) their aptitude as self-learners.

Affinity for technology. With the exception of one, all of the IT employees with whom I spoke extensively while at SMC demonstrated a very high interest in technology. Some of the employees described themselves as "techies," while others simply made reference to their strong interest in technology. This common thread of a strong affinity for technology is important in the context of this study and, particularly, the engagement

of these employees because it leads directly to more frequent use of ICT away from work and, at times, interferes with the personal and family lives of employees. With some employees, technology is all consuming whether the use of it is related to work or not. My field notes on my conversation with Nate, a desktop administrator that spends time outside of work fixing computers, provide a clear example of the strong affinity these employees have for technology:

> I ask Nate, "How much work do you do from home?" "Last week, I worked every night. I was uploading server builds, so I just did it from home. I have my work email and other applications up on my work laptop while I'm watching Master Chef on my personal laptop. I can do both at the same time, get more done." I ask, "What would have happened to that work had you not done it at home and at night?" Nate says, "I would just have to do it the next day, but it makes more sense to do [rebuild] some of the servers at night when they're down and nobody's using them. It's the normal way to do server builds, off hours when they're not in heavy use." I ask, "Does working like this ever get in the way of anything else in your life?" "Not really. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have a computer in front of me. The longest I go without using a computer is when I'm driving. And even then, I still have my phone with me. I have power supplies for my laptop all over my house. I sleep next to my laptop. It's my alarm clock. I don't have a TV—I use my laptop for everything. I read from it. I am near my laptop constantly. If I'm cooking, I look up the recipe on my laptop, then I find a video that shows me how to cook it." Nate continues, "I don't camp. I couldn't be without my computer that long. I have been in front of a computer constantly since I was about 11 years old. I don't shop at the mall. I only shop in a store for groceries. Everything that I need I can get online. Plus, I can do all the research and get all the information I need before I buy anything."

Nate was unabashed and, I would offer, proud of his near obsession with technology. Nate's story about camping is revelatory in this regard: it's not that Nate simply cannot live without a computer nearby—it's that he *doesn't want to*. He chooses this lifestyle. What drives Nate is being in front of a computer itself, not necessarily anything exclusively related to work. As he talks about how he's been in front of a computer constantly since the age of 11, it occurs to me that he's simply driven to learn

more about computers, to consume more knowledge, and to gain experience about computing.

John, a desktop administrator alongside Nate, also told me about his interaction with technology outside of work. From my field notes:

> He [John] does a lot of gaming and web browsing at home. John explains that he likes to build and take apart computers. He figures out how they run optimally, constantly changing components to see if he can optimize performance. He compares the power of the computers he makes to the ones that you can buy or that are reviewed at various web sites. I say to John, "Tell me about your computer usage after work." He says, "After work? It's high [he laughs]. I like to game. I like to tinker with machines to test them, benchmark them when running certain apps. I don't do any work unless there is an issue." We discuss the technologies that John uses on a regular basis. He has a laptop that he uses for work, but he qualifies that he doesn't use it very often. While at home, he uses the desktop computer that he built himself.

John is another employee that is engaged with technology all day, every day. Interestingly, John explained to me how he only chose to work from home when on-call and/or when necessary. He saw his time away from work as his own time to experiment and interact with technology in ways that he wanted to, not in ways that were dictated by a work situation. For John, time away from work did not mean time away from technology, it simply meant time away from the obligation to use *work-related* technology.

Charlie, the manager of the Application Development team, tells how he has had to curb his affinity for technology in recent years as his responsibilities at work and at home have increased:

> When I first started working here [SMC], I would work nine or ten hours in this office, then I'd go home and work another two or three hours. I grew up as a software developer. I love to write code. If there's something I can do at home, I'm happy—even if it's for work. It's fun to me. It's my hobby. I also spend some time catching up on emails… Recently, I'm trying to do less work at home.

> Maybe I do a bit of surfing or I read something related to work, but I'm trying to do less.

The implication from Charlie is that, had he the ability, he would spend even more time engaged with technology. Later in our conversation, Charlie explains to me enthusiastically how he has figured out a way to use GoogleVoice to incorporate his personal cell phone number into his work iPhone so that he does not have to carry two phones. My field notes on this part of our conversation:

> Though he [Charlie] did concede that his interest in, say, manipulating the phone system was a bit nerdy, it really demonstrates to me an enthusiasm for technology which I have to believe makes someone like Charlie good at their job. Further, his toying with the technology has created for Charlie some very practical solutions to everyday problems.

Charlie's strong interest in technology is not just a hobby—it makes him effective in his job and has very pragmatic applications.

Bonnie, a senior analyst, is also a self-described techie and heavy user of technology. Her enthusiasm for technology was very apparent. I asked Bonnie to describe for me her usage of technology while at home and after hours:

> It's really the same as here. I mean, I use the same stuff, just for less time. Let's say I'm home and awake from 6:00 to 11:00… I would say that three of those five hours are spent online texting or email or looking at the internet. I cook using the iPad. It's great for recipes or whatever. My kids are the same way—they watch TV using the iPad. We're constantly looking things up for school or just to find out more about what's on TV. Sometimes I'm learning about things for work, other times I'm just keeping up with friends on Facebook. Sometimes I feel like I'm buried in devices, though. I'll be looking at things for work on my laptop, posting to Facebook on the iPad, and answering texts with my phone. If people could see me surrounded by all these devices, they might think I'm crazy!

Bonnie has found a way to incorporate technology into every aspect of her life. She went on to explain to me that when she is surrounded by her devices, there is really no line for her between her work and her home life; she seamlessly floats between one and the other.

For Bonnie, there was no difference between checking her work email or her personal email or checking Facebook—they were all viewed by Bonnie as interactions with technology which she enjoyed. Bonnie also told me that she was working on an intranet project that required many hours of work for her. I asked her if there was any relief on the horizon or if she'll always be expected to work these extra hours. She responded:

> No, they'll be hiring someone else soon. This is a new position and the intranet is new. It was only released this past December, so there's a lot of pull on my time. But, it will get better. They promised that soon I won't have to work every night…. [pauses]…..but I may do it just for fun!

Bonnie's last comment here is telling. While she recognizes that she is working long hours and from home right now because it is necessary, she confesses that she will probably still be working at such a pace when there is help simply because it is what she likes to do. Her motivation is the work itself. Later in our conversation, Bonnie confided in me, "I'm very attached to my devices. I'm not tied to work. I don't have to do it; I just like to." In this same regard, many of the participants with whom I spoke saw technology simply as *fun*.

Gary, a software program that has written iPhone apps for SMC, is an interesting example of putting ones passion to work to create something meaningful. Gary told me with pride the story of the corporate directory app that he created:

> I ask Gary about the kind of apps he's written for SMC. He pulls out his iPhone and demonstrates for me an employee directory that he's created. He explains that the CEO had asked HR to pull a report of all employees with their pictures and create flashcards. The CEO had set for himself the goal of learning each employee's name and he wanted the flashcards so he could quiz himself. HR came to Gary requesting that he pull a report listing all employees. When Gary asked about the purpose of the report, he decided on his own to create an app that served first as an employee directory, but also could be used in 'picture only' mode so that the CEO could quiz himself on employee names. "I like to do this stuff," said Gary. "That weekend, I went home and I sat down and wrote this app. I wrote another since that inventories all of the tools we sell so that our

> salespeople have access to that information when they're on the road. I sat down with all of the VPs and showed it to them. They loved it!"

Because of his strong interest in technology and his enjoyment of programming, Gary was able to pragmatically and effectively create solutions for his internal customers at work. He did so not because anyone asked him to, but of his own accord, on his own time, and at home. In fact, not only was Gary not compelled to work from home, he was appreciative of the efforts made by management to respect work-life balance. From my notes:

> I ask Gary if he's ever expected to work from home. "Not really. Like I said, they do a good job of scheduling around here. We do two week sprints, where the project is broken up into sections and we have to hit those targets to keep things moving. I like to hit my targets, though we don't absolutely have to. But I like to keep things moving."

Gary's comments demonstrate the efforts made by management to ensure that workloads were reasonable and that all work could get done during traditional business hours. Yet, Gary frequently chose to use ICT to do additional work from home. Through this example, we also see not only Gary's passion for technology manifest as usable iPhone apps, we see his innate desire to solve problems.

Problem solving. A second sub-theme that emerged regarding IT employees at SMC was their strong predilection for problem solving. In this case, employees were not only attracted to the various technologies that they could use throughout their day, they were drawn to a very specific function that they can perform with those technologies: the solving of problems. The experiences of Gary, the developer of iPhone apps, demonstrate how IT employees put their technical acumen to use to solve problems.

It seemed to me that Gary approached work almost as a game in which the aim was to stay on top of as many things as possible in order to provide as many solutions to

problems as possible. When describing his workspace, he said, "I've got kind of a unique setup because I have the two screens. It's overkill compared to some, but I like having as much stuff in front of me as possible so I know what's going on." Gary spoke avidly about the prospect of helping his internal customers. After meeting with him, I made the following field note:

> Gary is the second person today to equate coding with problem solving. Beyond just their love of tech, it seems that many in this group are driven by a desire to solve problems and/or help the organization in some way. They approach the work like a puzzle that, once solved, is of benefit to other people. There is almost an altruism to it that is, oddly, self-serving because these developers would be playing with technology either way.

In this way, the more problems that employees in this group solve, the more they learn, the more adept they become at solving those problems, and the more valuable they are to the organization.

John (desktop administrator) spoke quite plainly about his approach to his job. When I asked John why he got into IT in the first place, he said, "I like to dig in, to analyze, to figure things out. I also like the customer service side of things, talking with different people, helping them out." It is through talking with John that I came to realize that often more so than working with technology, the IT employees enjoy work that involves problem solving and directly helping people out. Technology is the medium through which problems are solved and help is given. However, the reward is larger than just getting someone's PC back online or updating a business application; the real pleasure for these employees comes from adding real value by providing useful solutions to real problems.

Another member of the Infrastructure team, Tom, shared this same viewpoint of his work. As he was explaining to me that you can "root" an Android phone or tablet,

which allows you to jailbreak it and then tweak (modify) it, he told me why he likes his work:

> I like to hack things, to figure out how they work. I like to see what I can do with things. It's like I said before—I like hacking and tweaking. I don't write hacks, I just use other people's. Give me any operating system and I'll know how to run it in a few hours. I'll figure out the help commands, then I can do anything with it. I enjoy challenges like that. I get bored at work sometimes, so I like to learn new things. We just deployed new servers with Windows 2012 on them, so I had to learn that whole new operating system and the new GUI. I enjoy challenges like that.

For Tom, there is a clear level of pride in his technical acumen and his ability to deliberately break and, subsequently, fix things. Working on these problems was a challenge to Tom; solving these problems was where he found satisfaction.

For Alan, the desktop supervisor, providing the executives with tech support has taught him that level of service provided is also as important as resolving technical issues.

> Alan shrugs off this high-profile job as if it's no big deal. "I helped someone once and I guess they liked the service they got" he says. "The key is that you have to right-size communication depending on who you're dealing with. Executives vary. Some want all the details about the problem and how you fixed it, others just want you to fix it and go away. I guess I've figured out who needs what and I can deliver it. The president of [parent company] needs to be dealt with in a certain way, for example. With him, trust has to be earned—it is not given. You have to learn how to give people the help they need while talking to them the right way. Are jobs are not necessarily all technical. They're largely customer service jobs."

