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“Culture Shock”: An Ethnographic Account of a Small Business in the Face of Change

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"Culture Shock":
An Ethnographic Account of a Small Business in the Face of Change

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Abstract:

This ethnography follows a small business in Indianapolis that was founded on a small business philosophy that embodied family-oriented, close-knit employee relationships. Aside from the small firm finding success in its established company culture, this small business found great financial success within a niche market. However, as part of new expansion plans, management began imposing a more traditional, hierarchical management styles. While this shift is predicted by contemporary management theory, the human effects and cultural costs of this process are worthy of study. This ethnography follows employees' perceptions and reactions to the change in business philosophy and analyzes the instability that arises in the workplace as managers prepare for the next phase of expansion.

Section One – A Small Business Environment:

In the fall of 2016, a Wish TV article titled "Local Shops Prepare for Small Business Saturday" described Small Business Saturday in Indianapolis as the "Super Bowl" for local businesses where Indy locals could expect incentives and great deals. One local storeowner expressed, "It helps keep the money local and helps us hire more people in the community" (McNicholas 2016). Written specifically for Indianapolis consumers, many themes that I found throughout my research surfaced within this article.

Small businesses have played vital roles in America's economic development, especially throughout the early nineteenth century. It was not until the later part of the ninetieth century that larger businesses began to emerge, primarily "in field(s) where new technologies permitted economies of scale in the production and/or distribution of goods" (Blackford 2003:3). With the rise of larger businesses, small businesses did not disappear; rather they adjusted their products and their cultures. Small businesses since the nineteenth century have been successful in developing market niches by capitalizing on products and business tactics largely ignored by large manufacturers. As small businesses became "intermediate goods suppliers to larger industrial firms, small businesses persisted in the industrial segment of America's business system" (Blackford 2003:3).

As an Indianapolis native, over recent years I have noticed the popularization of small businesses, primarily the in the public sphere.[1] There has been great emphasis placed on utilizing services offered by local entrepreneurs as opposed to retail megastores or corporate enterprises. While small businesses have remained important to America's economic development, they have

[1] 2012 data of Indiana shares that there are 493,832 small businesses with 1,173,626 individuals employed. In 2010 alone, 7,694 small business establishments opened in Indiana (Small Business Administration 2012).

also contributed greatly to American culture, especially through market niches. As smaller companies are threatened by the presence of larger companies, they must create environments and products that capture consumer's interests while also competing with mega-enterprises. Innovative, specialized products and great environments allow small businesses to create a consumer base, but also contribute to diverse and unique experiences for the consumer that cannot be experienced in a mega-enterprise.

My Personal Experience with a Small Business

As I took notice of the popularization of small businesses, I sought to understand why small business culture felt different compared to mega-enterprises. In order to do so, I began searching for small businesses that needed additional help. Through networking, I was able to secure an internship with a small firm in Indianapolis with a unique business during the summer of 2016. I will refer to this company as LIX, Inc.

During my time as an intern, I noticed major changes occurring within the company. When I first began my observations among this small firm, I noticed a tight-knit, family-oriented company culture. Organizational management theorists explain that the firm is organized as a clan-culture, where mentoring and nurturing is highly chosen technique adopted by small business managers (Baldwin 2013). However, I began to notice major shifts in the organizational structure occurring right before my eyes.

As the company remained financially successful, the owners of the firm quickly began to think of ways to invest the money, and one major avenue was expansion. This entailed a significant change in business philosophy. Management took on a more hierarchal role, enforcing new rules that were not present prior to discussions of expansion. Employee satisfaction decreased, as they were being asked to take on many tasks in order to make expansion possible. Employees began to seclude themselves to their work and interaction among one another quickly declined. As a month passed, the company, while financially stable, felt culturally unstable, as the employee workload increased and the environment became more hierarchical. As this unraveled before my eyes, I began to ask, "*Why is this happening?*" After researching successful small businesses and talking with members of the faculty at the Lacy School of Business, I came to understand expansion – and the structural and human resources changes that come with it – is seen in contemporary business circles as the "natural" and necessary evolution of small business. Modern business orthodoxy represents expansion as the expected and correct path for those with an entrepreneurial mindset. However, in order to expand, various measures and changes must be implemented within the workplace, including a major transformation of company philosophy. (McGrath 2000)

This ethnographic study allows readers to follow the timeline of events that I observed at LIX, Inc. It lays out major transformative shifts I began to notice, with narratives from employees themselves. The potential knowledge gained from this study is to understand the effects of rapidly changing business philosophies and executive management practices on social relationships, human experience, and employee welfare in a company.

A Small Business' Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning

We can narrate the creation of LIX, Inc. through the lens of industrial organizational theory, which conceptualizes the start-up of small businesses as following a very formulaic process. The business plan behind LIX, Inc. was to capitalize on a niche market. These markets are subsets of larger markets where a specific product becomes the company's focus. Niche markets are centered on specialization, a tactic used to survive growing competition in the larger market. LIX, Inc. specifically focuses on a market that had been largely ignored: unclaimed assets. An individual's property becomes unclaimed (insurance payments, contents of safe deposit boxes, savings accounts, etc.) when they are unaware of an asset that belongs to them. The majority of the claims cases were typically unclaimed wills or an individual closed out a savings account and never collected their money. When an asset becomes unclaimed, the state treasury attempts to locate the owner through a newspaper ad. The attempts are minimal (once a year, as required by law) since the state government can utilize these confiscated funds as they attempt to find the owner. However, once the state attempts to locate the individual and the individual does not respond, the account is deemed abandoned and the state then takes over the account and claims the property or assets. The founders of LIX, Inc., having no background in unclaimed assets, came to this business idea because it was unlike any they had heard before, and the end-results seemed like a “win-win”: individuals would have their unclaimed property returned, and LIX, Inc. could charge commission based on the amount of the claim.

Creating a niche market requires a strategic business plan and an understanding of who might benefit from the plan. In the case of LIX, Inc., their understanding was that there was unclaimed property in the world, and they wished to find individuals for whom it belonged. The niche markets arises out of a common marketing strategy, segmentation, targeting, and positioning (Lynn 2011:4). When segmenting a market, one can:

> Differentiate your customers on the basis of demographic variables (such as age, gender, education, and income), geographic variables (such as nation, state, region, and neighborhood type), psychographic variables (such as attitudes, opinions, interests, and values), and behaviors (such as media habits, purchase frequency, brand loyalty, and channel usage). (Lynn 2011:4)

Segmentation identification can vary based on one's business needs. For LIX, Inc., as their business focused on educating clients on unclaimed and owed assets, their segmentation was based primarily on geographic variables. Many states require licensing and other forms of verification to conduct business across state lines. Therefore, the company was limited only to the states that did not require pricey licensing or excess documentation to recover an asset. The main takeaway when choosing segments for one's company is that it be suited for one's target consumer-base within this specific market. For LIX, Inc., the unclaimed assets that their clients were unaware of distinguished the type of market for the company.

Once a segment and the characteristics of that segment have been identified, business owners must identify their target market. Targeting is the evaluation of the attractiveness of each segment, or the commerciality of one's product.

> Attractive targets are those segments that 1) have strong sales and growth potential, 2) are relatively inexpensive to reach with marketing efforts, 3) are currently being served by few or weak competitors, and 4) have needs and desires that your company's resources are well suited to satisfy. (Lynn 2011:7)

LIX, Inc. targeted their specific market by only choosing to accept unclaimed assets that totaled over $5,000. They did so as this would result in strong sales and growth potential for the company. Additionally, the opportunity cost of accepting a claim worth less than $5,000 and the commission they would receive for the recovery, would not cover the expenses that the company contributed to obtain the asset (the cost of death certificates, mailing, additional governmental documents necessary). For LIX, Inc., their expertise in recovering assets created a new market that held little competition, and one that satisfied many of their client's (as their assets came in the form of a cashable check).

The last marketing strategy that benefits small business owners is the product positioning. The positionality of the product is how the completed product perceived within the market, primarily the target market. Positioning, however, also incorporates how consumers are able to understand what the product has to offer and how it becomes different from other competitive sources. For LIX, Inc., their product is not competitive because they are not competing with anyone else for this business aside from the government. Therefore, LIX, Inc. was able to bypass differentiating their product from competitors within the market. The employees at LIX, Inc. shared with their clients that the government attempted contact them, usually through the newspaper, but contact was not successful. Therefore, when clients are introduced to LIX, Inc., they become aware that only minimal effort was taken during the initial contact attempt (if the asset remains unclaimed for a certain amount of time, the government is entitled to the asset). Therefore, consumers became aware of the benefits of LIX, Inc. through the company's ability to promote highlight their altruistic efforts.

A Family-like Company Environment

I began working with LIX, Inc. at the beginning of the summer in 2016. The company itself had seven employees when I began working. There were two individuals in higher management, the chief executive officer, Ted, and the chief operating officer, Leia. Ted and Leia not only owned the company together, but were also married. This was a key point that Leia and Ted sold to their employees that contributed to the family-oriented environment that they had established. Early on in my fieldwork, Ted shared with the employees and interns:

> "We [Ted and Leia] were told plenty of times that it was impossible to run a successful company with your partner […] We [Ted and Leia] truly value our family at the office. It feels the same here [at the office] as it does at home."

In addition to Leia and Ted, there were two sales case managers, Lindsey and Ciara. Lindsey and Ciara were the leading two sales employees and worked on majority of the company's cases. They were responsible for revenue inflows, a task they worked on closely with Leia. In human resources, there was also Mary Masters, my primary informant. She was the Human Resources Recruiter, and the individual responsible for hiring new employees. In operations, Felicity was the lead employee who was in charge of the administrative tasks. Lastly, there was Jeff, LIX, Inc.'s only paid intern. Jeff was the company's data miner; meaning he was responsible for the primary research finding new customers for the company. Together, these seven individuals fostered Leia and Ted's family-oriented company culture, one that was meant to feel like a home away from the employee's home, but a culture that was soon to undergo major change.

From the beginning of my first day at the office, it was evident that the managers and hiring recruiter were selling the company as a family-friendly work place. One of the first interactions I saw at the company was between Mary, the Human Resources Recruiter, and Lindsey, a Case Manager. While introducing Lindsey to me, Mary wrapped her arm around Lindsey's arms and referred to her as her as being like a "sister." From that moment on, I saw the usage of "sis" and "bro" frequently used by the employees when directly talking to or about one another.

Another common reference to the family-like environment that the employees shared were how their relationships resembled that of blood related families. Early on in my fieldwork, Mary was having a birthday pool party at her mother's home on a Friday evening after work. She invited the entire office. Lindsey and Jeff were able to attend, and the following Monday, Mary shared the following:

> "My family loves Jeff. Him and his girlfriend are now officially family. My family told them they can come whenever they want to swim [in the family pool]."

Mary also shared how Lindsey had bonded closely with her sister during the pool party.

> "The funniest damn thing happened. Lindsey was in the garage with my sister getting something from the 'fridge and all the sudden we hear the loudest scream coming from the garage. We all came busting into the garage to see that Lindsey had been knocked on her ass. She told us a mouse ran over her foot. It was the funniest thing. My sister was on the ground laughing. After that, her and my sister were inseparable."

Narratives like the one that Mary shared and the frequent use of kinship referents were the obvious discourses used by employees to cultivate a family-like company environment giving the feeling of a home away from home.

My Initial Observations with the Family-like Environment

It was a hot summer day when I began working with LIX, Inc. The company was located outside of Indianapolis in an old, historic building. As I climbed my way up to the fourth floor where LIX, Inc. was headquartered, Mary quickly greeted me. Mary, who had an overly optimistic smile ushered me into the office. I say overly optimistic because, at the time, I was not aware of just how critical unpaid interns were to the overall production of the company, and it quickly became clear that her excitement was critical to maintaining the happiness of unpaid workers happiness.

Taken by surprise by Mary's cheery greeting, I almost missed a sign hanging by the front door that read, "Shoes OFF, please." This very unexpected directive was my initial introduction to the company's culture. Before I could even take my first shoe off, Mary had already begun explaining how the company embraced comfort and functioned “as a Google environment.”[2] I quickly came to understand that the Google environment she referred to was based on the office layout. It was clear that the office at LIX, Inc. embraced the open floor plan, as there were no assigned cubicles, only desks with computers, open to any of the employees.

Utilizing organizational theorist Edgar Schein’s “Three Levels of Culture” method of analysis, I could see that the message that LIX, Inc. was portraying was a "comfortable" place to work. This was communicated in a variety of ways beyond Mary's explicit description of the office environment. Schein expresses the importance in analyzing culture at different levels. He explains that it reflects the varying levels to which the cultural phenomena is observed from the outsider perspective, but also embodied within the insider (Schein 2010: Ch. 1).