Alan has benefited from this perspective by being placed in a position where he's doing less break-fix and more "larger picture" things. As a supervisor, rather than fixing smaller issues himself, he was helping those working directly with end users to find answers. He also did more basic managerial things like scheduling. He said, "I don't know all the answers, but I know how to get the answers. I'm really good at figuring

things out." Thus, at SMC, the ability to quickly and efficiently solve problems is valued and rewarded. In order to gain and maintain proficiency at problem solving, IT employees at SMC have also learned to become very adept at teaching themselves about the latest trends and approaches when it comes to technology.

Self-directed learning. Merriam, Cafarella, and Baumgartner (2007) present self-directed learning quite simply as "adults learning on their own" (p. 105). Though being a self-directed learner will not in itself guarantee success, such learning is indicative that a person desires self-improvement and is an indicator of employee engagement. In the context of the workplace, self-directed learning generally refers to the ways in which employees read and study outside of work, take advantage of informal training activities to learn, and get involved with projects that require the learning and use of skill sets that they wish to acquire.

Early in my conversations with him, Eli (VP of IT) talked about the role differences between the Application Development and the Infrastructure teams. Specifically, he mentioned that the developers were often connected from home *by choice* because that is how they chose to stay on top of the field of technology. Eli said, "Developers, for example, don't really need to be that responsive. They might read up on things at home a few nights a week. They are often teaching themselves new technologies on their home computer, but that's because they want to. They're passionate about what they do." As I learned more about both groups, I realized that, while Eli's comment about the learning habits of developers was certainly true, the same was also true of the Infrastructure group. In reality, another factor that is evidence of the high employee engagement in this IT department is that these employees have voracious appetites for all

things technical. They were highly interested in technology and, as a result, were constantly learning on their own.

While talking with Jim (lead developer) about his technology usage at home, the focus of the discussion turned to self-directed learning and how, as a developer, Jim is able to stay on top of the latest developments in technology:

> I ask Jim how often he checks his email at night once he is home from work. "I don't have any push alerts set up, but I do have a habit of checking my email about every hour. I also check my RSS feed, twitter, and my email at the same time. I don't respond to an email unless it's urgent." I ask him to tell me more about RSS and twitter. He says that he uses these tools to keep up with technology by reading blogs and articles. I ask, "Is it safe to say that these tools are taking the place of magazines and technical journals?" He says, "Yes, absolutely. The trade rags have gone away. People used to read Dr. Dobbs Journal, now they get this all served up to them. For free!" He mentions that Google Reader is going away and that the tech community is "up in arms" about it. He explains that Google Reader is like an RSS feed through which you can tag articles or sites that you'd like to read later. The substitute, Jim explains, is primarily a site called Feedly.com that is gaining membership exponentially after the Google Reader announcement. Jim explains that he normally spends his lunch hour at his desk "filing through feeds," looking for information about technology that is relevant to his job or that he's just plain interested in. He says, "It's difficult to discern what's noise and what's worth reading. There is so much out there…. I'm tossing around the idea of not signing up for the new reader, Feedly, and finally getting to the stacks of books that I have but I haven't been reading.

It was from Jim that I first began to realize the different ways in which technical people kept up on technology and, in essence, continually trained themselves. This behavior frequently almost bordered on obsessive. As I learned more, I came to realize that technology was a genuine passion for these people, something it seems with which they would be involved even if they were not getting paid to do so. The result of such involvement is that they became better at their jobs and could add more value to their employer.

In talking with Tom (systems administrator) about how he likes to stay on top of new technologies, he discussed a multi-faceted approach to learning:

> "I mainly play around with things at home. Not everything is always cutting edge, but I like to try out new things, to test them. I volunteer for new projects and management here is good about sending me to training. I've been to 4 different trainings in the last 2 years and I have two more to go to this year. I like to think that I bring the value back when I go to training." I ask Tom if he reads any RSS feeds or if he use Google Reader. He tells me that he does read up on technology a little bit, to the extent that he's "bummed" about Google Reader going away. He explains that, like most people, he's converted to Feedly and, "Thanks to Feedly, I have more to read than I'll ever get to. I like to read on a regular basis. I have a few sites that I go to. I'm slow reader, so I tend to skim a lot. I search for the information that I need, then I just move on. It's just that there's so much information coming at us at all times it's impossible to read everything.

Later, when Tom was giving me a tour of the data center with which he had a hand building and still maintains, he explained to me how he volunteers for certain projects in order to learn more. He told me about how he came in for six hours on a recent Sunday to rewire one of the rows of servers completely. He did extra project like these, he explained, to learn more about the network side of things (vs. the systems side) so that he could "move up." Tom had figured out that in addition to formal training, there was much to learn from teaching yourself and from learning on the job.

Gary, the iPhone app guru, explained to me that he had no choice but to take an approach of self-directed learning in order to progress in his career. While talking about his use of ICT after work and from home, he explained to me his approach to learning:

> Back in the day, I did more. I had to. I didn't go to college. I went into the military. So, the college boys, they all learned the right way. Everything I know, I've had to teach myself. So, I did it at night and after work. I taught myself how to use a Mac because I wanted to. Now, it's more fun. Back then, it was a necessity—I didn't know what I was doing!"

Gary explained to me that, as a self-taught techie, he has become comfortable enough with his skill set that he no longer feels he needs to learn specific languages or applications or systems in order to maintain his career. Now, he can learn things about which he is interested, like developing iPhone apps. Thus, his ability to teach himself has proven a great asset, as he can continually improve himself by learning more and his work environment by creating useful applications.

Similarly, I learned through a conversation with Alan (desktop supervisor) how he taught himself most of what he knows concerning technology. From my notes:

> After my planned conversation with Alan is done, he and I talk from some time about the value of a college education, particularly in the IT field. Alan shares with me that he went to college for two years and didn't find much use in it. He dropped out of college and started working. He shares that his parents were disappointed, but now that he's making a good living and is excelling at his career, he seems vindicated to a large degree. He says that people with whom he works are often taken aback when they learn that he doesn't have a college degree, particularly because he's good at what he does. Alan reiterates to me that there's nothing that he did or could learn in a classroom that he couldn't learn himself and that he's better off just working.

Alan's story is indicative not only of the innate ability that technology people seem to have to teach themselves, but the great desire and passion with which they approach their work. The result of this passion is that the IT employees at SMC often spend much of their time outside of work engaged either directly or indirectly with work. I learned that if these employees were not resolving a work issue of some kind, chances were that they were still engaged with technology, perhaps taking apart and rebuilding a computer or reading articles, blogs, and web sites about technology.

Summary: Employee Engagement

The employees of the IT department at SMC are a particularly engaged group. There are three sub-themes that emerged from the data that provide evidence for this

claim. First, the participants with whom I spoke possessed a strong affinity for technology, both at work and in the home setting; they were drawn to it. Second, these participants enjoyed using technology to solve real world problems that arose at SMC. Whether the problem involved restoring a network or creating a useful iPhone app, these employees derived great satisfaction from finding and implementing solutions to problems. Third, the participants showed a great predilection toward self-directed learning, the act of educating oneself in the interest of self-improvement and, in the context of the workplace, to gain more skills.

Though an engaged workforce is desirous (Macey & Schneider, 2008), the engagement of participants in this study manifest itself in the use of ICT nearly around the clock. The combination of an engaged employee base and ready access to technologies that allow them to work at anytime and from anywhere led to situations in which employees were required to set boundaries in order to create and maintain some degree of work-life balance.

Theme 3: Employee Boundary Setting

Throughout my time at SMC, I became exposed to the many ways in which employees set boundaries in order to make a distinction between their work and home lives. This undertaking is called *boundary work* and is "the process through which we organize potentially realm-specific matters, people, objects and aspects of self into 'home' and 'work,' maintaining these conceptualizations as needed/desired" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 186). Through the process of boundary work, we determine which items we need to integrate seamlessly into one another and which require a complete segregation between work and home. My conversation with Jack, the End User Services

supervisor, is a great example of the various ways in which employees approach boundary work. It reveals how Jack both segregates and integrates his work and the related consequences to this approach. In my field notes, I record my conversation with Jack:

> "But I'm always checking on things using my phone. I also take my laptop home every night. My philosophy is that if the organization provides you with a laptop, the expectation is that you take it home every night. I subscribe to that philosophy myself." I ask him how frequently he checks into work using any of his devices. He explains that the first few hours immediately following work are not top priority. "From 5:30 to 8:30, I do not check anything. That's when I'm with my family. I have two kids, four and 18 months." He points over his right shoulder to a black and white picture of two kids on the wall behind him. He continues, "If I hear my phone ring during that time, I respond, of course." Then, Jack says emphatically, "But bed is bed. I refuse to check email once it's time to go to sleep. Once I'm in bed, I don't look at my email again until I'm back at work."

Though he tries his best to segregate his home life from his work life and not proactively look at email while his young children are awake, Jack still makes it a point to listen for his phone. If someone calls him, then he will certainly answer. It is only when he is asleep that he will actually stop working for the night. Jack confides in me that he works all waking hours not necessarily because anyone demands it of him, but because he is ambitious:

> We work hard and we play hard here. Sometimes, work-life balance is tough. But, I'm driven to get to the next level. I'm a supervisor now, learning how to manage. But I want to get to the next level and be a manager. But, I'm still a husband and father. I want to get better at that, too, but it's hard to make it all work out.

There seems to be resignation from Jack that in order to get ahead at work and in his career, longer and later hours are going to be required. The thought seems to be that either work or family has to be sacrificed in order to get ahead in one aspect or the other. Jack does not seem to be bothered by this perspective at all. He talks as though it is

reasonable for him to work until he sleeps. Jack tells me of his best intentions to segregate, but how he quickly falls into a pattern of integration; he cannot escape work and it affects his family life. In this section about boundary setting, I will first discuss the reality of work-life balance at SMC and how the onus is most often on the employees to set boundaries. Next, I will cite specific examples of segregation and integration and how employees at SMC used these approaches to create work-life balance in their lives. Finally, I will discuss the factors that impact the ability of employees to set boundaries.

The onus is on employees to set boundaries. The IT employees at SMC take various approaches to boundary work. They are able to get away from work and/or integrate work in their personal lives in various ways and with varying degrees of success. However, there is one common thread throughout all of the various methods employed to create boundaries: the onus is most frequently on employees to set those boundaries. For example, in talking with Alan, the Desktop Team supervisor, I asked him quite plainly if he has ever been able to get away from work. His response came as a surprise to me:

> "For my honeymoon last year, I was able to disconnect." I ask, "Were you successful?" He says, "Yes, I think so. I brought along my work phone because it has international coverage, but I didn't really use it to do work. I sent texts to guys from work, but they were my buddies. I was just letting them know how my honeymoon was going. I'm really bad about taking time off. I need to get better, especially now that I'm married. But with phones, things are now actionable. I can fix things right from my phone—that makes a difference. My usage is very dynamic… I try to stay on top of things. If there's an issue, I want to get it buttoned up. I won't go hunting for work, but I'll address it if it comes up." He pauses again. "I'm getting better about work-life balance. I still have to *fight for my personal time* [emphasis mine] while being responsible to the business. I guess it depends on your stage in life, too. Like I said, I just got married a year ago. Now, I have to be more jealous of my time. I have to protect it.

Though Alan was unwilling to step away from being connected at work even on his own honeymoon, he realized that it was largely up to him to determine whether or not he stayed connected to work. My field notes on this conversation explain my thoughts on Alan at this point:

> Alan says that he's getting better about work-life balance, but what he describes to me is the opposite of getting better. He seems to know on one hand that there are methods by which he might be able to make a separation between work and life—his carrying of two phones is one attempt at such a method. However, he seems to undermine his own attempts at making such a break. Constantly checking email, always having his work phone with him, giving out his personal phone number to executives—all of these things serve to undermine any attempt Alan might make at segmenting or separating. He is basically on call at all times. "I still have to fight for my personal time while being responsible to the business" is indicative that the onus is on the employee to set the boundaries. And no one from SMC is necessarily stopping anyone from not staying connected or being informally on self-induced call.

My conversation with Kristina, the VP of HR sheds light on the idea that employees are responsible for setting their boundaries. Earlier, Kristina had mentioned that since the company pays for cell phones, it is the expectation that people will be on call. When I asked her to elaborate, she said:

> There are limits, of course, but if there is an important issue that might require their attention or if there is a unique circumstance, they are expected to be able to be reached. We expect employees to set limits with their managers… There are limits, yes… But the employees have to let us know what those limits are.

Again, the onus is on employees to set limits with their manager or supervisor, not vice versa. The employee has to let the manager know what is and what is not reasonable in terms of that particular employee's accessibility.

Like Alan, Bonnie (senior analyst) has trouble drawing a line between work and home during the week, but she has taken it upon herself to successfully create boundaries. A heavy user of ICT, she talked with me about her technology use:

> I can't discipline my kids about it because I'm the worst offender. I do like to go for walks, though. But I do not take my iPhone with me—the phone is off limits…. So, yeah, it's at least three of the five hours each night. Last night I worked about four hours just on work stuff. I worked until 1:00am on an intranet project." I ask, "How often do you have to work like that?" Bonnie responds, "Three to four nights per week I work two to three hours at home. But it's back and forth. Like I said, I'm not always just doing work. And Fridays and Saturdays are off limits. From Friday night until Sunday night I do not work. But for now, I'm the only resource here from the intranet, so I have to put in the extra hours. It's not something that somebody makes me do, but I want to do the best I can to make the intranet better."

Interestingly, Bonnie does have her limits. Going for a walk is her way to get away from technology, if only for a while. She also sets limits on the weekends, dedicating that time to her family. We learn here that Bonnie works after hours from home not because anyone is forcing her to do so, but because she wants to use that time to make her product (the intranet) the absolute best that she can. Her interest in doing good work can interfere with her family life, but Bonnie has found ways to create boundaries.

Similar to Bonnie, Tom (systems administrator) discovered that he can create boundaries. While on vacation last year, he made a conscious effort not to stay connected to work. Tom told me:

> Last May we went to Florida for a solid week. I unplugged completely and read the Hunger Games. I had my phone with me and checked it at first, but didn't respond to anybody. As the week went on, people began to email me less because I wasn't responding. I really enjoyed it. And I read the whole book!

Here, Tom was essentially shocked that he could not only get away from work, but that he would actually enjoy the time away from work. He was also surprised that it took some time for his colleagues to figure out that because he was on vacation, he would not be responding. It seems that the precedent must have been set to some degree that people on vacation would still be engaged somehow with work. Tom had to signal very clearly that he was on vacation and that he really was not going to be returning emails before his

colleagues took the request seriously. The onus was on Tom to let his co-workers know that he was on vacation; nobody was going to respect his time away had he not let them know.

Segmentation. When employees engage in segmentation, they make clear distinction between their work and family roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). A clear separation is made between the work sphere and the home and/or family sphere. Unlike Alan, Bonnie, and Tom, John (desktop administrator) seems to have very clearly made the distinction between his work and personal lives. When I asked John about his workload at home, he said.

> "I don't do any work unless there is an issue." I ask, "How would you know when there's an issue?" "When I'm on page, I respond to the pager. Most issues I can handle on the laptop. I escalate it to Systems if I need to. But, after hours I'm connected by choice. I don't check email. I don't do side jobs like a lot of guys." I ask him to clarify, "So, do you ever check your work email proactively?" "No, it's not part of my role." I ask, "So, is it fair to say that when you leave here, you leave here?" "Yes, absolutely. Once I'm gone, I'm gone. If someone were to call, I'll answer and I'll help out. These are my buddies. But I'll stay here late to get things done so that when I leave, it's personal time—that's why I do it. Some guys will bring work home—I don't like to do that.

The operative phrase here is "by choice." John is very comfortable claiming the time outside of work as his own. Though he is responsive when required, he does not feel compelled to constantly check his phone or any other device for work purposes. He draws the boundary between work and personal time very effectively.

Similarly, Betty seems to have no trouble making the distinction between work and home:

> I ask, "Do you ever connect to work after hours… at home?" She responds very plainly, "I try not to. I have not taken my laptop home. Ever. There is more to life than just work. I will always give 100% while I'm here. But, I work to support my life. If I'm on vacation, I don't check my email or do work. They're the first to say that no one is indispensable…. They can get along without me for

> a week." She continues, "My time is *my time*—you can't pay me enough for my time.

Betty was the most adamant about protecting her personal time of anyone I had interviewed. She said outright that she would not be bothered with work at home unless there was an emergency. She saw no use in checking email after hours. If someone needed her, they could call her. This approach is almost beyond segmentation. Betty's boundaries were not permeable at all. She did not like to do work after hours, period.

Alan, who brought his work cell phone on his honeymoon last year (above), carries daily a physical manifestation of his segmentation: he carries two cell phones, one personal and one for work. He says, "We're more than one person to different people. Carrying two devices can help people make that distinction." I made a note of Alan's comment:

> Alan's habit of carrying two cell phones is as clear cut an example of segmentation that I can think of. He's using a physical object to make the distinction between work life and personal life to himself and to anyone with whom he interacts. If you have a working relationship with Alan, you call him on one phone; if you have a personal relationship, you call another. It seems as though Alan is using this segmentation to make sense of the different roles in his life, as well. If he physically keeps his work phone away from him on weekends (which he mentioned) then he can make a cleaner break from work when he wants to.

Again, the onus is on Alan to segment his work life and personal life and to keep his work phone at bay on the weekends. Regardless, he has found a way to deal with technology and the intrusive nature of work that works for him. Other employees at SMC took a completely opposite approach to dealing with obtrusive ICT by incorporating these tools into the rest of their lives. This approach to work-life balance is called *integration*.

Integration. Employees are exercising integration when they are flexible and transition easily between the work and family roles (Ashforth et al., 2000). Here, the line between work and home life blurs to the point where it is not distinct. Tom (systems administrator) told me about how he generally spent his time after work at home either playing video games or fixing computers. For Tom, happiness was achieved by interacting with technology—it did not necessarily matter whether that interaction had a work purpose or if it was for Tom's own amusement. He said to me, "So, yeah…. I have work and personal pretty much combined. I really blend them together." For Tom, technology was integrated into nearly every aspect of his life. Work tended to bleed into Tom's spare time whenever he pulled it in. Interestingly, Tom did not mention in our talk anything of an emergent nature that might require his attention, yet he seemed to be relatively consistently engaged with technology at all times. Tom was the one choosing to integrate work into his home life sphere.

Similarly, Mary (HR manager) had found ways to integrate technology into her life. She told me:

> I'll post a tweet, check a job I have posted on LinkedIn, maybe post a new job. These are all administrative things that I just need to stay on top of. Social media is *constant*—it's not 9 to 5. Sometimes I'm on the treadmill at the gym and I'll be posting a job or checking for candidates. So, social media, if you're in that role, can be extra work. It's specific to my role. But, I'd be doing [personal] social media anyway, so it's really no different. And it's fun!

At the same time that her social media responsibilities represented extra work, this was also an activity in which most people engage regardless. Given that posting social media updates is not a particularly intense endeavor, Mary included her social media duties for work into those of her own. (Mary told to me that posting something "takes two seconds.") She pragmatically acknowledged that she would be on Facebook and/or

Twitter anyway, so there was not much difference to her for whom or what she is posting. The lines between work and personal activities were certainly blurred in this context.

As we have seen, it was easier for some employees at SMC than others to create boundaries and establish and/or maintain some degree of balance between their work life and personal lives. The ability to do so was impacted by several factors that varied according to each employee's specific set of circumstances. Examining these factors more closely will provide an understanding of the degree of ease with which employees were able to create boundaries and the repercussions that resulted from the creation of those boundaries.

The impact of marriage and family on boundary making. As I spoke with participants at SMC and began to collect their stories, it became evident to me that there was a clear distinction in boundary making approaches between those participants that were married and/or had families and those that did not. Eli, for example, shared with me that he had a 2-month-old son at home. In light of this, he had to "tread lightly", not cut out to early, and "cover his tracks" when he needed to be home. During this conversation in which the topic had turned largely to work-life balance issues, I asked Eli if SMC had a work-life balance policy. He shook his head:

> No. That would be taboo. Even bringing up the term 'work-life balance' in this organization would not be looked upon kindly. It would be career-ending. It is about perception. You have to be working hard—or appear to be working hard—because everyone else is expected to be working hard.

Eli shared with me that, as both a leader and an employee, he valued work-life balance and tried hard to create an environment in which the personal lives of employees could be respected. My field notes detail a story Eli shared with me about his efforts to preserve work-life balance for one of his employees:

> Eli provides me with an example of how work-life balance and perception interact at SMC. Recently, says Eli, a project in progress at SMC started to blow up. One of the key players for the project had already scheduled and paid for a two-week vacation with his family. Given the circumstances, the key player decided to go on the family vacation and check into work on a regular basis to stay on top of the issue with the project. Trying to be conscientious about being out of the office, the auto reply on the key player's email said as such. The fact that the key player was gone and that people both internal and external were being notified that he was out of the office started a ripple effect of panic throughout the office. Eli and his team were asked to go into the key player's email account and turn off his out of office notification, simply to halt the perception that the key player was not engaged in solving the issue.

Eli lamented having to play a part in a ruse that simply gave the illusion that this employee was not out of the office, as though any time away from work was not to be allowed. Further, Eli mentioned that CEO was becoming afraid that, since SMC had been working as a start-up and that people had been working so hard for so long that the firm might lose its edge and may not be able to continue on this sharp growth trajectory. Eli shares that one of his peers, a woman on the senior management team, said bluntly in a recent meeting, "I cannot do this. If the expectation is that we will work as hard as we've worked over the last 5 years, I can't do it." Interestingly, as dramatic as were Eli's portrayal of work pressures for senior management, I did not find evidence of these pressures beneath his senior level of management.

A number of managers and supervisors that work at levels below Eli seemed to quite easily make the decision to create boundaries and protect their family lives. For example, one of Eli's direct reports, Charlie, discussed with me how since the arrival of his two-month-old daughter, he had begun to work as little as possible from home. Likewise, Jack (End User Services supervisor) told me that he did not check his phone or email between 5:30pm and 8:30pm because of his two children, aged 4-years and 18-months-old. Alan (team lead) was working on creating his boundaries, but he

acknowledged the need to do so when he said to me "I'm really bad about taking time off. I need to get better, especially now that I'm married." Thus, for those employees not in senior management at SMC, there seem to be more possibilities for boundary making and the subsequent ability to work toward achieving work-life balance.