In Schein’s schema, the first level of analysis are the artifacts. Artifacts, according to Schein, includes:

> All the phenomena that you would see, hear, and feel when you encounter a new group with an unfamiliar culture. Artifacts include the visible products of the group, such as the architecture of its physical environment; its language; its artistic creations; its style, as embodied in clothing, manners of address, and emotional displays; and its observable rituals and ceremonies. (Schein 2010:23)

[2] I was curious to see if other companies sought to emulate a Google company environment, as well. Multiple sources point to the culture that Google cultivates, and one blogger explained, “One of the reasons why so many people long to work for Google is because of its unique company culture. The corporate tech giant is famous for treating its employees like gold and providing them with innumerable perks in a laid-back, fun work environment. Unlimited free gourmet food and snacks; complementary massages; on-site daycares; and free fitness classes and gym memberships are just a few of the many benefits offered to Google employees—or “Googlers” as they are called,” (Blackiston 2017). This environment creates drive, creativity, and competitiveness. This is critical because Google’s success is based on innovation and collaboration, which is cultivated through their culture. More, it keeps employees in the office, working longer (as they are happier), bringing in larger revenue, and creating larger profit margins for the company.

Before even walking into the small office space, the artifacts presented themselves, as these were the observable objects within the office space. “Shoes OFF, please.” These three words greeted every person who entered the small firm. Not questioning my new place of work, I followed suit, took my shoes off, and placed them on the shoe rack that was located next to the main door. The floorplan of the office was intriguing. Mary shared that the original owner of the building had designated the fourth floor as his living quarters, so their office space resembled an apartment. The un-traditional layout of the office space played into the company’s role of family-oriented identity, as Mary explained, it “Brought home to the employees.” Before I had a chance to explore of the office space, Mary quickly took me into her office and began orientation.

Orientation consisted of the interns convening around Mary’s desk, sitting on the large couch she had in her office. This was followed with a short PowerPoint presentation, which was even briefer due to Mary skipping through the majority of the slides.[3] The sections that I was able to catch a glimpse of shared things such as the company’s mission statement, what the overall business objective of the company is, and descriptions of their target audience. At one point in the presentation, Mary came across a slide that was no longer relevant and shared a very vocal profanity (demonstrating her obvious frustration), which she laughed off because she quickly remembered the interns were in the room, and continued with the presentation. When the presentation concluded, Mary explained, “As you can see, we’re a very unique company and one that really cares about our interns,” (Mary alluded to the collaborative environment the company

[3] As I became closer with Mary during my internship/fieldwork, I knew she did not particularly like orientation because it felt repetitive and unnecessary. Mary’s guidance as an HR Director focused more on mentorship rather than micromanaging. To Mary, many of the slides in the PowerPoint that she had skipped focused on company workplace expectations, dress, and other topics that confined and defined how employee/interns could act in the workplace rather than allowing them to work as a unique individual. Mary shared that she found the orientation template online because Ted required her to have this format available for incoming employees/interns.

cultivates as indicating their care and concern for the interns). Mary concluded orientation. “Are you ready to meet the rest of the staff?”

Nodding our heads, Mary walked us around the small office. First, she walked us into the conference room that was directly across from her office. The large desk with chairs surrounding it resembled that of a traditional office meeting space. More so, this was the first room in the office that actually felt like an office space. With a large projector, a white-board, and a device in the middle of that table that could make conference calls, this room was unlike the other desks in the office that had flowers, pictures, employee’s food and drinks, and other personal items belonging to employees.

> Mary: “We really only use this room when we have meetings, so make sure to keep the light off otherwise.”

It was fascinating to me that the office space that looked and functioned as a traditional office space was the least used room by the employees. Leaving the conference room, Mary brought me into the lounge area, a space that was clearly designed as a living room, in the original floorplan. “Tom, our CEO, thinks these were a great idea, but he’s the only one that actually uses these things,” Mary explained pointing to two large, red gaming chairs. The gaming chairs were clearly meant to be tangible symbols of the company’s “comfortable” environment that Mary kept reiterating throughout the tour.

Finally, Mary brought us into two additional rooms where the case managers and Leia worked. The case manager’s room has a similar large wooden desk as the conference room did. However, in this room, there was a large standing desk where Lindsey frequently worked. The case managers also used the large, wooden desk as a workspace, which they shared. This layout felt unlike a traditional office space and more like a workplace you would have in a high school art class. Everyone shared the table and worked at the table, and no one needed any additional workspace because all of the necessary tools needed were provided (pencils, pens, paper, and computers). More so, I could not help but notice that the employees were wearing jeans and tee shirts. Some employees even had headphones in listening to music. For a moment, it felt like I was at someone's home, not an office.

Crossing the hallway and entering Leia's room, this, too, felt like anything but a traditional office space. Leia's office had a large couch that usually was being used by an employee, and she had a large, glass desk. Around the room, it felt like a jungle, as Leia's entire west-facing wall was home to nearly twenty indoor plants. This atrium-like space made me feel as if I were anywhere but an office space. Leaving Leia's room, the quick tour was completed, and Mary was ready to share with me my daily tasks.

During this short tour, it was easy to distinguish the observable artifacts. These artifacts clearly shared that the company did not wish to function as a traditional corporate environment, but rather create an environment where employees felt at-home in. However, Schein explains that the artifacts are only the surface level to the overall analysis of a company's culture. The next level of analysis is the espoused beliefs and values of the company. To understand them requires more than looking at an office layout and furniture. Schein explains that a good start point to analyze espoused values are through a company's mission statement. I was able to easily find LIX, Inc.'s mission statement on their website and gain a better understanding of their values and beliefs. The company's mission statement incorporates important attributes such as the need to "remain as a small, family owned business to their clients" and to "avoid the entrenchment and privilege that comes from the environment of a corporate meritocracy." While the mission statement seemingly criticizes meritocracies, I believe that competitively driven environments that corporate meritocracies create would not be beneficial for the small company. It became clearer to me that the mission statement emphasized both the “family-like” environment of the company and the small size of the company. They seem to suggest that as a smaller company, they inherently had the ability to create relationships that are more personal with customers and with employees.

Within the first few days, I was able to gain a better understanding on LIX, Inc.’s espoused values. During my first days in the office, I closely observed interactions among employees and the COO. Only being exposed to traditional corporate structures with implemented hierarchical divides, I expected employees and upper management to have a very formal, professional relationship. However, I quickly found that LIX, Inc. did not function in such a way. When meeting Leia, the COO, for the first time, Mary had taken me directly to her office without notifying her beforehand. Rather than knocking on Leia’s door, Mary walked into the room and introduced me. Leia had already been standing when I walked in and we exchanged ‘hello’ with one another, but she did not offer a traditional handshake. Feelings of hierarchy felt non-existent as the introduction felt as casual as meeting someone on the streets of Indianapolis (or at another public venue). Mary made the introduction quick, but it quickly set the tone for future employee/employer interactions that I would have with her. In order to fit into the company’s environment, I had to become comfortable with the informality between upper management and myself, or I would not be adhering to the company’s espoused values and beliefs.

Much like the espoused values, Schein explains that the underlying assumptions of a company, the third level of analysis, are the most difficult to uncover. These are the things that employees take for granted, such as, the terms of how individuals are supposed to behave, how they are supposed to experience the workplace, what they can expect from their employer, and what they are expected to give. Schein explains basic underlying assumptions as becoming:

> So taken for granted that you find little variation within a social unit. This degree of consensus results from repeated success in implementing certain beliefs and values. In fact, if a basic assumption comes to be strongly held in a group, members will find behavior based on any other premise inconceivable. (Schein 2010:28)

I was able to unravel an underlying assumption within my first few weeks at the company. Lindsey, a case manager, and Leia, the COO, demonstrated this one instance for me. It was busy day in the office, and as I was finishing work, I realized that I needed Leia's help on filling out paperwork properly. As I walked into Leia's office, without knocking (something I was still getting used to), I encountered Lindsey laying on Leia's couch wrapped in a blanket. Lindsey explained, "I am freezing in this office, why can't we turn the heat on?" Leia gave Lindsey a laugh and explained to me that Lindsey worked in Leia's office frequently as opposed to doing work in her own office. As I left the room, I heard casual laughter and non-work related discussion. In that moment, it was evident that the taken for granted assumptions within the workplace were shown through the informal relationships and interactions among upper management and the employees.

To understand why this phenomenon was occurring, I turned to Karen Ho, author of *Liquidated*. In this ethnography, Ho focused on Wall Street investment bankers and their firms to demonstrate instability of the dominant market system, produced through corporate restructuring. This type of competitive work environment makes for a very formal setting where informalities are not welcome. Ho shares her observations of the back-office, where most of the workers:

> Are not considered "officers" (the most valued employees because they generate revenue) of the bank, and thus do not participate in elaborate orientations and training sessions, cocktails and presentations, fancy dinners and retreats. […] This powerfully hierarchical deployment of space implodes the notion of a singular, homogenous Wall Street employee. The boundaries between front, middle, and back offices resinscribe social hierarchies. (Ho 2003:79)

Wall Street culture fosters the idea of hierarchy, where people are aware of their status within a company. Employees on Wall Street understand if they are considered valued employees. More so, they understand their value as they are afforded luxuries provided by their firm. This type of environment is unlike that of LIX, Inc. With Lindsey, she was able to utilize her employer's office without thinking twice, a unique cultural component that the company fostered that is not prevalent in workspaces such as Wall Street. The environment that LIX, Inc. fostered suggested that they did not value a hierarchical workplace, but rather valued informality that alluded to an environment similar to one's home.

The Functionality of an Informal Small Business Environment

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, "small" businesses are "establishments with fewer than 250 employees, wholesalers whose annual sales amount to $5 million or less, and retail and services businesses with yearly sales of $1 million or less" (Blackford 2003:1). Within these smaller enterprises, there are major commonalities among the managerial arrangements among their labor forces and communities. Through my observations, I saw many commonalities between Dr. Mansel G. Blackford, a professor at The Ohio State University, and his analysis of the functionality within small businesses. More so, I saw his analysis within LIX, Inc., especially with regard to the lack of established hierarchy within the workplace. The following interaction occurred between a new intern and the CEO, Ted:

> Intern: “On the first day that I started interning, I was in the lounge area working on an article for the company’s blog. In came this guy in jeans and a t-shirt and he waved at me, and sat down and began working. I thought he was just another employee that I hadn’t met yet. […] later I found out that was Ted, (the CEO).”

The intern had a causal interaction with the CEO, so casual that she was not aware that it had been an interaction with someone in the company’s upper management. The functionality behind this informal conversation that occurred between the CEO and the intern is a common occurrence in what organizational theorists call "flat organizations.” The notion of the flat organizational structure is meant to benefit the employees, as their position in the company is seen as equal to that of their employer.

Smaller companies utilize the flat organizational structure because there is minimized middle management. This allows the organization to operate with ease, and resistance among employees and employers is reduced. In a study titled *Analytical Comparison of Flat and Vertical Organizational Structures*, Dr. Rishipal explains that the flat organizational structure has the ability to “increase the productivity of the organization,” and can “decrease the budget by cutting the middle men cost and decrease the communication barriers” (Rishipal 2014:58) leaving only a horizontal structure. There is still the presence of a CEO, but ideally, in a flat organization, they engage with employees as if they were employees themselves, not as their employees higher up.

This structure works well for smaller companies rather than large because larger organizations have many employees and it becomes necessary to have varying levels of hierarchy to tend to each employee. More so, a beneficial tenant within the flat organizational structure is that it places employees, even interns, along a horizontal axis with regard to positionality in the business. By doing this, the company outwardly demonstrates they cultivate and foster an environment that values of equality among those in the workplace.

Dr. Mansel G. Blackford argues that informal relationships are more possible in smaller companies like LIX, Inc. because "the elaborate hierarchies of top, middle, and lower management that normally exist in big businesses are not present" (Blackford 2003:2). When companies have traditional, hierarchical roles, informal relationships do not present themselves as they do in small businesses.[4] The need for hierarchical relationships is not necessary to create a functioning environment, as small businesses fewer employees. In part, this is due to small business being single-unit enterprises that only have one, or few, locations. Management, while necessary in small businesses, does not function in the same manner as large businesses. Ho offers further insight into the large business environment, sharing a narrative of her experience on Wall Street.

> Top executives spend hours each day during the end of the year "huddled in boardrooms or trapped on endless conference calls, sparring among themselves to determine how big the bonus pool will be, how it will be divided among the divisions, and, then, what each employee will receive" (Anderson and Thomas 2004). Such a compensation scheme, where workers struggle for recognition and "deservedness" creates an environment of competitive, even sabotaging, individualism that often cuts along the cleavages of race, gender, and class. (Ho 2003:261)

[4] Business News Daily shares a study from the office design company, Turnstone, sharing that "89 percent of the small business owner's surveyed said culture is an important contributor to a company's success. […] The research found that small businesses feel company culture positively affects them in a number of ways. Specifically, they said it boosts employee productivity and creativity, helps attract and retain both employees and customers, and helps the business grow and be more profitable" (Brooks 2014).

For employees in large businesses, revenue generating, profit-growing competition creates a hierarchical environment, as performance becomes everyone's goal. In turn, relationships are approached in the same competitive, hierarchical manner as those who are more profit/revenue generating compared to others are awarded for their contributions, while others continue to forgo personal relationships in order to achieve the same recognition. However, for small businesses, informal employee/employer relationships can occur and productivity can be maintained, as employers are better able to manage their employees due to their smaller employee base. However, while this structure is seemingly beneficial for small businesses, as each employee is thought to have an equal role in the smaller organization, many times at LIX, Inc., I found this ideal structure as unattainable.