Other employees with whom I spoke simply noted the role played by being married and/or having a family in their decision whether or not to work and engage with ICT after hours. While talking with John (desktop administrator), I pointed to the ring on his finger and said, "I see that you're married." "Yes," John replied. "Does that have anything to do with how you work?" I asked. John said, "Definitely. I used to stay longer just to get work done. Now, I'm more efficient." Similarly, when I asked Gary (software programmer) to describe for me how he interacts with technology once he leaves the workplace, he rattled off the technologies he liked to use and said, "I don't sit at 'em all day… because I'm married and I have two kids." Thus, there seemed to be a connection with marriage, having children and tech usage: those employees that were married tended to create more boundaries between work and home life, while employees that were married *and* had children tended to do so even more.

As a point of difference, Nate (desktop administrator), the one person with whom I spoke that was not married, made no mention of limiting his ICT use after work or while at home. In fact, Nate said he was rarely without his laptop and regularly fell asleep using it. Nate mentioned to me no effort to create any sort of boundary between work and home life. However, employees that were married expressed making an effort to work less and use ICT less frequently outside of work than their single and/or childless counterparts.

Married employees with kids work even less outside of working hours and expressed valuing their time even more. When I spoke with Matt (senior developer) about his life at home, he painted a clear picture of his efforts to create boundaries specific to his wife and children. He said, "I have three girls. Once I get home, there's a clear line between work and my home life. My wife stays home with the kids. After a full day, she needs a break. There's an agreement between us that when I'm home, I'm there for my family." Matt has very effectively drawn a line between work and home. He also opted not to get a cell phone through work:

> If I had a work phone, I'd only use it to check my email for maybe 15 minutes. In the 2 years I've been working here, Charlie has never had to call me at home for a work issue. My [personal] phone is always with me. If I were checking email all the time, it would be a real distraction… an interruption.

This is a profoundly clear example of boundary making and segmentation. Not only did Matt not like to or want to work at home, he actually refused the tools that would have allow him to do so. Matt told me later in the conversation that his girls were aged nine, four, and 10 months and that he and his wife were continuously busy. He said that he drew firm lines not just because he did not like to work from home, but because he simply did not have the capacity to do so. Other employees told me about the interruption and distraction that ICT had in their home lives.

For example, while Tom (systems administrator) was providing me with specifics regarding the times at which he uses specific technologies, he said:

> Sometimes when I use my laptop at home, I get yelled at by the wife. Unless it's something urgent for work—then I explain it to her and it's OK. But, I can still always check my email on my iPhone. I can do both. She will say 'Stop playing with the iPhone and pay attention to the kids.' But, she's always texting. She texts a lot. Sometimes she can't even hear me when I'm talking to her. I'm really bad about checking my phone. I'm always looking at the weather, the news, email, eBay….

Tom was a self-described heavy user of ICT and, though he wass aware that the use of technology took his time and attention away from his family, he stayed connected and checked in on work from home, regardless. However, there was no mention in my conversation with Tom of management forcing him to constantly check his email or to do anything related to work after hours. It appeared that he was constantly engaged with ICT of his own volition.

Mary (HR manager) offered a different perspective of her ICT use relative to her personal time. Since Mary's job duty was to update some of SMC's social media efforts after hours, I asked her if she ever found herself engaged with her cell phone even when it might not be necessary. Her response was telling:

> Yes, constantly. I have to make a conscious effort to leave it alone. People always make excuses to have their phone with them at all times. 'Oh, I've got kids' or something. No! Put the phone down. You can do it! You have to make a conscious effort. It's a constant distraction, even if it's just sitting out. You're going to want to look at it.

Mary acknowledged that she was empowered to control if and when she worked after hours. Interestingly, it clearly was a struggle for some employees to minimize their ICT use after hours and while at home, while other employees had found effective ways to create boundaries between their work and home spheres.

Summary: Employee Boundary Setting

Employees set boundaries to determine which items they need to integrate seamlessly into one another and which require a complete segregation between work and home (Nippert-Eng, 1996). At SMC, the onus to create such boundaries lies largely with the employees. Boundaries are created by drawing distinct lines between work and home (*segmentation*) and by seamlessly incorporating work into one's personal life

(*integration*). Employees that were married and had families tended to demonstrate a strong need to keep work separate from their home lives. At SMC, management made efforts to schedule work so that it would have a lesser chance of interfering with the personal lives of employees. Still, many employees at SMC chose themselves to use ICT to work after hours, irrespective of direction from management.

Chapter 4 Summary

In Chapter 4, the analysis of the results of my time in the field at SMC was summarized. A description of the physical layout and a summary of the participants were provided. A cultural analysis of SMC was also provided. As an organization, SMC values operational excellence, pride, openness, and comfort. Though SMC is an organization that is nearly 90-years-old, competitive pressures have led management to operate the firm as if it was a start-up. Employees had differing views as to the relative value of this start-up mentality and it has caused some to become concerned with the problems associated with SMC's continued growth. Symbols that typify the organization were found throughout: product displays demonstrated pride, employee photos reflect the organization's openness, and the constant use of technology reinforced that SMC was a hard-working global business.

Several themes emerged from the analysis of the field data, as well. First, the role of each employee in IT at SMC was the defining factor as to whether or not an employee felt obligated to utilize ICT after hours. Because of their role, employees in the Application Development group were much less obligated to remain connected to work after hours than their counterparts on the Infrastructure team. Employees in both groups used ICT after hours as a means of self-preservation in order to stay on top of their work.

Second, the employees used ICT frequently because they were a highly engaged group. This engagement was driven by their affinity for technology and their desire to utilize it for self-directed learning. Lastly, employees at SMC separated their work and home lives through *boundary setting*. In this organization, the onus was largely on employees to set boundaries; they did so utilizing both segmentation and integration. Employees that were married and/or had a family made stronger efforts to create such boundaries.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT and the subsequent nature of the relationship between these two constructs and work-life balance. The primary aim of this final chapter is to explain the findings of this study relative to the three research questions positioned earlier in this report and to explain their relationship to the extant literature and theory. I will also discuss the limitations of this study and its implications for both HRD practice and theory. Finally, I will offer suggestions for future research that might provide further insight into organizational culture, work-life balance, and the use of ICT.

Research Question 1: Espoused Values versus Actual ICT Use

The first research question that this study set out to answer is "What is the relationship between the espoused values of the organization surrounding the use of ICT and the actual use of ICT?" Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) describe *espoused values* as those values that are explicit and intended to serve as guideposts for behavior in organizations. *Theories-in-use*, on the other hand, are those observable behaviors that illustrate that which is actually done within an organization. In the main, the answer to the first research question is this: management espoused two contradictory values regarding the use of ICT, one value that was supportive of work-life balance and one value that was not. Further, reflective of both of these espoused values of management, some of the IT employees at SMC made an effort to separate their work and personal lives, while others continued to heavily use ICT to remain engaged with work after hours.

Throughout the data collection process, I remained open to the possibility of the existence of other espoused values concerning ICT that were not related to work-life

balance, but no such values were ever expressed by any participants. That said, while management spoke to me about the importance of work-life balance and the desire to shield employees from using ICT too frequently to work from home, this same management also told me that since the organization provided ICT for these employees, the expectation was that the employees would be available to work if and when needed.

In the end, most of the IT employees at SMC ended up using ICT from home frequently to stay connected to work. In general, it is not uncommon for management to wish that what they espoused was true while, in actuality, observed behaviors tell a different story (O'Reilly, 1989; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). At SMC, management wanted to believe that the culture was one entirely supportive of work-life balance while, in reality, most employees found work creeping into and impacting their personal lives on a regular basis.

The efforts of management to minimize the number of hours worked from home were frequently unsuccessful not necessarily because of any ill intent on the part of management. Employees ended up frequently using ICT to work after hours because of the impact of their role assignments and the high levels of engagement that these employees displayed. This high level of engagement serves as evidence of double-loop learning throughout the IT group that allowed the group to continually improve their aptitude for problem solving.

Role and the actual use of ICT. At SMC, I found that because of the specific work performed by various IT employees, there was ample opportunity for employees to display behaviors that were incongruent with the espoused value that favored work-life balance. Though management made efforts to instill some degree of balance in the lives

of employees, the employees displayed behaviors that were counter to the notion of separating their work and home lives. For example, the employees in the Infrastructure group rotated on-call duties so that *only one* team member was technically responsible for outages at any given time—the point of setting up a call schedule was so that no one employee or group of employees would be solely burdened with working after hours. Yet, despite the implementation of the call schedule, nearly all of the Infrastructure employees remained connected to work nearly all waking hours because they felt compelled to do so.

Recall how Alan, who specialized in technical support for the executives, struggled to maintain some degree of balance in his life. His direct manager spoke about the value of work-life balance for Alan and those on his team, but the demands of customers created an environment in which Alan was virtually always on call. Alan and his fellow employees assumed that a broader consequence of their roles as break-fix specialists was that they would need to be available to fix anything at anytime.

Conversely, the employees working in Application Development felt little to no obligation to be connected to work after hours unless they were working on a specific project for which after hours work was required. Generally, if an employee from Application Development used ICT to engage with work after hours, it was because they wanted to learn something new or stay on top of their email. Though employees that are consistent users of workplace technology frequently change their role identities at home in ways that more closely align with work (Fenner & Renn, 2004; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007), a number of the employees in the Application Development group did not find such assimilation necessary. Because their work role did not directly dictate that

they work after hours, these employees were free to choose if and when they worked after hours.

Still, all of the employees in the IT group displayed tremendous care for the work they did and expressed that they wanted to improve themselves and their teams. Since the definition of balance differs for each person (Frone, 2003), the employees from the Infrastructure team and the Application Development team were indeed able to find a combination of work to family that was right for their particular job and family situations (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). Employees from both teams still operated under the paradigm of observed values that led them to use ICT to work as much as they wanted and when they wanted. These values were *pride in work* and *operational excellence*.

The employees in the IT department at SMC took tremendous pride in their work. Gary, the software programmer that decided to spend an entire weekend working on an iPhone application that served as a corporate directory, beamed with pride as he told me about the tremendously positive reception his work received. Tom, the systems administrator that came in on weekends to work on the rewiring of the data center, could barely contain his pride and enthusiasm as he gave me a tour of that data center.

The managers of both of these employees explained to me how they took pains to minimize the workloads of the employees and, particularly, the amount of work done by employees after hours. Yet, the tremendous pride these employees had in their work compelled them to work more hours. At the same time that management at SMC attempted to minimize after hours workloads, employees on both the Application Development and Infrastructure teams were constantly using ICT to engage with work after hours, even if not compelled to do so by management. Some employees in the

Infrastructure group would engage in work because they were on call, while other employees chose to do so willingly and of their own accord.

Thus, while management and the employees of the group discussed with me a desire for work-life balance, many of the employees exhibited behaviors that lead me to conclude that, as Frone (2003) contends, when given the choice between work and personal life, employees most frequently choose work. Most significantly, these employees decided to work after hours *not* because management at SMC had compelled them to do so; these employees worked after hours primarily because they were highly engaged.

Employee engagement and the actual use of ICT. Just as their specific roles gave employees reason to utilize ICT to stay engaged with work, so did their high level of engagement. The majority of the IT employees that I observed and spoke with were tremendously engaged with their work and cared about it deeply. Most of these employees were, at their core, techies. They enjoyed working in the technology field because they are drawn to technology, to gadgets, to hardware, and to various applications of this machinery. A direct result of this affinity for technology was that these employees frequently eschewed any sort of efforts to create or maintain work-life balance; they were compelled to be connected. Inherent in the use of technology is its availability at any time and from anywhere (Parkinson, 1998; Fenner & Renn, 2004; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008; Kossek, Lautsch, Eaton, 2006; Park & Jex, 2011); these IT employees were all too eager to exploit that availability.