Ritualism within Small Business 'Clan' Culture

The emphasis on personal relationship building at LIX, Inc. reflected that of a "clan" corporate culture. In an office environment, a clan culture is one that places great importance on employee participation and shared values (Schein 2010:168). In turn, the tight-knit relationships that reflect that of an extended family are seen as encouraging employee's entrepreneurialism and creativeness. This internal focus sees long-term possibilities rather than focusing on internal competition for short-term results.

Organizational theorists explain that the shared values among the employees led to collective experiences in the workplace. These shared values are not inherent, but rather, the company (such as LIX, Inc.) builds the clan culture in order to cultivate these shared values. One of the first encounters of the clan culture that I came across occurred shortly after I began my fieldwork with the small firm. It was Lindsey's birthday. Lindsey was the leading case manager as she had been with the company since it was a start-up. Her presence was one that was highly valued, and many had close, personal relationships with Lindsey.

It was mid-day when Leia came into Mary's office. Mary and I had been completing our daily tasks, but immediately halted per Leia's demand: "Mary, take Ted's credit card and go buy Lindsey a cake and a card for her birthday." Without hesitation, Mary took ahold of the CEO's credit card agreeing to her employer's request. A surprise party was in the works for Lindsey. When Mary returned with the cake and the card, I asked if this was a common celebration for someone's birthday in the office. Mary shared:

> "We celebrate birthdays, but Lindsey has been with the company since it first started. This year we really wanted to surprise her. It used to be Lindsey, Leia, and me. We were in a small and cramped one-roomed office space with our elbows ramming into one another and our shit all over the place. I'd be making phone calls and posting job listings, and I'd listen in on conversations that they'd be having with their clients. You'd be surprised just how much you pick up just from working in the same room as someone. Even though we'd want to strangle each other by the end of the day that was when we had the most laughs."

That was the first time I heard this narrative. It was one that I would continue to hear during the next seven months.

From a functionalist anthropological perspective, the narrative that Mary shared served a variety of purposes, and one that, according to William Ouchi, a business management professor at UCLA, manifests itself within a "clan-culture." Mary explained that, while they celebrated birthdays, typically it was in an informal manner. If someone were newer to the company, they would receive a verbal recognition that it was their birthday, making it aware to the employees.

For Lindsey, however, as she was a seasoned employee, she was awarded a full birthday party. Mary sharing this narrative with me served a variety of functions. As I was newer to the firm, Mary was sharing an oral narrative in order to acclimate me into the culture. By sharing the birthday narrative to me prior to the birthday celebration, it allowed me to understand the experiences of employees in the organization. Ouchi explains:

> […] Popularly told stories about founders and other key organizational actors in some organizations perform integrative and control functions by serving as persuasive and instructive exemplars of managerial paradigms. (Ouchi 1985:471)

While the narrative worked to validate the values and beliefs of the company, it was also used as an integrative tool for those the narrative was shared with. This shared narrative allowed me to understand that this birthday celebration for Lindsey was not done and should not be expected for everyone's birthday. Additionally, with the narrative that Mary shared with me regarding birthday celebrations, it became clear that I should not expect other, non-seasoned employees to have. Lastly, as I had not been a part of a birthday celebration with the company before, by being introduced to Mary's narrative, I was able to "participate" in prior birthday celebrations that would prepare me for Lindsey's birthday party. One could interpret Mary's narrative as an effort to introduce me to the history and bring me into the collectivity of the company.

Some very early anthropological ideas offer additional insights into the birthday celebration and narrative that Mary shared. In their studies of rites and rituals, Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown demonstrated the fulfillment of social functions that ceremonies and rituals were able to complete.[5]

[5] It is important to note that functionalism developed in the hands of many anthropologists after Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. However, ideas regarding rituals started with them in many ways. Malinowski's work with the Trobriand

Lindsey, who had been with the company for four years, was greatly respected by the CEO and COO. She was praised for the work she continued to do throughout the office and the amount of hours she constantly worked. The CEO and COO felt it necessary to thank her for all of the work she did. More so, her birthday celebration was the last step of the integrative process of becoming a major key organizational actor. As Lindsey continually set high standards and proved to be an integral team member, her hard work was recognized. She worked the same, if not more, hours per week as the COO, and at times, her sales even surpassed the COO's sales. There was no better time than her birthday for the CEO and COO to make a statement that they saw her as a main contributor to the company, which set her apart from the other employees. The birthday celebration, however, acts as a critical ritual in confirming Lindsey's importance to LIX, Inc. Arnold van Gennep (who succeeded Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski) offers the concept of the rites of passage that lead to status change of an individual through a transition. This new status is achieved upon the completed of three phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation.

During the birthday celebration, the first stage of separation was represented through the process of Mary obtaining the cake and card, and my efforts to get everyone to sign the card without Lindsey knowing. In this first phase, Lindsey had been separated from the rest of the organization as she was oblivious about the birthday celebration and thus detached from the rest of her colleagues who were in the know. The second stage, liminality, presented itself when

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Islanders offers an additional layer to rituals. He suggested that basic human psychological and physical needs are at the root of all rituals. He found that rituals that were seen (from an outsider perspective) as exotic or strange, played an integral role in community cohesion and stability socially. He gives the example of the Trobriand Islanders who resorted to "magic" rituals when it came to fishing in the deep ocean as opposed to the reefs. In essence, when they go beyond the reefs, they are subject to harsh waves and sharks. The rituals allowed them to establish their roles and understand the jobs that they needed done. The Trobriand Islanders maintained the psychological well-being of their tribal members through their magic rituals, but also allowed them to participate in social/economic community functions. (Malinowski 1922) everyone hid in the office's kitchen ready to surprise Lindsey for her birthday. During the liminal stage, there is ambiguity. As employees were preparing for Lindsey's celebration, many times we could hear her ask, "Where is everyone?" as everyone was focused on her celebration and not their daily work tasks. This stage also brings with it the individuals understanding and awareness that they are in this stage as it is marked by the unordinary as things are not as they usually are. As for Lindsey, she noticed the unordinary quietness of the office space, allowing her to piece together the awareness that things were not as they typically were. The in-between stage that encompasses liminality brings with it an end-stage with a way out of the period of separation. In order to do so, the ceremony masters must offer their guidance to help the individual leave this stage.

As Lindsey stood at the threshold, she was ready to leave her separated state and begin the process of reintegrating herself with the group. It was then when the ceremony master, in this case the COO, was ready to offer guidance and called her into the kitchen. As Lindsey made her way to the kitchen, the entire office was waiting. When she entered, they all yelled "Happy Birthday" and surprised her with a cake for her birthday. At that moment, Lindsey was reincorporated into the organization as she accepted the birthday surprise and her card. In that moment, the CEO and COO embraced Lindsey in a welcoming manner, but one that that established the importance of her presence within the company. What was unclear at the time is that employees would see the ritualistic ceremony of Lindsey's birthday celebration become clearer in the near future. Her new status within the company would become prevalent when the company starts to pursue expansion and growth. The CEO and COO saw Lindsey as being an integral part to growing the company, but they needed to complete the ceremonious birthday ritual in order to clearly define her importance in the company, an importance that greatly differed from that of the other employees.

Section Two – Neoliberalism within the Workplace:

The intentional manner in which the company created a "family-oriented" workplace acted as a way to conceal the inner workings of a neoliberal workplace.[6] To understand the company environment of LIX, Inc., it is critical to understand neoliberal ideology. Through the rights of private property, free markets, and free trade, neoliberalism emerges as an economic and political theory proposing that the well-being of humans can be advanced by the liberalization of entrepreneurial freedoms (Harvey 2005). The state becomes the creator and protector of the frameworks to these practices.

Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of the United Kingdom, was a leading proponent of neoliberalism policies and practices, and understanding her beliefs is critical in understanding LIX, Inc.'s workplace. With Thatcher's belief that free markets and economic growth were compliments, she moved away from Keynesian economic policy that much of the world engaged with in the early twentieth century. Thatcher's stances were centered on the deregulation of financial markets, the increase of state-ownership, and decreasing the power of trade unions. Neoliberalism's economic model has become a curious and creative theory, and its effects have become objects of study by many social scientists. Leading interpreter of neoliberalism, Elise Edwards, professor at Butler University, shares:

> When construed in the most general of terms, neoliberalism is a political and economic set of principles and practices that champion the efficiency of market forces, the preeminent importance of private property rights, and the necessity of maintaining both to guarantee

[6] Much of what I received as values and underlying assumptions within the company culture, (clan culture, employee/employer relationships, birthday celebrations, and the 'relaxed' environment) were understandings and narratives that were critical to keeping the workplace afloat.

> individual rights, freedoms, and prosperity. According to a neoliberal ethos, human happiness and welfare are best served by markets free of state control and regulations, unencumbered flows of labor and products, and a system governed by an ethic of individual initiative and responsibility. (Bourdieu 1998; Carrier 1997; Graeber 2010; Harvey 2003, 2007) […] The effects of neoliberal restructuring include the privatization and commodification of public goods and what Harvey (2007) refers to as "state redistribution," or state involvement in the upward redistribution of wealth and intensified social inequality. Across a diversity of cultural spaces and economies, neoliberal principles have produced fundamental shifts in relations between citizens and the state, labor and capital, and production and consumption. (Edwards 2013)

Neoliberalism is believed to support economic growth and aid in the achievement of human progress and development. The ideology that is neoliberalism has provided a framework for my own fieldwork. Neoliberal ideology presents itself within LIX, Inc. through employer's actions and values. More so, neoliberal ideology has allowed me to analyze specific themes within LIX, Inc. that lead me to conclude that there were major contradictions to the family-oriented environment that the company was attempting to portray to their employees within their workplace.

Neoliberal Policies and the Development of Employee Skills

It was late October when I was sitting in Mary's office helping her with work. Mary had just recently received an email from a potential employee with a complaint. The potential employee had applied for a virtual position with the company as a claims researcher. When hired, this role requires the new employee to pay a $300.00 fee to attend a three-hour long training session. On this specific day when Mary received the complaint, Ted was in the office. While Mary was discussing with me the employees issue with the payment, Ted walked in:

> Ted: “What’s going on?”

> Mary: “I received complaint from a CR [Claims Research] who doesn’t want to pay the fee for training. He thinks we should pay it for him.”

Ted’s demeanor had changed when Mary shared this with him. He aggressively responded,

> Ted: “Do these people not understand that this is one of a kind training? You can’t find training like this anywhere else. Why would we offer this training for free? Just so they can go out and duplicate this work?”

Ted and Mary exchanged their thoughts on the individual’s complaint in the e-mail. While they both agreed that payment was necessary for training, Ted’s neoliberal mindset became painstakingly obvious. He believed that employees should pay their own fees to train themselves, as this would elicit their investment in themselves. More so, Ted hinted that if he were to provide this training free, that they could simply go out on their own and “copy” what the company is doing by “duplicating” what was taught in the training.

What I also found through my time spent around Ted was that he valued employees who would think entrepreneurially. I saw this mindset emerge when Ted discussed training new employees. He believed that the employee would become the owner of their education if they paid for it, which in turn is seen as the employee capitalizing on their entrepreneurial mindset. For Ted, he believed that employees should prove their commitment to their role by investing in their own training, therefore, proving their loyalty to the company. The company did not believe that it was their responsibility to provide education to their potential employees without a compensatory fee.

Many who turned down the virtual position disagreed with this perspective. There were those that made it through the interview process, and when told about their mandatory fee for training, accepted and embraced the ownership of their education[7] and happily paid for training.

Economist, Alfred Marshall, offers an additional layer of insight as he explains that in capitalist systems, there are no markets for skills or labor that tie a worker to their employer. Rather, a worker is tied by an imperfect market in their future job. Ideally, this suggests is there is a certain freedom of the employee that emerges between the employee/employer relationships (such as, an employee can leave their current position even if there is not a position readily available). Capitalist rhetoric suggests that, with these “missing markets,”[8] the development of a worker becomes dependent on the unselfishness of the employer. This proposed theory by Marshall suggests that, because there are no contracts (such as futures contracts), or a market to secure an employee’s labor to an employer, that employers will underinvest in their employees learning. (Hodgson 2016: 5, 244). This unrealistic expectation of skills development in a capitalist society is seen also in neoliberal theory.

> We meet the difficulty that whoever may incur the expense of investing capital in developing the abilities of the workman, these abilities will be the property of the workman himself; and thus the virtue of those who have aided him must remain for the greater part of its own reward. (Hodgson, 2015:244; Marshall 1920:565)

[7] One incoming employee shared that she was happy to pay the $300.00 for training while praising LIX, Inc. for providing an online platform in order to do so.
[8] A missing market is a market that does not exist even though there is a need for it. This is because markets must meet certain conditions in order to form (Hodgson 2016).

In neoliberal theory, as the social state no longer holds responsibility in providing needs such as education or training, this becomes the responsibility of the employee. In turn, this creates an employee that becomes more entrepreneurial as they take action for their own training.