Many of the IT employees spent much of their time outside of work engaged with ICT because they were undertaking self-directed learning. Whether we consider Jim, the application developer that surfed the internet over his lunch hour to find articles about technology that he could read at home that evening, or Gary, who taught himself to write iPhone apps, a number of participants were consistently drawn to ICT after hours specifically because of their desire to learn more. Jim spoke to me about the seemingly endless stream of articles on top of which he felt obligated to stay. There were not enough hours in the work day for Jim to learn all he could about technology. Similarly, a number of the participants demonstrated engagement by working after hours using ICT because of their predilection for problem solving.

Single-and double-loop learning. Many of the IT employees at SMC functioned at a level well beyond single-loop learning. With single-loop learning, people seek little feedback and stay within the boundaries of what has been established as acceptable within the organization. Such people do not examine the validity of the goal that they are trying to achieve nor the ways in which they are attempting to achieve that goal; they simply continue to attempt to achieve those goals in the way(s) they always have (Argyris, 1982). As an organization that considered itself in a start-up phase and that was constantly trying to improve itself and obtain operational excellence, the IT department at SMC was not a place where maintaining the status quo and/or a degree of routinization was acceptable. Driven by the leadership of Eli, the group constantly looked for new and better ways to do things; they regularly engaged in double-loop learning.

Double-loop learning occurs when those in the organization question not only the ways in which they go about achieving their goals, but questioned are the goals and

norms of the organization themselves (Argyris & Schön, 1974, 1978). Thus, rather than just accept assignments from management at their face value, the IT employees at SMC constantly asked if there were new and better ways to accomplish work.

When Gary was asked for a simple employee report, he asked the requestor more questions about the purpose of that report. The result was the corporate directory iPhone app. When Tom was dissatisfied with the wiring arrangement in the data center, he taught himself wiring conventions and rewired the data center himself. These employees focus on problem solving not just to satisfy customers, but in an attempt to reinvent how IT services were delivered at SMC. With double-loop learning, members are interested in everyone's success because it is acknowledged that the solving of problems ultimately benefits the entire organization (Argyris, 1976). As a result, the entire IT organization at SMC was improved when employees stepped up to create solutions for real world problems brought forth by their internal customers. Problem solving in such cases is evaluated by the degree to which the problem is solved and stays solved while it builds upon those problem-solving capabilities already established through the group's single-loop learning (Argyris, 1982). In this way the IT group at SMC sought to continually build its problem solving capabilities.

Certainly, there were times that I observed or was told about where routine work completed. As complex as the issue was, for example, Jack's working to fix a downed phone line was a rather routine endeavor. Similarly, the desktop analysts that worked on the help desk and were taking calls for password resets largely had a script from which they could not stray. Yet, many of the remaining participants of this study did not, in many cases, just take orders from management. They worked to find additional and

novel ways to incorporate the use of ICT in ways that were beneficial to both their own learning and to the organization. As the IT group at SMC continued to solve problems, they learned not only the solutions to specific issues, they improved their problem-solving capability itself. As a result, Eli's vision of a "world class" IT department focused on operational excellence seemed realistic and attainable.

Implications of research question 1. Ultimately, the IT employees at SMC were a highly performing group intent on consistently doing good work and improving themselves. The group's high level of engagement and their ability to find new ways to solve problems are indicators of this high level of performance. The caution in this finding as it relates to the use of ICT is that such employees can easily lose sight of work-life balance and keeping the use of ICT in check, especially after hours. The environment at SMC supported the work of Boswell and Olson-Buchanan (2007) and Waller and Ragsdell (2012) in that the ease with which technology made work available to employees of SMC at all hours indeed led to an increased amount of time during which employees worked outside of traditional business hours. Thus, management at SMC was caught between their aspiration to be a highly functioning, "world class" IT operation and their desire to create a culture in which work-life balance was valued and attainable. These goals frequently opposed each other.

In any work setting, there will always be ways to improve that way in which work is completed and there will be more problems to solve. There will also always be more to learn, particularly in the world of technology. Because the overuse of ICT ultimately has a deleterious impact on the productivity and wellbeing of employees (Parkinson, 1998; Waller & Ragsdell, 2012), managers and employees alike need to be provided with tools

and policies that accommodate and help to perpetuate a rational and balanced approach to ICT usage.

Research Questions 2: The Use of ICT and Work-life Balance

The second research question posed by this study is "What is the relationship between the use of ICT and work life balance in this organization?" Numerous past studies have established that ICT interacts with work-life balance in a variety of ways that are both positive and negative (Parkinson, 1998; Marquardt and Kearsley, 1999; Schlosser, 2002; Fenner & Renn, 2004; D'Abate, 2005; Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007; Cowan & Hoffman, 2007; Park & Jex, 2011; Waller & Ragsdell, 2012). While ICT provides great access and flexibility, it can also create situations in which employees feel obligated to work around the clock. The aim of this study was to understand the relationship between ICT use and work-life balance *specifically at SMC* so that we can better understand the nature of the relationship between organizational culture and ICT usage. We must first understand *what* is happening before we can understand *why* it is happening.

There are four related answers to Research Question 2 as it pertains to SMC. First, at SMC, the onus for creating and maintaining work-life balance is squarely on the employees. Second, integral to the boundary work methods of segmentation and integration at SMC was the idea of *choice* and the concepts of *push* and *pull*. Third, the way(s) in which employees at SMC allowed ICT use to impact their personal lives varied depending on whether or not a given employee was married and/or had children. Fourth and finally, there seemed to be a two-tiered system of work-life balance at SMC: one tier for senior managers and another tier altogether for all other employees.

Employees must create work-life balance. At SMC, it became clear to me the while management expressed a desire to create a culture that respected each employee's individual need to achieve and/or maintain work-life balance, it was largely on the shoulders of *employees* to discover and implement any such tactics that might ensure a degree of balance between their work and home lives. This fact is significant because, while managers articulated that family and flexibility were important and that the use of ICT after hours should be minimized, the demands of the work environment did not necessarily make it easy in many circumstances for employees to take advantage of any such flexibility. As demonstrated by my conversations with Alan, who had to keep work at bay while on his honeymoon, or Bonnie, who chose to physically leave her technology at home and go for a walk in order to make a separation from work, employees were frequently placed in situations in which they had to decide the degree to which they wanted to allow work to creep into their personal lives through the use of ICT and actively create barriers accordingly.

Several studies echo this same sentiment and reinforce the notion that it is the responsibility of the employee to ensure that their desired degree of work-life balance is achieved (Ashforth et al.., 2000; Clark, 2000; Frone, 2003; Desrochers & Sargent, 2004; Olson-Buchanan, & Roswell, 2005; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005). Irrespective of whether employees used ICT to work after hours and from home because their role dictated it or because they chose to do so themselves, the fact is that they frequently ended up working more and longer hours than they would had ICT not made access to work so readily available (Fenner and Renn, 2004). Thus, the ease with which

employees at SMC could access work created an environment in which they did so and, as Alan put plainly, they had to "fight" for their own time.

Choice as it relates to push and pull. Boundary theory explains the ways in which people integrate their work and home lives by identifying tactics that people can utilize and provides actionable knowledge that affords people the ability to control their own experiences (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009). Also a part of boundary theory are the work-life balance tactics of *segmentation* (drawing distinct lines between work and home) and *integration* (the blending together of work and home lives) (Ashforth et al., 2000). Keeping in mind that employees at SMC were responsible for their own boundary work and building on the concepts of segmentation and integration, I add to these concepts the idea of *choice*. That is, outside of situations where role or unexpected outages or project work came into play, employees at SMC had a great deal of control over how much or how little they worked after hours. Because of the relative large degree of control over their after hours schedule afforded employees, they were placed in a circumstance where their engagement with ICT and, consequently, work itself came largely down to their own *choice*.

Alongside this notion of *choice*, the nature of the work done within the IT group at SMC created an environment that I describe as *push* and *pull*. Sometimes, employees used ICT to work after hours because work was pushed at them. Those employees in the Infrastructure group that were on call or that had to respond to an outage in a system for which they were responsible had no choice as to whether or not they engaged with technology after work; such responsiveness was part of their job. Likewise, occasionally employees on the Application Development team might have been in charge of a

software upgrade that was executed after hours or might have needed to join a conference call with Chinese colleagues that, because of time zone difference, took place in the evening. This type of work was also *pushed* at employees. In these cases, the demands of the organization compelled these employees to stay connected (Fenner & Renn, 2004; Wilson et al., 2004; Waller & Ragsdell, 2012). They had no choice but to find ways to integrate such work into their lives and to mitigate the impact of such work.

Conversely, I saw and heard countless examples from employees of instances in which—entirely of their own volition—they *pulled* work to them. Most employees from the Infrastructure team that were not on call, for example, still constantly checked their work email, communicated with co-workers via text or instant message, and remained aware of the status of the networking systems at SMC virtually around the clock. These employees simply wanted to stay on top of their work and/or prevent major issues from developing (Boswell & Olson-Buchanan, 2007). Some members of the Application Development team did the same or were involved with work indirectly by engaging with ICT for the purpose of self-directed learning.

In these instances, employees had a great deal of control over their level of engagement with ICT and the amount of work done remotely. In this regard, the idea of employees having to create boundaries for themselves does not and should not have negative connotations—these employees consistently and actively made the *choice* to use ICT to engage with work after hours. To these employees, using ICT to *pull* work into their home lives was the way in which they achieved balance (D'Abate, 2005). Remaining engaged with work after hours was a comfort to these employees. None of these employees described to me feelings of anticipation or anxiety described by Waller

and Ragsdell (2012) surrounding the use of ICT outside of the office. Rather, moving back and forth between work email and personal email or using a laptop to work on a project while watching television at home made these employees feel like they were staying on top of work while still being present at home.

The role of marriage and children relative to work-life balance. To a large degree, employees at SMC that were married and/or had children made a greater effort to create boundaries between work and home. These data are counter to the work of Schneider (2010), which asserted that working parents spend an average of 64 hours (paid and unpaid) per week engaged in activities related to work; employees at SMC with families told me that they worked less than their unmarried or childless counterparts. The employees that were married or had families were much more apt to employ segmentation and to *not use* ICT from home during certain hours or to set aside specific times at which they would use ICT at home than employees that were not married or that did not have families. The employment of such boundary making techniques increased when employees had children. These employees had discovered and implemented ways to avoid *work–family conflict*, the inter-role conflict that occurs when role demands in either the work or family domain are incompatible with role demands in the other domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). With such easy access to work, employees were constantly placed in situations in which they had to choose between work and family; those employees with families chose work less frequently than those employees without families.

These employees that were married and/or had children were fully aware that because ICT allowed for engagement with work at anytime and from any place, work

was an ongoing *activity* as opposed to a specific *place* (Cowan & Hoffman, 2007). Such employees seemed to more clearly understand that with the increased work flexibility afforded by ICT came increased working hours and an increasing obligation to feel that one should be working at all times. The struggle then for the employees that were married and/or parents was to proactively set aside time for family and choose to not be engaged with ICT and work.