Neoliberal Workplace and the 1099 Worker

The neoliberal workplace presented itself not only during the hiring process at LIX, Inc., but also after employees were hired as well. I was sitting in Mary's office helping her with work when it occurred to me that she had never mentioned how she administrated employee benefits. With a basic understanding of the human resources sector, I was aware that this was typically a role that an individual in a human resource position was meant to oversee. When I asked:

"Mary, how do you administer employee benefits?"

Mary responded:

"Oh, I don't have to. All of the employees are contracted."

Contracting workers was an obvious business choice for the company, as it is a cheaper and more risk-averse route. In a business context, independent contractors differ from that of a traditional employee. The "employees" at LIX, Inc. were contracted for a particular job, and received payment only for the work that they completed. According to the Small Business Administration, "independent contractors are business owners, and are not their clients' employees," (Small Business Administration 2017). Independent contractors do not receive employee benefits, nor are they protected under the same legalities as standard employees. While the employees at LIX, Inc. are not legally considered employees, the CEO and COO have cultivated a company culture that suggests they are employees, regardless of their independent contract status. After conducting more research regarding independent contractors, this made me reexamine my field notes, as I wanted to reexamine my understanding of the relationships at LIX, Inc. More so, I had a change in perception in how I viewed LIX, Inc.'s employee/employer relationships. I began to question the interactions I saw, and how they changed knowing the employees were contracted. By choosing to contract their workers, the company functioned in keeping with neoliberal theory.

> Neoliberalism upholds that the individual is generally the best judge of his or her interests, and that the economic ends are generally best pursued through a market system involving private ownership and contractual exchange. (Hodgson 2005:1)

A contracted worker is seen as owning their means of production. This differs from traditional employees who receive payments for their labor, which is "owned" by their employers. Independent contractors are seen as providing a service and not being "owned" by an employer. Arguments in favor of this kind of system deem that it is advantageous for both employers and employees: workers are motivated by the meritocratic system to do their best work, which benefits the company, and, the most successful workers are justly compensated more than their peers are. As their compensation is based on their output, the decentralized system of the contractual agreement instills an entrepreneurial and self-managing worker. However, I began to question: are the contracted individuals really benefiting from this exchange as much as is suggested in theory? I asked Mary:

> "What is it like being a 1099 (ten ninety-nine)?"
>
> Mary: "It has its ups and downs. Taxes are a bitch, but I have an awesome accountant. I went to high school with her. She always gets me a crazy amount refunded. The insurance sucks though. I make too much for Medicaid and not enough for the one me and the kids are on now."

Interestingly enough, Mary, while being self-employed based on her independent contractor status, did not seem to mind the lack of benefits that come from being a standard employee. From the company's standpoint, they provide their workers with the basic work-related necessities that standard employees are provided who work based on a W2 or W4. In the case of LIX, Inc., the contracted workers are provided computers, office supplies, office space, and additional amenities they need in order to complete their daily tasks. A controversial topic, yet rapidly growing practice indeed, many companies are turning to hiring independent contractors over standard employees.[9] While the "employees" at LIX, Inc. are not classified as employees (as they are considered self-employed), because of the rhetoric used in the company, from here on out I will continually refer to them as employees.

The decision to hire 1099 contracted workers, a neoliberal act within the workplace, is a direct contradiction to the family-friendly environment, espoused by LIX, Inc. management. Therefore, LIX, Inc., like other small firms relying on independent contractors, seek out sociocultural means to create that ideal environment. The structure of the company suggests that it values a family-friendly environment, For instance, the owner made efforts to show they valued and supported work life balance, as reflected in the ritualistic birthday celebration with Lindsey. The company was able to momentarily suspend their work to prioritize a celebratory moment (which, the suspension of work effectively reduces the contractors' money-making opportunities, unlike for salaried worker, as this is unpaid time). Mary shared:

> "Sometimes [my youngest daughter] has to come to work with me. It drives Leia nuts, there was this one time where she was going around the office saying "Hi" to everyone,

[9] According to CNBC, over the past 20 years the "gig economy" has been increasing. This includes those operating as 1099s. The past 20 years has seen an upward of a nearly 27% increase of independent contractors than payroll employees. (Wells 2016).

> and running around like an animal. I couldn't get her under control. She would run to me, then to Lindsey's office to say "Hi." Well, she tried her luck and ran into Leia's office while she was on the phone and yelled "HI!" and ran away. Let's just say Leia was not too happy about that."

The lack of benefits are made-up through family-friendly policies. While the company does not provide benefits for health insurance or childcare, workers are allowed to bring their children in if necessary, even if this is not always a desirable option. Additionally, workers are allowed to take days off work for child-related issues. This family-friendly environment is established through the support of the employers to their staff as a way to increase productivity and overall happiness of workers. These examples reflect the shared assumptions within the company, that they value their employee's, their lives, and their families. Many of the instances that I saw to establish a family-friendly work environment were merely through the physical artifacts within the company (motivational posters, comfort spaces to sit, and technology for the employees), and espoused beliefs (mission statement). However, while the CEO and COO place emphasis on their open, flexible environment, it quickly became evident that this is contradicted through their expectations and treatment of employees.

Reciprocity within a Neoliberal Workplace

One of the hallmarks of neoliberalism is an increasing need for 'flexibility' within the labor markets. [10] As we have moved towards a more globalized world, we see increased flows of

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[10] Dr. Elise Edwards explores the relationship between popular representations of soccer and the rise of neoliberal discourse that celebrated new individualism in Japan at the turn of the millennium. Edwards explains that "neoliberal logics that necessitated an increasingly "flexible" (read: nonregular, part-time, partially-, or under-employed) work force have facilitated the rise of a discourse of individuality very much in keeping with the ideal of flexibility that champions identities and affect that work in the service of forms of transnational capitalism favoring shareholders and profit margins over employee welfare," (Edwards 2013).

information and technology that create and move goods more easily throughout the world. Worldwide, the apparent deregulation of labor protections has become widespread to meet the demand of consumers, who are broadly understood to want “lower prices” no matter the social or environmental costs. Wal-Mart is a notable example of a multinational corporation that has championed the motto “lower prices” making for a successful business model. The most obvious cases of deregulated labor are seen in developing countries where large multinational companies have outsourced their labor and citizens of those countries work in unskilled positions with little pay and long hours in hazardous working conditions. The unfortunate circumstances of globalization that are shown in developed countries, are seen in unpaid internships, such as deregulated work, long hours, little pay, and hazardous working conditions (as unpaid interns do not have means to employee benefits).

Internships were a common topic during office meetings. At any given time, the office had two to three interns who were required to be college students or recently graduated. During the summer the office had reached five interns working in the small, apartment sized office space. This comes as no surprise under neoliberal polices, as the labor market demands educated workers who are able to quickly complete the tasks they are given.

Guy Standing, author of *The Precariat* (Standing 2014) discusses the role of the intern as a modern phenomenon with university students, both current and graduated, working trivial office jobs with little to no pay. Standing explains that the intern and the internship is a means for cheap and dispensable labor for the employer (Standing 2014). However, these internships are competitive as students strive to gain additional skills and expertise in hopes of expanding their network enough for their dream careers. The internship becomes a rite-of-passage particularly for middle class university students. For small businesses like LIX, Inc., interns are an indispensable workforce.

During an office meeting, Ted and Leia were debating how to entice interns to work without compensation. The following conversation occurred about an upcoming open house the company was holding for potential interns:

> Maria: "The open house is on the 18th and the event-brite will be refreshed and set out to students. [Another intern] is working with the office at IUPUI to have a table set for multiple times so we can get the word out about our program."
>
> Leia: "Getting the word out is important. We need to take advantage of social media and our location [the office is located by four universities in the Indianapolis area]."
>
> Mary: "We need to get literature out. Start advertising it. Do we have an account with GFS (for food)?"

Leia nods her head, "yes."

> Mary: "We need to get the universities; we need to contact their internships and career heads."
>
> Ted: "We need something more than that. We need to create data mining certifications for the interns. This certifications will state that this person has done 'this much' data mining. It's a certification for the folks that come in [as interns]."[11]

[11] The certification would be given to the intern upon completion of a successful internship to commemorate and legitimize the work they put in.

The role of the intern was one that was exploited at LIX, Inc. As the interns were unpaid, the employers were able to temporarily take advantage of the free labor coming into the workplace. However, as internships have grown in importance over the past decades, the internship role has created a labor market within itself through the act of reciprocity.

Cultural anthropologist, Marshal Sahlin, is credited with the identification of balanced reciprocity. The general idea surrounding reciprocity is that individuals will typically repay actions. When analyzing the internship program at LIX, Inc., balanced reciprocity emerged as the type of reciprocal action between employer and intern. Balanced reciprocity is seen as the more economically driven form of reciprocal action. Sahlin explains balance reciprocity as referring to:

> […] Direct exchange. In precise balance, the reciprocation is the customary equivalent of the thing received and is without delay. Perfectly balance reciprocity, the simultaneous exchange of the same type of goods to the same amounts […] Balance reciprocity is less 'personal' than generalized reciprocity. (Sahlin 2013: Ch. 5)

When looking at the internship program, it became obvious the exchange of goods that were occurring. The company was looking for unpaid interns to offer their help around the office, while the intern was looking for a position that would strengthen and differentiate their resume for future employers upon graduation. This balanced reciprocity arises as the goods exchanged remain within the labor market.

In this retrospect, reciprocity no longer becomes about the physical object exchanged between one another, rather it becomes about the relationship of the exchange that has been shaped by competition (Mensink 2011:71). College students must remain competitive when it comes to internship positions as this allows them experience to benefit their job search after graduation.

Vice versa, small companies, such as LIX, Inc. exploit the college student and the internship for their own benefit and free labor. The unpaid internship reflects the same characteristics as the 1099 worker; each is expected to remain entrepreneurial, flexible, and competitive in order to own the means of their production. With the 1099 worker, they are motivated by the meritocratic system, which provides compensation based on performance. In turn, this creates an entrepreneurial worker. With the intern, as they obtain the unpaid internship, they are essentially becoming self-managing and entrepreneurial as their ability to utilize any potential references when job searching in the future, which is in direct relation to the work they put in during their time at LIX, Inc. This is advantageous for both employers and interns as the intern becomes motivated to leave an impression. Both of these workers are able to become self-managing and entrepreneurial because the CEO has cultivated a workplace in order for these types of workers to emerge. More so, as discussed in the following section, this workplace is cultivated from the CEO's entrepreneurial mindset, demonstrated by the labor force at LIX, Inc.

Section Three – The Entrepreneurial Mindset and the Emergence of Symbolism:

Ted: "Alright everyone, share your ideas!"

Each meeting ended with Ted encouraging employees to share a creative idea he/she had, either towards their own work or for the company as a whole. As a small company, it was easy for the CEO to rally all of the employees and encourage them to share ideas, but many of the employees did not put much effort into prospective business ideas. This was interesting to me because the CEO was giving each employee an open platform to discuss any changes to the company or even explore further business options.

It became clear that the CEO embodied the clear characteristics to that of an individual with an entrepreneurial mindset. When I began my fieldwork, the entrepreneurial mindset was not clear to me until I began doing further research. After engaging with Rita McGrath's *Entrepreneurial Mindset*, it became clear that Ted exhibited qualities such "setting the work climate, orchestrating opportunity-seeking and moving particular ventures forward personally" (McGrath 2010:318). A central tenant of an entrepreneurial spirit tends is to evolve an organization so it does not remain static. This is seen as a general evolution for a company. Diversification of a company's services or products is a common integration that a company can undergo to not remain static. The role of the entrepreneur is to cultivate an environment that can take on this growth through the integration of new subcultures, technologies, or other assimilations within the organization management deems necessary.

What also became clear was that the characteristics that were exhibited by the CEO were not shared among all of the employees, which explained why majority of employees did not jump on the chance to share new, creative business ideas. McGrath distinguishes the difference between a CEO as an entrepreneur owning a small business, which is contrasted to a small business owner. A small business owner is someone who owns a business deals with known products and risks. The entrepreneur, however, seeks:

> Profitability and growth, [and] the business is characterized by innovative strategic practices and continued growth, and may be seen as having a different perspective from small business owners in the actual development of their firm. (Sadler-Smith 2003:48)

One criticism that employees had when sharing their ideas was that they felt their ideas were unheard, forgotten, or turned down. Early on in my fieldwork, much like other employees, I felt the five minutes at the end of the meetings where we contributed creative thoughts were wasteful as well. Many ideas felt forced, as employees felt they needed to contribute something to the discussion. Many creative ideas that were shared were never re-addressed after meetings, and employees felt their input was worthless.

Employees were not aware that there was a difference between their ideas and the calculated thinking that the CEO engaged with when an idea was shared. McGrath explains those with entrepreneurial mindsets "tightly link their strategy with their choice of projects, rather than diluting their efforts too broadly" (McGrath 2000:3). The CEO had to take into consideration if the business opportunities shared were able to capitalize on technologies already being utilized by the company. What employees were unaware of was that their shared business opportunities were not wasted; the ideas merely did not fit within the already established technologies and networks. Additionally, the employees were unaware that Ted, in actuality, did see their input as necessary for the company's growth. This is because soon one of these ideas would fit into the business model and would be pursued. It took the team, however, to offer any perspective possible in order to achieve this potential business model.

Entrepreneurial Mindset and the General Evolution of a Small Business

I was able to observe a monumental change within the company during my time in the field. Finally, the CEO was introduced to a business proposal that required little investment and capitalized on the company's already established networks. The new proposal was to integrate tax sales[12] into their services provided. It was clear why Ted saw this as a beneficial opportunity for LIX, Inc. The tax sales they were referring to were tax liens, meaning they would be the owner of a lax lien certificate, allowing them to be investors for the property owners. In a sense, the company has already started this 'middle-man' company, as they become the temporary holder of unclaimed property until it is returned to their heir. Tax sales would allow LIX, Inc. to become a temporary 'middle-man' on a property and accrue interest until the owner of the property has paid their taxes. Much as McGrath explains, this new business idea correlates closely with their current services.

What was unexpected were the changes that came with this new business idea, primary within the office environment. The office began to see changes, some changes that were abrupt, and others that were gradual. However, when the CEO locked-in on this new business idea and felt the opportunity and investment was worth moving forth, these changes became necessary in order to take on the new project. As McGrath explains, those that have the entrepreneurial mindset have the intention to grow their companies, even after years of establishing a specific company environment. This change is predicted by organizational theorists, but one that was unexpected by employees.

[12] Tax sales refers to the forced sale of property (usually real estate) by a governmental entity for unpaid taxes by the property's owner. Ted sees LIX, Inc. as being able to capitalize on this because, in tax lien states, "when a property becomes delinquent for non-payment of property taxes, the county will sell a "tax lien certificate" to an investor as a way of recouping these unpaid property taxes," and "When someone purchases one of these tax lien certificates, they are not buying an ownership interest the property. Instead, they are buying a lien on the property. As the owner of a tax lien certificate (aka – tax lien), the delinquent property owner still owns the property. However, the lien holder is entitled to repayment for the amount of the tax lien certificate plus interest," (Williams 2016).

In organizational theory, the main principle of organizational change is seen as an evolutionary process in which "the overall corporate culture will adapt to changes in its external environment and internal structure" (Schein 2010:275). The general evolution within an organization is inevitable as it becomes about growth. Anthropologist Franz Boas contributes additional insight to general evolution within tribes through diffusion:

> When studying the culture of any one tribe, more or less close analoga of single traits of such a culture may be found among a great diversity of peoples… The ideas do not exist everywhere in identical form, but they vary… The influence of external and internal factors upon elementary ideas embodies one group of laws governing the growth of culture. (Boas 1940:271)

Boas is credited with the concept of diffusion as being a feasible instrument in the discussion of exchangeable cultural ideas among cultures located within nearby areas. This discussion of culture exchange is a direct rejection of Boas' predecessors (who believed in the pre-determined evolution of culture) by explaining that the traits a culture embodies arises from the spreading of cultural traits. Boas argued that if one were to view similar cultural forms in societies relatively close in proximity, that there would be an original origin. As groups interact with one another, cultural forms are shared and ideas become diffused among these groups. In essence, Boas argues that cultural forms are uninventive through the process of diffusion.

As companies grow, they must take on similar characteristics to that of companies that had been successful in growing their consumer base. This stage "involves diversification, growing complexity, higher levels of differentiation and integration, and creative syntheses into new and more complex forms" (Schein 2010:275). This general evolution suggested by organizational theorists is similarly seen by anthropologists, particularly Herbert Spencer, whose ideas suggested that cultural development (such as increased complexity) were very social-Darwinist in their own right. As new subcultures emerge within the organization, and as basic assumptions transform and take on new meanings, the changes that occur internally become inevitable as the organization seeks growth.

These organizational changes were precipitated by the general evolution occurring. As the company remained financially successful, the owners of the firm quickly began to think of ways to invest the money, and one major avenue was expansion of their product line. This entailed a significant change in business philosophy. Management took on a more hierarchal role, enforcing new rules that were not present prior to discussions of expansion. I came to understand expansion – and the structural and human resources changes that come with it – is seen in contemporary business circles as the "natural" and necessary evolution of small business. Modern business orthodoxy represents expansion as the expected and correct path for those with an entrepreneurial mindset. However, in order to expand, various measures and changes must be implemented within the workplace, including a major transformation of company philosophy. (McGrath 2000:18)

The White Board as Symbolism for an Entrepreneurial Mindset

I began to observe noticeable changes around the office, primarily with regard to interactions among upper management and the employees. During bi-weekly meetings, all seven employees, including the three interns, would be present. From an analytical standpoint of flat organizations, the decentralization and integration of all employees is a benefit for the company as the entire labor force is participating in discussion of the company. The decentralized, flat structure also provided significant symbolism within the company.

As I participated in bi-weekly meetings with LIX, Inc., symbolism presented itself early on through the social structure of the employees. As it reached 9:00 AM every Monday and Thursday morning, all the employees rushed to the boardroom to begin the hour-long discussion. For the hour beforehand, the employees were flooding Mary's emails with their weekly updates so she could place them on a worksheet and print off a copy for everyone to have during the meeting. The following interaction occurred regularly during the beginning of my fieldwork as employees made their way to the boardroom.

The rush the boardroom usually happened around 8:56 AM. Mary would shout to the office: "Has everyone sent me the most recent updates that they want me to print for the office meeting?" In this moment, various employees usually began responding yes. Mary followed this response with, "Alright everyone. Get in the boardroom now!" After this interaction, employees would get their coffee ready for the meeting, and begin placing their coffee down at different seats around the large boardroom meeting table. Mary was in charge of connecting two employees that were located out of state to the speakerphone so they could be present for the meeting. By 8:59 AM, Leia would make her way to the boardroom, and the meeting would begin.

During my first month of attending meetings, the symbolism of space in the boardroom was quite interesting. During my first meeting, I was one of the last employees in the boardroom as I was asked to obtain an item in the office for another employee. As I re-entered the room, I noticed that the only seat available was the one that was at the head of the table. Having been with the company for less than a week, I felt uncomfortable sitting at the head, but had no other choice. I assumed this seat was "assigned" to the COO, Leia, or the CEO, Ted, (on days that he was present in the office, which was rare). I began to take notice during the remainder of the boardroom meetings that Leia nor Ted rarely sat at the head of the table. Symbolically, the head of the table is presented as representing a hierarchical divide among the heads of the table and the others sitting around. However, this symbolic positioning in the boardroom reflected the underlying efforts (or in organizational theory, underlying assumptions) by the owners to create the atmosphere of a flat organization, one that values inclusivity rather than hierarchy.

The boardroom became an integral aspect in my own analysis to understand and interpret the culture of LIX, Inc. Clifford Geertz, a symbolic anthropologist, expresses the importance in the role of the anthropologists as unraveling the webs of meaning in different cultures, and interpreting them. He further explains that culture is a:

> Historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life. (Geertz 1973:89)

Geertz suggests that culture is distinguished from social structure, as culture is merely the patterning of various meanings that are embedded within symbols. More so, Geertz suggests that it becomes the anthropologist's role to unravel the web a society's culture.[13] Analyzing LIX, Inc., I engaged with Geertz as he suggested that anthropologists are translators for culture. I found that there was much symbolism in the boardroom, some of which allowed me to analyze from an anthropological perspective. The social structure of the workplace was presented through the seating arrangement in the boardroom, a symbolic component of the company's open culture. As

[13] Geertz describes culture as being "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973:89).

employees sat wherever they wished, this alluded to the open, non-hierarchical workplace. However, much symbolism remained within this small space.

The space of the boardroom allowed employees to contribute during the meetings and share major milestones or projects they were currently working on. This created an environment of motivation, as employees were required to participate and share with all employees their work. The boardroom also became a place where shared organizational goals were established. Additionally, Dr. Rishipal explains that within flat organizational structures, employees benefit from open discussions especially with the goal-setting process. Employees are empowered, which helps the company obtain goals that feel more shared and are known among all employees. Further, "this shared process can foster community and create shared organizational goals" (Rishipal 2014:16). As shared goals are being established, innovation and creativity has an arena to flourish. With effective communication among employees and employers, as:

> Ideas come from a wider range of sources in a flat organizational structure than in companies with many layers of management. By giving everyone in a company an equal voice in submitting new ideas and feedback on operational processes, products, services, business models, and company policies, companies can discover new ideas that may lead to competitive success. (Rishipal 2014:16)

Innovation and creativity was one facet that the CEO, Ted, particularly emphasized during bi-weekly meetings. Ted was rarely present during the workweek as he had multiple companies he owned and managed aside from LIX, Inc. However, when it came time for the meetings, he was either physically present, or he called in on a conference call. His push for innovation and creativity among employees was painstakingly evident, especially through his continual emphasis on the company's whiteboard. The whiteboard was exactly that, a large whiteboard that Ted encouraged his employees to use every meeting. When Ted was present, he had employees use the whiteboard to create a visual representation of their goals and their weekly plans. Most employees despised having to use the whiteboard during meetings. During my first days at the office, I came across the large whiteboard in the conference room. I asked Mary what it was for. She explained:

> "Everyone writes what they're working on during the week, and things they want to accomplish. Ted checks it to make sure we're actually writing things down. It's damn frustrating because we talk about this during the meetings, then we're expected to take time and re-write it on the board. No to mention I also type out a word doc for the meetings with the same info on it."

The whiteboard was an overtly obvious symbol for employee creativity and motivation. While employees were frustrated because they felt they were reiterating information that was discussed during the meeting (as their weekly goals were printed on a sheet of paper for all employees to reference during the meeting) it also brought a great sense of accomplishment. As employees achieved their goals during the week, they would pick up the dry erase marker and erase a task that was completed, providing a sense of accomplishment. Motivation became apparent, as employees in the same division, primarily the case management division, would race one another to complete their goals. Surprisingly, the whiteboard helped to create and strengthen relationships, even when it was created to boost competition.[14] This not only created healthy competition in the

[14] This is in part because the employees were 1099 contracted workers. They were not competing for a limited amount of sales, but rather for their own entrepreneurial benefit. If someone was making more sales, they were not seen as taking this business from another employee. This allowed employees to share the ways they approached clients, and share organizational tactics that worked well for them (many times the case workers would share their contacts in local governments with one another if they were both doing business in that state, as the government official would be aware of the company and the information they required).

workplace, but also adhered to the friendly, relationship-oriented environment that the company was attempting to create within their culture. Many times Ted would remind employees to:

> "Encourage […] one another. If you see a project on the whiteboard and you think you can contribute to it, do it. This is why we started the whiteboard project, to help each other."

While the whiteboard was despised and seen as unnecessary to employees, I witnessed it strengthen relationships. If an employee was struggling to meet their weekly goals, another employee was able to offer their help. In a flat organization, this is possible because, "employees are empowered and expected to take responsibility for a range of traditionally managerial decisions in their daily routines" (Rishipal 2014:59). Interestingly enough, the whiteboard also adhered to the neoliberal polices of the company as it encouraged employees to be entrepreneurial in their own work.[15] Employees at LIX, Inc. who offered their help to other employees did so on their own free will (falling subject to the entrepreneurialism facilitated by neoliberalism), as upper management was not necessary in their decision-making.

While competition seemed to be the forefront of the whiteboard, I took notice that it was symbolic of the CEO's entrepreneurial mindset. One key characteristic of an entrepreneurial mindset is that:

[15] The whiteboard reflected the neoliberal workplace. Governmentality studies, or the exercised state control over the populations body (Foucault), has found new meaning with the arrival of neoliberalism. As the market moves from the maximization of social welfare, the market creates practically. More so, it creates the normalization of preferred models for human relationships. It comes to dealing with the issue of dispersed (often-limited) information that is critical to the neoliberal account for social order. (Hayek 1944, 1960, 1976). With this occurrence, individuals prepare themselves to participate in market relations, even in the absence of a tangible market, as it is merely a construction. However, there is disciplinary power that arises from the forces of the market and disciplinary actions taken by individuals because of the market. In a sense, the construction of the market is to create an individual who is entrepreneurial in spirit (Jones and Spicer 2005). Unfortunately, employees were unaware of these discussions and would not be for another two months when the CEO and COO made clear their future intentions for the company. However, until then, employees were subject to the changes that upper management deemed necessary to begin expanding the company.

> They engage the energies of everyone in their domain. Habitual entrepreneurs involve many people – both inside and outside the organization – in their pursuit of an opportunity. They relate and sustain networks of relationships rather than going [at] it alone, making the most of the intellectual and other resources people have to offer and helping those people to achieve their goals as well. (McGrath 2000:3)

The whiteboard was implemented at a time of major transformative change in the company. The CEO had begun pursuing the new product line of the company, and a way for him to capitalize on this new energy was to engage with his employees and bring out the same energy in them as well. As people began to engage with healthy competition, at the same time, they were becoming more entrepreneurial in their daily work, as they took the CEO’s challenge (goals on the whiteboard), and utilized their resources around them to achieve their goals. For the CEO, the whiteboard symbolized the next stage of growth for the company as employees were strengthening their networks, increasing their sales, and becoming more interconnected in their work. The whiteboard represented a positive and quick change in the organization that was accepted by the employees. Unfortunately, not all abrupt changes were received as positive.