Two tiers of work-life balance. As much as senior management purported to value work-life balance for employees and, in many instances, demonstrated behaviors that would support such an effort, the management team itself did not seem to be afforded the same consideration when it came to their own work-life balance. Recall that Eli informed me that there was no work-life balance policy at SMC because any talk about work-life balance at his level would be "taboo." One of Eli's colleagues on the senior management team noted in a meeting that she simply could not go on any longer working at the same pace as during the prior five years of rapid growth. This sentiment confirms the work of Waller and Ragsdell (2012), who noted that the more senior the employee is within an organization, the more compelled they felt to check their email and/or stay connected outside of work. In this regard, those employees that were more successful within the organization were essentially punished with more work. However, Eli did convey to me at one point that he had been afforded some space and time away from work when his daughter was ill and his son had been in a car accident. It seems that for managers at SMC, a situation must be grave or emergent in order for consideration around work-life balance to be given.

At the same time that they struggled to find work-life balance, SMC management made some effort to create situations in which the employees in the IT group could feel less compelled to use ICT for work after hours. For example, Gary (the iPhone app developer) explained to me that management did an exemplary job of scheduling tasks and projects so that work could be completed during normal business hours. Still, Gary consistently decided on his own to work from home if and when he felt compelled to do so. Again, employees at SMC were invested in their jobs to a degree that the wishes and intentions of management did not necessarily matter—the employees wanted to do good work and to improve themselves and chose on their own to use ICT to do so.

Implications of research question 2. Most worthy of note in the data surrounding the second research question is the idea that while employees were primarily responsible for achieving and maintaining a degree of work-life balance in their lives, most employees in IT at SMC demonstrated that, when given a choice between work and personal matters, they actively *chose* to *pull* work toward them. This observation is somewhat troubling given that Cappelli, Constantine, and Chadwick (2000) noted as a primary source of work-family conflict those instances when employees do not take advantage of opportunities to implement work-life balance practices. While employees at SMC that were married and/or parents were more resistant to *pulling* work into their home lives, they were still responsible for the setting of those boundaries, as well. In this regard, management's espoused value of work-life balance risks smacking rather token, as there were no formal efforts made to *ensure* that employees actually achieved any degree of balance.

With the responsibility for work-life balance on the shoulders of employees and without any further focused efforts, management and the organization have, to a large degree, abrogated their responsibility for helping employees achieve work-life balance. In order for any work-life balance efforts to take hold, the organization and management need to share with employees in the responsibility for creating boundaries and finding ways in which to make easier the separation of employees' work and personal lives to the degree that it is healthy.

Further, it would helpful for all managers to be able to model behaviors that are congruent with the valuing of work-life balance. Since senior managers themselves were afforded little opportunity to achieve work-life balance, employees were not necessarily given any direct indication that work-life balance was either valued or permissible. Such organizational behaviors need to be modeled from the top down (Perlow, 1998). Irrespective of what managers at SMC might *say*, the employees will follow those behaviors that they *see*. As long as work-life balance continues to be "taboo" for senior managers at SMC, it will continue to be an espoused value and not one that is observable or real and employees will continue to use ICT to extend their workday.

Research Question 3: Organizational Culture and the Use of ICT

The third and final research question that this study aims to answer is: "What is the nature of the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT in this organization?" The organizational culture at SMC included highly engaged employees that were proud of their work. As a self-described start-up, SMC as an organization continued to run fast and run hard, which was welcome to some employees and of concern to others. Thus, the nature of the relationship between organizational culture and

the use of ICT at SMC played out in two fundamental ways. First, at the same time that the values of operational excellence and pride created an environment in which employees felt compelled to be connected for a number of reasons, these same values often served to contradict and/or undermined work-life balance efforts. Second, employees had assumptions about continued growth and change that informed their views about ICT use. They viewed this growth and change warily and were concerned about the increasing need to use ICTs after hours to do more work, while no organizational mechanisms had been put into place to ensure any degree of work-life balance for employees.

We can better understand these phenomena and how organizational culture relates specifically to the use of ICT at SMC by examining and contextualizing the data collected around each of organizational culture's four main components: artifacts, values, assumptions (Schein, 1984, 1990, 1992) and symbols (Hatch, 1993). Because they are most prominent and best related to the use of ICT at SMC, I will first and primarily discuss *values* and *underlying assumptions* and their related data. I will then explain how *artifacts* and *symbols* serve to a lesser degree to explain the relationship between organizational culture and ICT use.

Values. Through observation and conversation, I learned of four values at SMC: openness, pride, operational excellence, and comfort. To understand how these four values relate to the use of ICT at SMC, they can be paired into two groups: (1) operational excellence and pride, and (2) openness and comfort.

The first pair of values I will discuss is *operational excellence* and *pride*. The goal of the IT department at SMC was to be a "world class" operation that demonstrated

continuous improvement and operational excellence. Largely due to the leadership of Eli, this tone had been set in the department and bled through it. Eli (or any of the managers that reported to him) never exhibited any of the negative behaviors to exert control on subordinates noted by Perlow (1998) during her qualitative study of a software development group: imposing demands, controlling requests, monitoring by standing over, or checking up on. Instead, Eli and his management team shared their vision for the group (to be a "world class" operation) and set to helping employees achieve that goal. Time and again during my field work at SMC, employees in the IT department referred to this aspiration; the goal was clearly understood and valued within the organization. In the three years since Eli had led the IT group, the team had made great strides toward achieving the goal of being "world class." As a result, the IT team took great pride in what they had accomplished as well as the work that they did day-to-day.

This aspiration for continuous improvement/operational excellence and the pride taken in the work done within the IT department led to the increased use of ICT after hours for two reasons. First, employees felt the need to remain connected and on top of their work in order to achieve operational excellence. Most of the time, operational excellence could be achieved by doing one's job well during the regular work day. Sometimes, however, achieving operational excellence required after hours work using ICT. Members of the IT team either solved problems real time or they employed *self-preservation* to remain on top of their work and to ensure that the next day's workload was manageable. Second, because of the pride they took in their work, employees continued to improve their skill set through self-directed learning or by simply working more and longer hours. Whether their aim was to improve their IT department or to

improve themselves as employees, ICT use continued after the work day had ended. Such after hours work was counter to the other two values displayed at SMC, *openness* and *comfort*.

The second pair of values observed at SMC was *openness* and *comfort*. The culture at SMC was one in which both the physical layout of the building and the attitudes of the employees encouraged openness. Employees felt free to express to management how they felt about situations. Open workspaces encouraged collaboration and the sharing of work and ideas. Employees could have any questions answered more readily and could feel more connected to work because they had access to managers.

At the same time, great efforts were made at SMC to make employees feel comfortable. From the bright, airy physical layout of the building to the free coffee and casual attire, the culture at SMC was one in which an effort was made to make working there pleasurable. Accordingly, employees felt comfortable using ICT throughout the building both to get their jobs done and to remain connected to people in their personal lives. In most of the meetings that I attended, employees had a laptop or their smart phone placed in front of them on the table—and frequently both pieces of equipment. Employees often used the large, open atrium to make personal phone calls or to catch up on their email or texting.

Thus, there was the juxtaposition between (1) the hard work driven by the aspiration to obtain operational excellence and the pride related to that goal, and (2) the establishment of an open and comfortable environment in which to achieve that goal. The tradeoff from an organizational standpoint was this: employees worked hard, but the organization made sure that they were comfortable while doing so. With ICT always at

the ready, work for employees could be potentially nearly inescapable. In such an open and comfortable environment, employees continuously used ICT to stay engaged with their work as well as to remain connected to the people in their lives outside of work.

Assumptions. *Assumptions* are those thoughts and feelings that are unconscious and underlying and which determine the perceptions, thought processes, feelings, and behavior of the organization's members (Schein, 1984, 1990, 1992). My field work uncovered three fundamental assumptions that can help to explain the interaction between organizational culture and the use of ICT at SMC: (1) that all employees of the firm operate as though at a start-up, (2) that the continued growth of the firm will be problematic, and (3) that employees had differing views on the cultural shift that had occurred.

First, the effort by SMC's management to position the organization as a start-up was impactful to the use of ICT because it created a culture in which, at the same time that employees were asked to work long and hard hours in order to fundamentally change the way that products were made, marketed, and sold, there was very little process or rigor around the use of ICTs or consideration for the impact of ICT on work-life balance. Recall that SMC did not have a formal statement about their culture, a technology usage policy, or any policy related to work-life balance. Thus, at the same time that a hard driving, fast-paced culture was created, there was no formal corporate mechanism in place to which management and/or employees could refer if they sought guidance or direction concerning the use of ICTs or work-life balance.

Second, employees in the IT group at SMC assumed that the continued growth of the firm would, at some point, become problematic. Because SMC had transformed itself

into a fast-paced, hard charging start-up, Eli had specifically built a team that functioned at a high level. This high-functioning aspect of SMC's culture was hugely advantageous given their short-term goal of achieving $2 billion in revenue, but it could also serve as its Achilles heel, as it would become difficult to sustain such aggressive growth and productivity over a period of time. Employees at SMC recognized that the pace at which they were working was not necessarily sustainable as a long-term approach, particularly given the current staffing levels. In the short-term, the excess work that had to be completed was leveraged largely by using ICT from home and after hours. When workloads increased to the point that work could not get done within normal business hours, employees at SMC used their laptops and smart phones from home to stay on top of their work. Employees recognized that if the organization continued to grow at such an accelerated pace, they would be forced to use ICT from home increasingly in an effort to keep up with their workload.

Third and lastly, employees had differing views on the cultural shift that had occurred. Some employees were enjoying the increased work pace and saw as a positive the proliferation of new projects and technologies to work on. As techies, they viewed the cultural shift as bringing with it more opportunities to interact with ICT and to learn new technological disciplines and approaches to work. Other employees felt that the new skill set required to function in a start-up could be harrowing. Some employees did not have the ability to operate across functions and were not necessarily open to continually learning more and incorporating new technologies. They were comfortable with the technologies with which they currently worked and wanted to utilize ICT after hours as little as possible for work-related issues. Though the number of such change-resistant

employees in the IT group was small, they did contribute to the culture of the IT group at SMC and their needs must be considered.

Artifacts and symbols. As related to SMC, artifacts and symbols do not necessarily broadly explain the use of ICT. Rather, artifacts and symbols inform us of the larger cultural values observed. For example, the "museum" hallway and the new product displays represent the pride in both the legacy of SMC and in its new product offerings. The constant use of smart phones, which Eli referred to as a "leash," is symbolic of the constant connectivity with work that nearly all employees felt compelled to maintain. However, there is one symbol that is most relevant and worthy of discussion as related to culture and ICT: the laptop computer.

For most employees at SMC, the laptop served as the primary means for accomplishing their work. Frequently, I attended meetings in which every employee also in attendance sat with their laptop in front of them at the conference table. Thus, while at work, the laptop served for most employees as a symbol of connectivity and productivity. Such ICT enables work to no longer be a place to which we go, but an activity that we have the potential to do all day, every day (Nippert-Eng, 1996). This considered, recall that eight of the 17 employees that I interviewed told me that they brought their laptops home every night out of a sense of obligation, but they very infrequently—if ever—used their laptops at home. Instead, they checked their email with their smart phone. They brought their laptops home with them "just in case." These employees felt an obligation to have at the ready this specific form of ICT if and when they should ever be needed. This unique routine speaks to the *organizational commitment* of these employees.