Section Four – Changes in Pre-Existing Corporate Culture:

Within a few months of starting my fieldwork, I began to notice changes to the office space. The furniture itself remained the same. There were the same gaming chairs, couches, and office furniture. However, new items began to accumulate. The CEO bought and installed an attachable pull-up bar on one of the doorframes. Simultaneously, I began to take notice that the COO's shoes were accumulating by the front door, as were items of clothing in her office. This was particularly interesting because, as the COO took on more of a managerial position rather than her previous, more personal mentor role, I assumed the office space would follow suit. Rather, the office space remained the same, with the addition of a few new items that belonged to the CEO and COO. The office space began to accumulate more personal, household items rather than items specifically for an office setting.

Karen Ho's fieldwork on Wall Street and its very prevalent hierarchical structured workplace offers insights as to why LIX, Inc. did not restructure the office space, but rather added to it. Ho shares her observations during her time on Wall Street, which allowed for strong comparative analysis between Wall Street banks and LIX, Inc. Ho introduces readers to 'the bullpen.' The bullpen is a small 150 feet long by 20 feet wide office space that is inhabited by investment banking analysts. Ho explains:

> Inside the gate, cramped desks, shelves, and floors overflowed with pitch books, PowerPoint presentations, and old binders of previous deal books, not to mention soda cans, footballs, gym bags, weights, change of clothes, deodorant and an extra suit hanging just in case. (Ho 2009:90)

The analysts and associates that work within this bullpen are young, straight-out of college individuals. Working over one hundred hours a week, these investment bankers rarely have a day off during the yearlong position within the company (they endure these unfavorable working conditions in hopes they will move up the ranks of the firm). The reasoning behind the sweatshop like" working conditions are to win businesses, and service deals. Therefore, in order to do that, one must be working constantly as one's personal life must be sacrificed. Ho explains that Wall Street analysts work in such conditions because, as on analyst explained:

> You could just do your job, and if you were very good you were fine, but if you were just mediocre, you would be chewed up and churned out, and somebody else would be put in the seat. . . . We worked an average day of 16 hours. Many nights we were there until eleven o'clock, getting a cab home just to turn around. (Ho 2009:89)

If analysts were not committed to their work, they would be replaced with someone willing to sacrifice their time. This was a new ideology for LIX, INC., and one that I saw the COO taking ahold of.

Coming into the office on a July Tuesday, I crossed paths with the COO, Leia, as I made my way into Mary's office. Leia looked exhausted, and she was wearing the same clothes as the day before. I smiled and gave a friendly 'hi,' but Leia did not return the gesture, rather she quickly went back into her office. Seeing my friendly attempt, Lindsey came over and explained:

> "Yeah, she [Leia] slept here last night. I don't think she got much sleep on that couch."

Leia had a small loveseat in her office, one that could comfortably be sat on. Sleeping, however, did not seem probable. Lindsey followed her statement with, "She's been doing that a lot recently." Much like the investment bankers that Ho described in her ethnography, I began to notice the same qualities in Leia. As creating more deals with clients and 'winning' their business became more important, it became evident that Leia was taking extreme measures in order to reach these goals. The workout equipment in the office indicated that Leia no longer had time to engage in her strenuous workout regimes that she usually shared with employees. Rather, she had to create a space in the office where she could continue working out, but also continue to do work. As her shoes and clothing piled in her office, it became evident that Leia's focus was on sales and business, not on going home.

Much as Ho explained, in Leia's office, the binders and files began to pile. I was surprised to hear that she spent nights in the office sleeping because her couch did not have an inch of space for anyone to sit during the day (as it was piled with files, books, clothes, etc.). As more clients were being contacted by Leia (with the overtime that she began putting in), more files needed to be created for each case. Therefore, her office space began to reflect that of 'the bullpen' on Wall Street. Despite the focus on expanding LIX, Inc., it became clear that it was not necessary to redesign or expand the office space to do so. Rather, through the implementation of a hierarchal structure, much like that of Wall Street, and the same goals of 'winning' clients and business, all that became necessary was an allotted space to work overtime and pursue almost continuous work.

Employees began to worry about the hours that Leia was contributing and what that would entail on their end. Mary shared:

> "Do you see the way she (Leia) looks at me? I don't know what she expects. No one else in the office has kids! I'm not working past 5."

Mary began to worry that her forty-plus hour workweek was no longer sufficient. As a mother of two daughters, Mary had other obligations outside of the workplace. While others were beginning to work overtime, Mary feared her position might be at stake because she was only contributing forty hours a week. Luckily, for Mary, her position was not at stake. In fact, her work hours were reasonable. Working in human resources, many of the individuals that she was in contact with were working within the same timeframe as she. For instance, individuals that applied for a position with the company expected their interview to occur during the 9-5 workweek. However, Leia and the other case managers had to keep hours much like those of the Wall Street investment bankers.

> Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of work for analysts and associates, and one of the central reasons they must stay at the office until the wee hours of the morning, is that they are catering of the schedules of the senior bankers. (Ho 2009:97)

In a similar fashion, Leia and the case managers had to cater to the schedules of their clients. Many of the clients they needed to have discussion with were either working during the hours they contacted them, or unavailable doing other tasks. This is because their clients were sought out specifically by the company and were not expecting someone to contact them during the workweek. Sometimes the best time to get in contact with a client was after they were home from work and were able to look over paperwork and have a more engaged conversation with a representative of LIX, Inc. Case managers' work largely depended on the schedules of their clients. For that reason, it benefitted them to stay later either in order to get ahead of their cases, or to begin new cases.

The Emergence of Rank

The first change that occurred rapidly was the manner that the CEO and COO interacted with their employees. The informal interactions that had taken place during my first month and a half with the company ceased. No longer could employees walk into the COO's office without knocking on her door if they had a question. I believe this was in part because the COO had been spending more time at the office, and her office space began to reflect that of a bedroom at home (i.e. clothes laid out, hygienic products, and in the case of the COO, less organization than would be expected in an office space). The only individuals allowed in the COO's office were those who were meeting with her, or those that were working on a project with her. The COO's once "open couch policy" now became her place for storing binders and potential projects. Additionally, informal conversations that occurred in the lounge area and kitchen became noticeably less informal when the COO entered the room. Edgar Schein explains this transformative interaction:

> As the number of people in the organization increases, it becomes increasingly difficult to coordinate their activities. One of the simplest and most universal mechanisms that all groups, organizations, and societies use to deal with this problem is to create additional layers in the hierarchy so that the span of control of any given manager remains reasonable. (Schein 2010:270)

In the case for LIX, Inc., as the sales goals increased and the company began to implement new ways to grow the company, it became necessary for an overseeing manager to make this process smooth and manageable for employees. Unfortunately, what actually occurred around the office that employees were uninformed of was the imposition of said corporate hierarchy. Employees, myself included, were unaware at the time that the CEO and COO had decided to pursue a new business model, which employees were aware of, but this new business model also included expanding the company, which employees were unaware of. By engaging with a more traditional, hierarchical management structure for the company, employees had to adapt to the new environment. This hierarchical structure took place in a vertical movement (as hierarchies are inherently vertically stratified moving away from the current horizontal/flat organizational structure that LIX, Inc. had), as some positions were tasked with managerial positions, and others were not. This posed as difficulty for employees that had become accustomed to the flat organizational structure that valued employee flexibility and comfort.

For LIX, Inc., as the CEO and COO began discussing expansion and the necessary transformations that needed to take place internally, rather than formally stating these new rules and values, the CEO and COO did so in an informal matter. The informal imposition of the hierarchical structure was evident in the boardroom. The COO once sitting among her peers, now began sitting at the head of the table. I began to notice this power shift mid-July and it persisted until my fieldwork concluded in December. The COO's positioning in the boardroom reflected the new values and norms that upper management was creating in the workplace. Employees, however, were not receptive to the changes that were occurring and began feeling insecure as the relationship between them, the CEO, and COO became more hierarchical.

New Roles and Job Insecurity

Mary began exhibiting feelings of job insecurity mid-July, almost a month and a half since I had been working closely with her. Mary shared with me one day:

"I feel like they're giving me petty work. I'm drowning right now."

When I had begun working with Mary, her primary role was human resource management. She was a one-person HR team for the small company. Her daily tasks generally consisted of sourcing resumes, contacting potential employees, and tending to other specific requests of the CEO. However, as mid-July neared and the CEO and COO began their discussions of possibly expanding the company, many internal changes began occurring, and they directly affected Mary's role within the company. She was being asked to complete new tasks that were outside of her expertise, such as research-oriented tasks. These tasks felt wasteful to Mary, as she felt she was not completing tasks rendered specifically for her human resource expertise. She felt these tasks were devaluing her specialization in human resource work. Mary was unable to see her educational training, years of human resource work within these new tasks, and she was not able to fully understand what her role was within the company. For instance, Ted had asked Mary to complete locational maps for the virtual employees at LIX, Inc. (These locational maps identified where the virtual employees that sold the most claims lived). Unfortunately, for Mary, Ted did not relay the importance of the locational map. Therefore, Mary felt this was a trivial task forcing her to neglect her internal work. Mary was unaware that Ted was using this locational map for future relocation purposes in order to possibly relocate the company in closer proximity to top performing virtual employees. Leia, on the other hand, was frustrated that Mary was not appropriately using her work hours to source resumes to hire employees presently. This was a clear example of the miscommunication between the CEO and the COO that left Mary at the target of criticism by both parties.[16]

It was evident Mary felt her position within the company was at stake as she asked me one day:

[16] While this represents a failure to address formal controls by management, philosopher Karl Marx offers additional insight into Mary's perception of her new role at work. As Mary felt she was "drowning in her work," Marxist theory can add additional insight to this phenomenon, as it is seen as being the objectification of labor. "The fact expresses merely that the object which labor produces – labor's product – confronts it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labor, which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the objectification of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as loss of realization of the workers objectification as loss of the object and bondage to it; appropriation as estrangement, as lamination," (Marx 1982). Marx explains that feelings similar to Mary's occur as the worker has become foreign to the work that they are tasked with and complete. Feelings of alienation to one's labor is found within Marx's analysis of the bourgeoisie society. There are those that own the means of production, or the bourgeoisie, and those that sell their ability to work, the proletariat. This society is formed through commodity relations, or the relationships between selling and buying. These commodity relations are shaped by the material world, where labor becomes an objectification of human ability. Objectification arises when workers are not connected spiritually, or cannot recognize themselves, in the work they are completing. The worker then feels alienated from their labor as a result.

"Do you think Leia (the COO) likes me? Has she said anything to you about me?"

On the day Mary asked me this, she was behind on all of her human resource work, such as phone interviews and sourcing resumes. This was not because she had been intentionally putting off these tasks, but that she was being asked to complete additional tasks specifically for the CEO, Ted. Leia had come into Mary's office earlier that morning asking her if she had sourced any resumes for a new, up-coming position the company was hoping to fill quickly. Unfortunately, Mary was unable to share any recent updates. Leia, unhappy with this response, did not respond verbally, but rather quickly exchanged a serious glance between Mary and me. Mary quickly responded:

"Alex is going to do that right now for you."

Without a further response, Leia replied with a "thank you" directed towards myself, ignoring Mary's efforts. As Laurie Kirsch, author of *Investigating the Antecedents of Team Based Clan Control*, explains, the prior team-based clan control was failing as the CEO and COO no longer placed emphasis on team-based work. It was no longer the requirement of the team to help one another complete tasks; rather the individual was required to complete all tasks regardless of time constraints. Employees accepted this change, but felt job insecurity because of it.

A Failing Integration of Corporate Culture

In order to expand, the company found it necessary to establish a more traditional, hierarchical structure so that they were able to focus on managerial tasks. Now, the CEO and COO were fostering an environment where some employees had new supervisory roles. However, the CEO and COO moved forth with this new structure without giving direction and guidance to employees. Many employees began to feel their roles in the company change, it created a sense of insecurity especially as interactions and communication between their employers changed, as well.

Mary shared with me her own personal feelings during this transformation. At the time, neither she nor I were aware as to why the office environment felt different, but we shared our perceptions of our roles within the company. Mary's feelings during this time reflected job insecurity and alienation to the labor she was tasked with by her employers. What Mary shared can be explained using Ouchi's typology of organizational controls, which are either formal or informal. While a more traditional structure was being established, the CEO and COO were failing to directly address reasoning's why there were changes occurring in the workplace.

The company's lack of communication was due to the company's previous organizational environment. The CEO and COO in the past tended to focus on informal controls, or the "unwritten, unofficial values, norms, shared values, and beliefs that guide employee actions and behaviors" (Kirsch 2010:471). Rather than clearly stating that the company was implementing a more hierarchal structure (a formalized manner), the CEO and COO were attempting to change the environment in an informal manner, or also known as clan control. Clan control is where "work-related behavior is motivated by shared norms and values, as well as a common vision, [where] individuals attempt to be accepted or 'regular' members of a team" (Kirsch 2010:1). The company fostered this environment over the past four years. However, as the CEO and COO were working towards expansion, the clan control that was established for the past four years was no longer adequate and more as formal control became necessary. Formal controls have "focus on pre-specified rules, performance targets, and hierarchical relationships" (Kirsch 2010:1). Unfortunately, employees were unaware that the CEO and COO were attempting to use clan methods to implement formal controls as employees were used to their team-based focus. Now, employees were more focused on strict performance targets.