Recall that O'Reilly (1989) explained the three phases of organizational commitment as *compliance* (fitting in), *identification* (creating meaning with other members of organization), and *internalization* (value congruence with organization). Though I would argue that they were certainly committed to the organization, the employees that were continuously taking their laptop home with no real intention of ever using it had never moved beyond the *identification* phase of organizational commitment to the final phase, *internalization.* These employees were bringing their laptops home out of a sense of duty (compliance) and because they wanted to fit in—everyone else brought their laptops home (identification). However, with no intention to actually use the laptop, it seems that these employees' values were not necessarily congruent with those of the organization (internalization). These employees clearly valued their personal time at home—otherwise they would spend that time engaged with their laptop and working. However, the cultural pressure placed on some employees to remain available for work created an environment in which they felt compelled to have their company-sponsored ICT at the ready at all times, even if they hoped to not have to use it. Thus, the organizational culture at SMC was one in which, at times, the appearance of connectivity was as important as actually being connected.

Implications of research question 3. Organizational culture did not have as significant a relationship as I had expected with the ways in which employees at SMC used ICT. It was my expectation that the organizational culture at SMC would directly set the tone as to how much ICT was used after hours by creating an environment in which direct pressure was put onto employees to do so. In such a case, management would have created policies and modeled behaviors that would have set the expectation

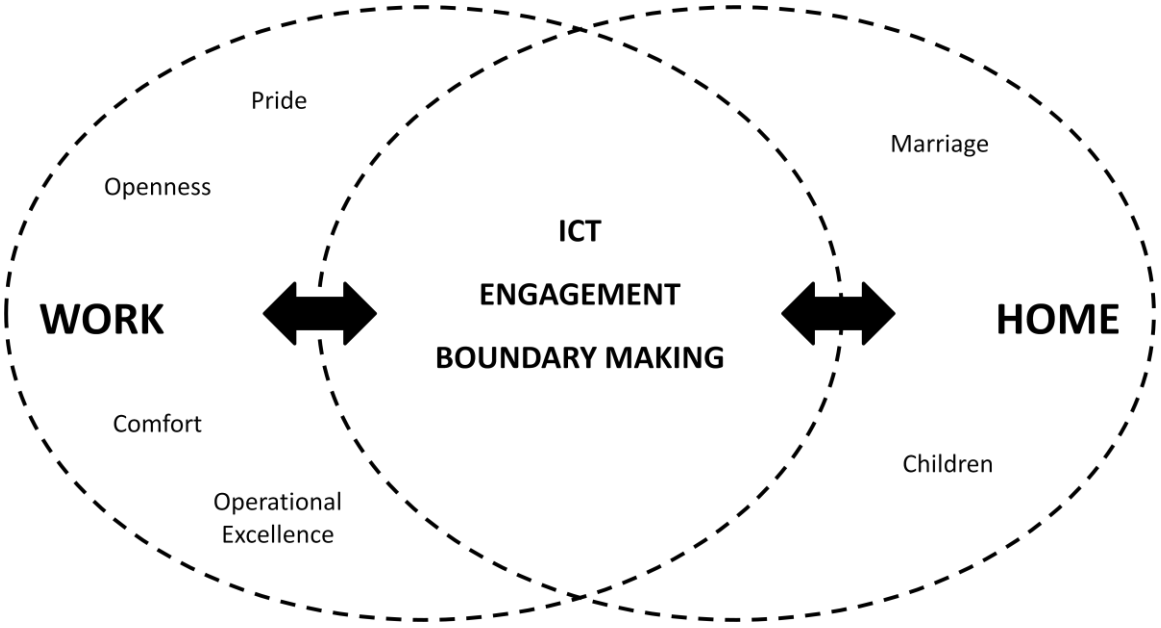
that the constant use of ICT after hours was the expected norm. Instead, of much more significance was the role of each employee and the employees' level of engagement. Put simply, the employees used ICT to work after hours (1) because *sometimes* it was expected of them (role), and (2) because they *wanted to* (employee engagement).

A common theme throughout the cultural analysis offered in this report is that the employees at SMC were increasingly concerned that further changes to the organization would bring with them the increasing need to use ICTs anytime and from anywhere to do more work. Given that an organizational culture is "a complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols that define the way in which a firm conducts its business" (Barney, 1995, p. 657), the employees at SMC were becoming increasingly concerned about how the values of the firm were informing the way in which business was conducted and how, as a result, business demands might warrant increasing amounts of work.

The drive for operational excellence at SMC often meant working harder and longer hours—utilizing ICT anytime, anywhere to do so. Propagating the organizational position of a start-up meant that employees would continue to need to be increasingly responsive and nimble—utilizing ICT anytime, anywhere to do so. Continued growth and the drive for $2 billion in revenue would mean that employees would be required work differently and to do more—utilizing ICT anytime, anywhere to do so. In this regard, the relationship between organizational culture and the use of ICT presented a dilemma for employees; they were constantly told to work toward growth and that growth was good, but along with this growth came an increased workload and the prospect of using ICT increasingly to keep up.

Figure 4 summarizes how organizational culture and the use of ICT ultimately impact employees and their ability to develop and/or maintain work-life balance. Influenced by SMC's organizational culture (represented by the firm's values), work is pushed to employees or pulled toward employees because of their high levels of engagement. The home domain and its contributing factors of marriage and children overlaps with work, as employees frequently integrate the two domains. Employees have access to work through ICT, which intersects both the work and home domains. Because employees have a choice as to the degree to which they will utilize ICT to engage in work after hours, they have to employ boundary making in order to achieve the unique level of work-life balance they desire. Noticeably absent from this picture is management or an organizational culture that is supportive of employees' boundary making efforts; the responsibility for creating such boundaries is left solely to employees.

Figure 4 Organizational Culture, ICT Usage, and Work-life Balance at SMC



Management at SMC could put at ease the minds of employees if they were to formally outline expectations regarding ICT usage, particularly after hours. The organization should work to create a culture in which management and employees alike share the responsibility for using ICT in a balanced manner. If managers and employees shared clarity around ICT usage expectations, the constant concerns around the proliferation of ICT usage could be allayed. Further, management could shift the positioning of the organization away from the start-up mode and embrace the organization's maturity by implementing some degree of process and policy.

This step toward maturity and the codification of the work done at SMC might stifle slightly the entrepreneurial spirit engendered by the firm's status as a start-up, but the right degree of process and policy could also create efficiencies by leveling expectations. Even though situations that are incongruent with the assumptions of an organization can be disorienting to the organization's members at first (Schein, 1992), such a shift would provide much needed stability to an organization that has seen a tremendous amount of change in the last several years.

Limitations of the Study

Though this ethnographic study provides meaningful insights into the relationships among organizational culture, the use of ICT, and work-life balance, the study does have limitations. First, the scope of the study's sample is limited. The study examines one department within one organization that operates in one industry. By virtue of its ethnographic methodology, the study favors depth at the expense of breadth (Brewer, 2000); the study allows us to know one group extremely well, but the sample size of the study is inherently small.

Second, though the use of ICT is relatively constant across industries (Parkinson, 1998), an argument could be made that studying an IT group may skew toward those employees that use technology more heavily and may have patterns of ICT use that differ from employees at large. Though employees working in the IT field are indeed heavy users of ICT by virtue of their jobs and their affinity for technology, nearly every other job in today's knowledge economy involves the constant use of ICT. It could be argued that all knowledge workers today are required to be heavy users of technology. In this regard, an equal argument could be made that the sample set for this study appropriately represents the average modern knowledge worker's use of ICT.

Third, the sample of this study related to gender, race, and ethnicity was too small to definitively determine if and how gender or race/ethnicity played a role in the use of ICT and the employment of various work-life balance strategies. Of the 28 employees in the IT group at SMC, only three were female and all were Caucasian. A broader sample of female and racially diverse participants could have shed light on the role of gender, race, and ethnicity relative to organizational culture, ICT use, and work-life balance.

Fourth, because data collection relied upon the participants themselves and their own interpretation of the questions asked them, the validity of the data may be questioned. This study may have benefited from a quantitative/survey format that allowed for more consistent and precise data collection.

Fifth, the study is representative of one point in time. Data collection for this study took place over a period of nine weeks in the summer of 2013. Given the rate at which technology changes, various aspects of the study's shelf-life pertaining to specific technologies may be shortened and quickly dated. The ways in which employees will use

different, unforeseen ICT in the future may have a material impact on the results of this and similar studies.

Sixth, this study was not able to utilize organizational documentation as a data source. Relative to this study, a statement of organizational culture, a technology usage policy, or a work-life balance policy could have provided insightful data. The organization studied had not yet produced such documentation. The availability and examination of such documentation would have provided a more concrete basis from which a comparison of espoused values versus theories-in-use could have been made.

Lastly, my role as the primary researcher may have at times skewed the results. Though I did my best to enter the field with an open mind and as though this particular corporate experience was new to me, I cannot escape the reality that I have lived and worked in the corporate environment for the better part of two decades and that I have spent much of that time working specifically within an IT environment. At times, my more intimate knowledge of the IT environment lent credibility to the participants and created efficiencies in that I did not need to learn the environment. However, had I been completely unfamiliar with the corporate IT environment, I may have asked different or more questions and probed certain aspects of the organization more deeply.

Implications for HRD Practice

Because employers that proactively provide work-family benefits report greater organizational commitment (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999), employers need to move beyond passive work-life balance measures. It is not enough to speak of work-life balance as a "good thing" or to create a policy in the hopes that employees obey it. It is my contention that the organization—*not* the employees—need to take the lead in the

sensible use of ICT through enforced policies and initiatives that are supportive of work-life balance and by the example of the behavior of management.

In the case of SMC, because employees at SMC did have, for the most part, much control over how much or how little they worked after hours, it is important that employers/management do not take advantage of their willingness to work more than is normally expected. It is easy for management to say, on the one hand, that work-life is important and that they desire work-life balance for all of their employees. But it is just as easy, on the other hand, to turn a blind eye when employees decide *on their own* to work extra and long hours. The risk is that working such extra and long hours will become an expectation of employees, regardless of management's espoused position on work-life balance. Such expectations of employees can easily become exploitive.

HRD practitioners can coach managers to recognize signs that employees are working excessively from home and encourage managers to intervene in these situations. The high level of engagement of employees at SMC demonstrates that, while the overuse of ICT is indeed a legitimate concern, there can be a balance struck between enthusiastic job engagement and the rational use of ICT. Because of their background in organizational behavior and employee development, HRD practitioners are uniquely qualified to work with managers and employees to find ways to strike such balances.

This study demonstrates that without any formalized, written perspective on the rational use of ICT, employees will feel compelled to be connected and working at all hours. I believe that employees need more than just good intentions and platitudes when it comes to actually achieving work-life balance. When it comes to creating and maintaining boundaries, employees need help in the form of policy, firm scheduling, and

mandatory "technology holidays" during which they are not allowed to use ICT. Because culture pervades the way employees perceive, think, and feel and is ultimately manifested in overt behavior (Schein, 1984), HRD practitioners need to influence the culture so that an environment is created in which employees are encouraged and have permission to *not* use ICT excessively.

Under the direction of HRD practitioners, employers need to produce, distribute, and enforce clearly written policies concerning the use of ICT. These policies should (1) give employees explicit permission only use ICT when it is necessary for work, (2) clearly state that the organization will make every effort to minimize the amount of work required of employees after hours, and (3) give managers explicit permission to implement and enforce the aforementioned "technology holidays" on a regular basis. Similarly to scheduling employees "on-call," employee should be scheduled for technology holidays or extended periods of time during which they are not to interact with ICT for work purposes.

Implications for HRD Theory

Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2009) call for a deeper understanding of the complex nature of the technology/work/home interaction. Prior studies have determined that excessive use of ICT outside of work has deleterious effects on the mental and physical health of employees (Goldberg, 1999; Kraut, Dumais, & Koch, 1989; Kakabadse, Porter, & Vance, 2007) and, potentially, on the quality of their work (Parkinson, 1998; Frone, 2003). Meanwhile, Orlikowski and Scott (2008) note that the vast majority of studies fail to take into account the role of technology in organizational life.

This study has demonstrated that ICT has become so pervasive and intricately integrated into the lives of employees that, irrespective of the best intentions of management, employees will continue to use ICT excessively unless forced to do otherwise. That said, ICT and the use of it should no longer be on the periphery of work-life balance theories or considered just one of many factors that influence work-life balance. HRD theory around work-life balance must situate ICT and its use squarely in the center of work-life balance as *the* singular most important factor that impacts work-life balance. The ability of ICT to intersect the domains of work and home is without precedent or limit relative to work-life balance theory. The pervasive use of ICT is not a trend; its central focus to work-life balance theory is necessary and required.

As technology progresses and the types of ICT used in the workplace changes, organizational structures will evolve to accommodate such changes. As organizations become less vertically-integrated, more flexible and focused on *what* gets done as opposed to *how* or *where* things get done (Bolman & Deal, 2008), HRD theory will need to evolve along with these changes and more accurately capture the ways in which learning and the development of expertise occurs in remote, less structured settings.

The work of Voydanoff (2004) presents the concept of *facilitation* as the synergy created when resources associated with one work-life domain enhance or make easier participation in the other. Given the broad impact of ICT on work-life balance and its growing central influence in both the work and home domains, HRD theory can incorporate ICT as a resource for facilitation for both enabling work-life balance and for delivering HRD interventions virtually. While the nascent field of VHRD (Bennett, 2009; Bennett, 2010; McWhorter, 2010) explores the benefits of "anywhere, anytime"

learning engagements, the developing theory around the field will still need to strongly consider the impact of virtual HRD interventions on the work-life balance of employees.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study provides a deeper understanding of the ways in which organizational culture relates to the use of ICT and work-life balance. Using this study as a springboard, there are several areas related to the study that researchers can explore going forward. First, this study briefly notes that marriage and parenthood impacted the ways in which participants created boundaries between work and life. But, also apparent and not within the scope of the study were differences amongst participants of different ages. Building on the work of Chalofsky (2010), a study that more specifically examines the interaction between age, the use of ICT, and the employment of boundary making strategies could provide insight into how employees at different stages of life approach ICT usage differently.

Second, a study similar to this one could be situated in an organization within a different industry and/or with a functional group other than IT. Such a study could answer the question, "Do other functional groups approach the use of ICT and work-life balance differently than those employees in IT?" Such a comparison could be made with virtually any other functional group within any other organization/industry and would serve to either disaffirm or reinforce the findings of this study.

Third, a study similar to this one could be conducted using a different methodology or a mixed methods approach. A narrative approach, for example, could provide deeper insights into the experiences of a smaller number of participants. On the other hand, a quantitative study would allow for more probing, consistent, and

generalizable data that could be replicated over a much broader sample. A mixed methods approach could broadly and deeply examine questions related to organizational culture, ICT use, and work-life balance. A longitudinal study could capture a broader data set as well as the changing pace of technology and its impact over time.

Lastly, a fourth area for future research could be the incorporation of *productivity* into the construct mix. This study examines only the relationship between organizational culture, the use of ICT, and work-life balance. Missing from this equation is the impact that any or all of these factors have on productivity. To what degree is productivity helped or hindered by the use of ICT? To what degree is productivity helped or hindered as one tries to obtain or maintain work-life balance? Do ICT and work-life balance interact to help or hinder productivity? Such a study would speak to business results more so than relationships and would prove useful.

Conclusion

This study is an ethnographic exploration of organizational culture, work-life balance, and the use of ICT in the work and home settings. At the firm studied, SMC, the espoused values of management were contradictory, with one espoused value favoring work-life balance and the other espoused value requiring that employees be available to work anytime and from anywhere. The behaviors observed provided insight as to why employee actually used ICT after hours: they did so because it was required of their role and because they were highly engaged.

Employees at SMC were largely responsible for setting boundaries and controlling the ways in which the use if ICT impacted their own work-life balance. An environment of *push* and *pull* arose, in which work that was pushed at some employees

required that they use ICT after hours to complete that work and in which other employees actively chose to *pull* work into their personal lives. Those employees that were married and/or had families chose to pull work into their lives less frequently. There was a different tier of work-life balance that applied to senior managers at SMC: while employees frequently had the opportunity to choose whether or not they worked after hours, senior management most frequently did not have that choice.

An analysis of the culture at SMC found that the organizational culture related to the use of ICT in two ways. First, a strong value for operational excellence and great pride in the work done created an environment in which employees were exceedingly conscientious and desired to work hard. This desire often led to the use of ICT after hours to complete work. Second, the cultural values of openness and comfort were demonstrated by the organization's transparent style of management and the efforts made to treat employees well. Still, employees expressed their concern that the drive for excellence and continuous change might lead to increased workloads and the increasing need to use ICT after hours in order to complete work.

Most interestingly, I commenced this study expecting to find organizational culture to be a significant factor in determining the degree to which people use ICT outside of work. What I found instead was that, while the cultural values of operational excellence and pride at SMC did indeed influence the ways in which employees used ICT after work to some degree, the larger determinants of ICT use were the roles of employees, the engagement of the employees, and the fact that these employees actively *chose* to use ICT after hour irrespective of what management desired. Certainly, culture played a role in influencing ICT use, but it was not the central role.

This study strongly reinforced my belief that organizations have an obligation to create a culture in which the sensible and balanced use of ICT is not just a belief to be espoused, but a core behavior that should be modeled and enforced by leadership and managers. It is my contention that HRD practitioners need to work within their organizations to take proactive measures that ensure that the use of ICT is not excessive and does not have a deleterious impact on the work-life balance of employees. HRD theorists should recognize the central importance of ICT within theory related to organizational culture and to work-life balance. Suggestions for future research involve replicating this study in different environments, considering different demographic factors, and focusing on employee productivity as it relates to work-life balance and the use of ICT.

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Yahyagil, M. Y. (2006). The fit between the concepts of organizational culture and climate. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communication, and Conflict, 10*(2), 77-104.

Zheng, W., Qu, Q., & Yang, B. (2009). Toward a theory of organizational cultural evolution. *Human Resource Development Review, 8*(2), 151-173.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee ***December, 2013***

Ph.D. in Urban Education, Specialization: Human Resources Development (HRD) with a minor in Organizations and Strategic Management. Dissertation, "Compelled to be Connected: An Ethnographic Exploration of Organizational Culture, Work-Life Balance, and the Use of Mobile Workplace Technologies"

Marquette University

Masters of Business Administration ***May, 2006***

University of Washington

Human Resource Management Course ***April, 1998***
Earned PHR (Professional in Human Resources) certification at end of course

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education (English) ***May, 1996***

SERVICE

Graduate Assistant in the Department of Administrative Leadership ***2010 - Present***
UW-Milwaukee

Graduate Student Employee: ***2009-2010***
Assist with efforts for UW-Systems Agenda Grant, *Integrating Quality Management in Teacher Professional Development Plans: Enhancing College Preparation in Mathematics*

Academy of Human Resource Development International HRD SIG Member ***2010 - present***

Academy of Human Resource Development Virtual HRD, Technology and Distance Learning SIG Member

Ad-hoc Reviewer ***2009***
Proceedings Manuscripts of AHRD International Research Conference in the Americas, Academy of Human Resource Development, 2009

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

AHRD Cutting Edge Research Award for "Workplace technology and the creation of boundaries: The role of HRD in a 24/7 work environment" at the 2013 AHRD International Research Conference in the Americas, Washington, DC. **March 2013**

UW – Milwaukee Chancellor's Scholarship: $2,500 ***2012-2013***

UW – Milwaukee Chancellor's Scholarship: $3,600 ***2010-2011***

UW – Milwaukee Graduate School Travel Grant: $800 **Fall, 2010**

UW – Milwaukee Graduate School Travel Grant: $300 **Spring, 2010**

MEMBERSHIPS & AFFILIATIONS

Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) ***2010 - Present***
Past Member, Advisory Board: *Milwaukee Business High School*
Past Board of Directors:*Academy of Information Technology, Washington High School (Milwaukee)*
Student Mentor, Business Advisor: *INROADS (internship program for students of color)*
Past Member: *SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management)*
FHRA (Financial Human Resources Association)
FUEL Milwaukee (formerly YPM) – Employer's Council

PUBLICATIONS

Thomas, K. J., & Akdere, M. (2013). Social media as collaborative media in workplace learning. *Human Resource Development Review*, 12(3), 329-344.

Conceição, S. C. O., & Thomas, K. J. (in press). Virtual human resource development (VHRD). In R. F. Poell, T. Rocco, & G. Roth (eds.) *Routledge Companion to Human Resource Development*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Thomas, K. J. (2012). Knowledge management in international organizations: Insights for HRD. *Learning & Performance Quarterly, 1*(1), 21-39.

REFEREED CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS & PRESENTATIONS

Thomas, K. J. (webinar, April 22, 2013). Workplace technology and the creation of boundaries: The role of (V)HRD in a 24/7 work environment. *Webinar led for the Virtual HRD Special Interest Group of the Academy of Human Resource Development.*

Thomas, K. J. (2013). Workplace technology and the creation of boundaries: The role of HRD in a 24/7 work environment. *Proceedings of the Academy of HRD International Research Conference in the Americas*. Washington, DC: Academy of Human Resource Development.

Thomas, K. J., & Akdere, M. (2012). Social media as a means to improve organizational learning: Implications for HRD. *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference of the ASIA Chapter of the AHRD & 2nd International Conference of the MENA Chapter of the AHRD* (pp. 1431-1446). Istanbul, Turkey: Academy of Human Resource Development.

Thomas, K. J., & Akdere, M. (2011). Social media as a means to improve organizational learning: Implications for HRD. *Proceedings of the Academy of HRD International Research Conference in the Americas*. Schaumburg, IL: Academy of Human Resource Development.

Irby, D. & Thomas, K.J. (2011) Using a participatory research framework to re-imagine drop-out prevention planning: Critical reflections from the field. *UW-Milwaukee School of Education Research Conference*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Thomas, K. J. , & Akdere, M. (2010). Social media as a means to improve organizational learning: A review of the literature. *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference of the Academy of HRD (Asia Chapter).* Shanghai, China: Academy of Human Resource Development.

Thomas, K. (2010, March). *Social media as a tool for learning in organizations*. Food 'n' Thought Session presented at the Academy of Human Resource Development 2011 International Research Conference, Knoxville, TN.

WORK EXPERIENCE

MillerCoors **September, 2013 – Present**

Leadership Development Manager

U.S. Bank, N.A. (formerly Firstar Bank, N.A.) **June, 2000 – June, 2009**

Vice President, Sr. HR Manager *September, 2005 – June, 2009*
Private Banking Relationship Manager *August, 2004 – September, 2005*
Senior Human Resources Generalist *January, 2002 – July, 2004*
Human Resources Generalist *June, 2000 – December 2001*

Cardinal Stritch University **June, 2008 – August 2010**

Adjunct Faculty, teaching courses in Human Resources, Management, Leadership and General Business

Cotelligent, Incorporated **Seattle, Washington** **September, 1996 - April, 2000**

Consulting Staff Manager *January, 1998 - April, 2000*
Technical Recruiter *September, 1996 -December, 1997*