Additionally, employees were unaware that the CEO had given the COO the task of being a managerial presence within the office. Therefore, the new formal controls were not being communicated to employees. This was in large part due to the CEO's entrepreneurial mindset as it was not beneficial for him to be the leading hierarchical presence within the company. Rather, the CEO's priorities focused on external factors in order to make expansion possible.

The COO's new role became focused on internal processes and management of employees. Many times Mary found herself being an intermediary between the CEO and COO as they had differences in internal versus external processes. Ted relied on Mary to complete tasks deemed for external processes, while the COO was unaware and needed Mary's focus on internal processes. Not only was miscommunication between employers and employees, but miscommunication also was occurring between the two employers/owners. Without formalized controls to alleviate these miscommunications and establish clear projected goals of the company, employees such as Mary found themselves stressed and unclear of their role within the company.

The Stages of Learning and Change

When an organization undergoes change, those within the organization are subject to the dynamics of psychosocial change. The vital assumptions that surround any change within a human system can be derived from Kurt Lewin, often referred to as the founder of modern psychology, and his basic model regarding learning and change. Lewin established 'The Stages of Learning and Change" as a basic model to explain the disequilibria that occurs within humans as they undergo change. The application of Lewin's model becomes important in analyzing organizational change, as well.

Lewin explains that there are general changes that occur as individuals undergo and accept change. First, there must be a sense of disequilibrium that arises. In this case, the disequilibrium is within the workplace. One example of disequilibrium that I witnessed happened to Mary. Mary had been keen to complete some of her daily work while sitting on her couch. Mary was one of the few employees that had an office to herself, and much of her work was completed through e-mail. Mary, being tech savvy, had the newest forms of popular technology, and it made doing her work from the comfort of her couch even easier. To note, she did not begin her day working from her couch, however, after lunch, Mary would spend anywhere from forty-five minutes to an hour checking e-mails laid on her couch. Afterwards, she would make her way back to her desk. Mary usually scheduled phone interviews before or after her mid-day time on the couch. When she treated herself to the comforts of the couch, she only allowed herself to complete work that did not require her desk. This did not affect the productivity of her work; rather it reflected how mobile her work could be.

When I first began my fieldwork, this type of behavior was encouraged by employees, especially by the CEO. Mary always encouraged me to sit in the red gaming chairs in the lounge area to do my work if I pleased. I declined and chose my desk for professional reasons, but the offer stood nonetheless. The first time I witnessed Mary checking e-mails from her couch, the COO walked into her office to ask a question. Without questioning why Mary was on the couch, she left after her question was answered. Readdressing the levels of culture discussed earlier, the couch is representative of the company's artifacts. Mary's checking of e-mails reflects artifacts as well, as it is the observed behavior. Mary's ability to work from her couch was one manifestation of the company efforts to create an environment that was comfortable for their employees. However, I observed a major change this established of culture within a matter of minutes.

It was a mid-July workday when the CEO stopped by the office. He did not typically conduct his work in the office, as he did not have an actual role aside from being the creative intellect behind the company. The CEO's role was more focused on regular check-ins with the COO, and being a motivational leader to the employees. When he came to the office, employees did not feel the power dynamic shift; rather they saw him as a creative mind that could offer a fresh perspective to any situations that came about. I saw this type of environment for the first month and a half of my fieldwork. This abruptly changed during a hot July day. It was after lunch, and Mary was checking e-mails from the comfort of her couch. I was finishing a task on the computer at my desk, and had my back to her. Behind me, I heard the following:

CEO: "Mary, *what* do you think you're doing?"

In a very calm voice, Mary answered:

"Hey, Tom. I'm just checking e-mails."

Tom: "You check e-mails from your desk from now on."[17]

Mary, who had become accustomed to the established comfortable environment, was immediately subject to a state of disequilibrium. Lewin explains this disequilibrium as the *unfreezing stage*. During the unfreezing state, one undergoes a situation that either brings about the motivation to change or one's failure to change. Lewin explains there are three degrees that create this motivation of change:

> 1) enough disconfirming data to cause serious discomfort and disequilibrium; 2) the connection of the disconfirming data to important goals and ideas, causing anxiety and/or

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[17] Tom had seen Mary check her emails from her couch numerous times. I was present for many interactions where Mary would be on the couch, checking emails, and Ted would come in to have an informal, friendly conversation.

> guilt; and 3) enough psychological safety, in the sense of being able to see a possibility of solving the problem and learning something new without loss of identity or integrity. (Schein 2010:301)

It became evident that Mary was uncomfortable, however, she did not immediately respond to the CEO's demand. In that moment, she began processing her next move. During Mary's silence, she entered into the second transformative stage, the *unlearning stage*. In this stage, she had to unlearn the previous established values she had become accustomed to in the face of this organizational change. In this stage, either individuals begin thinking of solutions for the change meaning they become resistant to the change or they accept it.

Mary broke her silence by saying, "Sorry Tom, not a problem." In that moment, according to organizational theorists, Mary was preparing for the third stage of Lewin's model, the *internalization of new meanings*. However, I would argue that Mary had not fully undergone the transformation within the third stage. Lewin explains the third stage as *refreezing change*, meaning, "The new learning will not stabilize until it is reinforced by actual results" (Schein 2010:311). For this stage to become solidified, employees need to produce the new expected behaviors with noticeable positive results. For a leader, such as the CEO, to feel that an organizational change is necessary, the new required behaviors must produce better results and fix any issues that he deems weak or inefficient. The change was for Mary to complete her work at her desk, and if this clearly made her more efficient at her job, then the refreezing stage would be complete. While organizational theory suggests changes in organizational structure is seen to create efficiency, I felt that what was occurring (between the flat and family-oriented image and the more stratified, disciplined workplace) was a concern about appearance, not efficiency.

A Social Darwinian Effect due to Change

I was unaware at the time, but I began my work with LIX, Inc. during a major transformative stage, the company's midlife.

> Organizational midlife can be defined structurally as the stage at which founders and owners have relinquished the control of the organization or promoted or appointed general managers. (Schein, 2010:311)

According to organizational theorists, when a company reaches its midlife, culture changes within the structure as the company grows. The culture that the company established during its infant years becomes less important to preserve and is replaced, as growth becomes a reality. The prior culture is now forgotten as new structure emerges. At LIX, Inc., in the midst of all the personnel and company culture shifts, the artifacts and espoused values remained the same (the company has yet to change their mission statement). More so, as a company reaches midlife, it becomes difficult for the current employees to unravel and decipher the new culture that is emerging. Much of what is missed during the transformative stage is the understanding of the organization's change in culture, and what it is doing for the company.

With that in mind, not every employee was receptive to the organizational change. As September neared, employees became aware that the company had decided to relocate their company to Boulder, Colorado. This area was central to many of the virtual employees that the company had, and fit all the company's needs to grow. Once employees became aware of the company's expansion, few began vying for managerial positions that they could secure when the company relocated. Much to my surprise, those that I thought would be front runners for managerial positions based on their presence within the company did not complete for the new positions.

Lindsey, the leading case manager of LIX, Inc., had been the company's star performer since I began my fieldwork. During the months of June, July, and August, there had been one other case manager, Ciara. However, Ciara was still new to the position. Because of this, Lindsey was much like a mentor to her as she continued to learn the business. Not all employees saw Ciara as being an integral performer to the company, or one that deserved as much help as Lindsey offered. Mary shared:

> "Ciara is a burden. Lindsey holds her hand through her work. On top of that, her attitude is awful, especially with clients. I've never seen someone answer the phone with such bad mannerism. Leia is sick of it, she's sick of the complaints. They're thinking of firing her. I bet she'll be gone soon."

Through my observations, it was clear that Mary's complaints about Ciara were true. Many times, I would overhear Ciara answer a phone with a harsh tone, or speaking in a demeaning manner to a client who was unaware of the claims process. Not only that, but there were times I felt uncomfortable because of Ciara's impolite manner to others and myself in the office. Because of this, Lindsey was someone that I chose to utilize if I had a question. Many in the office discussed Ciara's unprofessional behavior. Her behavior was one that quickly needed an adjustment if she were to remain with the company.

As the months progressed and September neared, Lindsey's workload increased (as many other employees did because the CEO and COO were undergoing necessary changes in order to expand). Ciara had not been terminated as Mary had predicted. Mary shared that the company needed as many case managers as possible to maintain the increased workload. When September came, the COO pushed for an increase of 2,000 mailers to go out to clients. This meant obtaining 2,000 more cases of unclaimed property from state governments and producing the initial paperwork necessary to begin the process of recovering the lost assets. The company chose to increase their mailers the first week of September, calling for a busy month. Between hundreds of phone calls a week to clients, obtaining necessary information for the next stage of the claims process, and an increase in monthly goals set by upper management, Lindsey and Ciara were working long hours to stay on top of their work. With this, Lindsey was not only overworked, but she was still taking on much of Ciara's work. More so, Ciara began showing up late to work and even taking off days unexpectedly. Mary shared:

> "She's [Ciara] aware that we need her. She's taking advantage of the fact that she can waltz in her and do whatever, but that we'll struggle without her."

Ciara had become a very unproductive worker. She had been completing tasks, but not at the pace that Lindsey had been completing tasks. It reached mid-September when the company finally decided to hire another case manager, Erika. Erika worked after-hours as she held another full-time position with a law firm. She came into the office around 5 p.m. every night. This posed as a major disadvantage of Lindsey, as she explained:

> "No I'm not staying past 6 or 7 to train Erika. That's a 12 hour day."

Despite her obvious frustration, Lindsey found herself staying later than normal. It was not that she finally came around and wanted to help train Erika, but she was unable to finish her work during the workday as she was constantly helping Ciara. I began observing that Lindsey became sicker as September continued. She constantly had colds, headaches, and was exhausted from being overworked. As the end of September came, I noticed major shifts in her work ethic, and I had my own personal concerns for her health.

Much like her health, her presence within the company further deteriorated. Sitting in meeting one day, Lindsey had forgotten to send in her weekly stats updated on her sales and the mailing campaign's overall stats. As Mary concluded her introductory portion of the meeting, she turned towards Lindsey:

> Mary: "Alright, that's all I have for my portion today. On to the mailing campaign. Lindsey, you didn't send in your stats, do you have them?"
>
> Lindsey: "I have not pulled our stats. I've been focusing on the CCU's and new opportunities."

The COO sighed heavily but stared at her computer monitor. The atmosphere in the boardroom was tense as Lindsey sat staring at the table wide-eyed. In a very low voice, Lindsey answered:

> "I can put together my stats if you give me a second, I've been swamped."

It was a rare meeting where the CEO was present, and he was equally as frustrated as the COO. He snapped in an aggressive tone:

> Ted: "*They* can't hear you Lindsey."
>
> Leia: "So there's no stats"?

For almost fifteen seconds, the boardroom remained quiet and Lindsey began manically typing on her computer. Not breaking eye contact with her screen, Lindsey replied:

> Lindsey: "Here, I just pulled the LPOA information."

At this time, the COO began shaking her head. The boardroom experienced a moment unlike any I had witnessed before. It was obvious that the employees, especially the case managers, were stressed with the increase in workload. Everyone had to keep reminding themselves that the extra workload meant a more secure short-term while the company remained in Indianapolis, and one that would help them in the long-term as they planned their move to Colorado. The meeting continued on as the other employees turned in their contribution to the company's overall stats. The tension was alleviated shortly as the meeting moved forward. The animosity in the boardroom that occurred between Lindsey and her employers was uncomfortable, but short-lived. I assumed this would work itself out, especially because of the strong bonds between many in the office. However, when I came into the office the week following the meeting, Mary shared:

> "Lindsey is no longer with us. She's been terminated."

I was surprised by this news, but I was more surprised at how indifferent everyone in the office was regarding her termination. I expected more employees to engage in a discussion or share their feelings on Lindsey's termination, but the office went on as if nothing happened.

Tensions Leading to Employee Termination

Lindsey's approach and attitude did not fit the future-focused ideals of the company. While this explained the understanding behind Lindsey's termination, it did not express in its entirety why Lindsey had fallen from a star performer to a problem employee. When looking back at my field notes, it became clearer where tensions emerged. As the CEO and COO began their discussions of expansion during late August and into early September, new divisions (organizational theory defines these new divisions as subcultures) began to emerge. As mentioned, employees began vying for managerial positions. It became obvious that Lindsey was going to become the overseeing manager for the case managers as she held the highest sales and seniority. While the company was still in the beginning stages of discussion, the managerial position did not come with an increase in hourly wage,[18] rather it came with short-term acclaim and the promise of status in the long-term. Lindsey was able to maintain the title of "Case Manager," however; Ciara was demoted to "Case Analyst." The demotion that occurred did not include decrease in pay either.[19] It merely reflected a demotion on a horizontal level, as the case analyst and case manager were the same position, but one held the more prestigious title, one that was viewed more positively within the company.

As Lindsey embraced the newly found managerial position, she became a part of LIX, Inc.'s subculture of first-line supervisors. Edgar Schein explains the subculture of first-line supervisors as a "culture [that] rises through shared experiences of success" (Schein 2010:56). As the company was now taking on a hierarchical structure, this lead way for the company's first-line supervisors. Schein adds:

> Elders will teach newly promoted supervisors how to perform their roles, and this mentoring will be more powerful than any formal training they might have been given. In the same way, middle management and higher levels will develop their own shared assumptions and, at each level, those assumptions will be taught to newcomers as they get promoted into that level. (Schein 2010:56)

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[18] To further note, Lindsey was not compensated in any other way (i.e. Time that she out into training and mentoring others).

[19] The demotion of Ciara became necessary so that Lindsey could train her properly one-on-one. This was because, in her new position, the COO allotted time where Lindsey was able to train her team. In turn, Ciara would have the ability to be promoted into the case manager position once improvement occurred. It would take the collaboration between Lindsey and Leia, the COO, in order to create shared assumptions among their supervisory presences in the company in order to make this process successful.

Lindsey and Leia met in private meetings to discuss Lindsey's new role as manager and what that position entailed. Leia had experience as the COO in rallying her case managers, and assisted Lindsey in doing so, as well. Lindsey was not as quick to pick up the managerial role, and Leia would often joke and say, "It's not so easy is it?" to Lindsey as she became frustrated when her team did not meet goals.

However, it became evident during meetings that Lindsey and Leia were not seeing eye-to-eye with their leadership roles. During meetings throughout late August and September, Leia was clearly frustrated with Lindsey and her team. They were not meeting their monthly goals that Leia set for them. More so, Lindsey had been holding daily meetings with her team in order to increase their sales. These meetings were seen as a waste of time to Leia, as the mailing campaign failed to come to any substantial conclusion to increase their sales. More so, Lindsey led these meetings without the COO's approval. As Schein suggests, previous "elders" will teach their supervisors how to preform, which this mentoring creates a sense of understanding as a supervisor and is shared by all supervisors. Lindsey, however, began to supervise in her own manner, one that Leia did not agree with, nor did she pass along during as she assisted Lindsey in becoming a manager. This created tensions in the workplace between the supervisors, which soon became apparent to all of the employees.

During a meeting, it was Lindsey's turn to share and discuss the mailing campaigns efforts. She was flustered and ill prepared at this time, which was becoming common.

Leia: "What is going on with the mailing campaign?"

Lindsey: "I haven't sent out any new mailers, I've been focusing on closing open cases and making follow-up calls."

Ted: “It’s mid-October, when’s the mailer going out? That should have already been done.”

Leia: “I can do one this week. Last month I sent out 750.”

Mary, the CEO, and the COO were aware that Lindsey had been having daily meetings with her team during work hours, and nothing beneficial was coming from them. Mary had shared with me beforehand that she knew the CEO and COO were becoming frustrated that Lindsey was not discussing her daily team meetings during the weekly meetings. Mary also shared that these meetings were unapproved by Leia. During the meeting, Mary interjected to allow Lindsey a platform to address the reasoning behind why she felt the daily meetings were pertinent. In an effort to persuade Lindsey to discuss her managerial actions, Mary asked Lindsey the following:

“What are you doing with your team?”

Lindsey: “We sent out level 1 cases and we discussed where we need to go [as a team].”

The animosity grew in the boardroom as it became clear that Lindsey was tiptoeing around discussing the daily team meetings she was conducting. Lindsey’s blatant diversion made Mary frustrated as well. Mary had given Lindsey a platform to address the daily meetings she was having with her team.[20] Lindsey was purposely diverting attention anywhere aside from discussing the un-approved meetings. Mary directed the next question at Ciara:

“Ciara, tell me what you’re doing.”

[20] I was never able to ask Lindsey about her un-comfort during the meeting as she was terminated shortly after. However, I can speculate that if these meetings had resulted in increased sales and were seen as an efficient use of time, the CEO and COO would not have been against them. However, Lindsey had not shared with Leia that they were daily. She had led Leia to believe that they were weekly meetings. The lack of communication paired with a decrease in sales provided a tense situation between Lindsey and Leia.

> Ciara: "We've had daily meetings every day at 9 am for 30-45 minutes. [We talk about] progress on cases and moving forward with Level 1 and 2, and how we can strategically and collectively move forward and come together and how we can move cases forward. Especially, big cases."

Erika could sense that the COO, CEO, and now Mary were frustrated that the team was spending almost an hour of worktime on daily meetings just to see sales remain static. More so, because Erika was a new employee, there were now three case managers (however, sales were less with Erika coming onboard than it had been with just Lindsey and Ciara). Leia felt that she had set realistic growth goals with the implementation of a new case manager. More so, Leia had more sales combined than the three case managers did. Leia had provided Lindsey the responsibility to ensure that she and her team were successful when she promoted Lindsey to a supervisor. Unfortunately, Lindsey was not meeting Leia's expectations.

Erika interjected in hopes to alleviate the tension:

> "Yes, it's helping strategically. They could be every other day. In terms of POA spreadsheets, Ciara made an additional tab where we have processing times so we know how long it takes. Using the white board, we have cases 1 and 2 levels and POA listings. We sent out request for the owners list. We sent out ones that have longer processing times, Maryland was sent out last week. The spreadsheet is growing. Ciara has made this more efficient."

Ted, still apprehensive, asked Erika:

> "Do you think you're learning something new every day?"

Erika answered positively and was able to alleviate the tensions in the short-term. As Lindsey took on the supervisory role, her leadership actions were different from that of Leia's. Leia was considered Lindsey's supervisor, and Lindsey was expected to lead in the same manner as she did. Lindsey, however, approached her supervisor role as more of a mentor (as seen in her daily meetings with her team), rather than a supervisor that continually made sure the team was meeting goals. Lindsey was taking on a supervisory role that had been accepted under the previous family-oriented, flat organizational structure. At this time, Leia expected up-and-coming managers to immediately jump into a hierarchical position and supervise with more authority. Schein explains that when first-line supervisors do not follow suit with one another that the following occurs:

> These hierarchically based subcultures create the communication problems associated with 'selling senior management on a new way of doing things.' […] As each cultural boundary is crossed, the proposal has to be put into the appropriate language for the next higher level and has to reflect the values and assumptions of that higher level. OR, from the point of view of the higher levels, decisions have to be put into a form that lower levels can understand, often resulting in 'translations' that actually distort and sometimes been subvert what the higher levels wanted. (Schein 2010:56)

As Lindsey felt it necessary to have daily meetings with her team, Leia disagreed and this caused tension. Leia felt that her way of completing claims was being undermined by Lindsey. In the conversation above, Leia interjected with how many mailers she had sent out (750)[21] in an effort to prove that her way of processing claims was faster and more efficient than what the mailing campaign had been doing under Lindsey's supervision. As tensions grew between Leia and

[21] In a small business, a CEO/COO can often be seen as conducting similar business to their employees. For Leia, this is how she made income, through sales. The way she conducted her business and the way she approached her work was how she ideally wished all employees would.

Lindsey, it became clear that the shared assumptions of managing the mailing campaign were no longer established.

Disagreements surrounding the best management techniques were not the only issues that grew between Lindsey and Leia as she took on her new managerial position. Issues began to arise regarding assumptions of the influence that time had on planning and its effects on the management processes. Lindsey and Leia were not agreeing on time orientation and it began to create tension among the two. Anthropologists' Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck explored the importance of time orientation in their monography, *Values Orientation Theory*, proposing that:

> All human societies must answer a limited number of universal problems, that the value-based solutions are limited in number and universally known, but that different cultures have different preferences among them. Suggested questions include humans' relations with time, nature and each other, as well as basic human motives and the nature of human nature. (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 2002:1)

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck noted that every culture embodies basic understandings about the nature of time. Every culture creates a basic orientation regarding the past, the present, and the future. Developing a survey with sixteen situational questions, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck sought to understand how various cultures understood basic time orientation. Their study found that many Euro-Americans were future oriented, meaning they placed focus on becoming a dominant force over nature, expressed through emphasis on individualism and continually "doing" work. Native cultures, however, were past oriented, meaning they placed focus on creating a harmonious relationship with nature through the collaboration of groups, and they were in a state of "being" rather than "doing." This refers to focusing on the here-and-now and is seen in organizations that adopt this orientation as they only focus on surviving in their niche market rather than dominating the market (this was something that LIX, Inc. did not want to fall subject to). In another study conducted by Hofsteded and Bond, who engaged with Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's work, they identified "a dimension that contrasted a past/present orientation with a future orientation and found that economic development was correlated with a future orientation" (Schein 2010:126).

Shared cultural assumptions surrounding time orientation are crucial for the success of organizations. LIX, Inc. once being an organization that focused on the present was now shifting their time orientation towards the future. The CEO and COO presented themselves as the planning department in the move to expand the company. Prior to discussions of expansion, employees worked for the present, and focused on immediate tasks. There was not much focus on the past, nor did employees think of the future. Employees, for example, regularly complained of the five minutes dedicated to creative and future planning at the end of every meeting. The employees saw the weekly ritualistic act of planning without implementation as wasteful to their present orientation. Many times Lindsey fell subject to thinking in the present as opposed to thinking for the future. She focused on her current goals and failed to integrate a strong team that would help the company grow. These employees, especially Lindsey as she was brought in as a part of the planning department in her supervisory role, were now expected to embody a future orientation once the CEO decided on a new business opportunity.

Section Five – Missing Sub-Cultures Leading to Internal Change:

The first week of October, during an office meeting, the CEO and COO shared that they wanted to begin concretely defining roles of the employees. Up until October, many of the employees knew their day-to-day work and established goals for themselves. However, there was constant movement between employees, as they would help other employees with roles vastly different from their own. The CEO focused the meeting off on future data miners. During the meeting, Ted began:

> "We need data miners. In fact, we should have our blogger write an article about what [they're] currently doing. I mean our data miners [are known] for legal research and need to be educated in data science… informatics. We need to target the student body at IUPUI and other sub-schools for computer scientists. These people should have a background in IT and research, and data management."

As Ted concluded his stance, Leia interjected with her own opinion regarding data mining.

> "Eventually data mining should be more applicable, reliable, editable. We need one of those people to get better data for people to use. We need a better system, a built system. It is costly. If we have someone good with IT, this could be possible. The information we have, we could create a module for data mining. The case scenarios and skip tracing should be in the software and have a robot to think for you. An intern could build this and have their name on it. We need to be smarter on this information."

Ted disagreed:

> "What about batching versus human error? How much better can a computer be than a human when it comes to batching? It's all dependent on the information provided. You

> have to use human segment, too. It's above thinking. The best way to do this is better data miners to circumvent lost human error." [22]

The current data miner, Jeff, interjected with his own opinion:

> "Long-term, the technology would be beneficial for extra help. But for the short term, we need better training for the data miners."

Ted, having an additional opinion on the topic surrendered his initial stance and added:

> "If we can find better batching, then fine, I would prefer to not use a human. Using a human right now is good, but a machine would be faster. I'm leaving this to Leia's department to [over]see the growth of data mining."

Unfolding before my eyes, I saw employees being persuaded by technological seduction and looking for subtle outlets to introduce new technologies. Schein describes technological seduction as:

> One of the less obvious but more important ways in which the leaders of midlife organizations change cultural assumptions is through the subtle, cumulative, and sometimes unintended consequences of new technology that they introduce deliberately or take advantage of. At one extreme, we can observe the gradual evolutionary diffusion of a technological innovation such as the automobile as it displaces not only the horse and

[22] The reason Ted brought this to mention regarding human data miners over a computer is that, in the search for an heir to a claim, it requires a named search. Many times, data miners are given simply a name that they must trace. If it is a common name, this makes the search hard. It requires phone calls to clients, it requires genealogical research, and it requires utilizing multiple sources. A computerized platform that would be created may search for a name and conclude that the search is complete when in actuality it may not have considered all of the factors that a human would have when searching for a person. This is much like private investigative work; something that a computer may not be capable of.

> buggy but also, eventually, many of the assumptions and rituals that accompanied the old technology. (Schein 2010:284)

Leaders of companies become attracted to the idea that new technologies will increase the company's productivity. As Schein explains, it is at the expense of the company's old technology. More so, the implementation of new technologies has "the effect of getting people to think and behave in common terms" (Schein 2010:284) as they are aware that this new technology brings with it the understanding to increase productivity.

One issue remained; the new technologies mentioned during the meeting were either the introduction of human data miners or the introduction of a new technological platform that could complete data mining with more efficiency than a human could. With either of these introductions, the reasoning behind these changes is due to the desire of the company in increasing their overall efficiency and productivity. As Jeff mentioned, in the short-run, the integration of new data miners would benefit the company. Jeff saw hiring new data miners as a way to introduce social technology (as opposed to hardwire computer platforms) into the company and increase training for the current data miners. This developmental training program would create common conceptual understandings and a shared language that otherwise was lacking with regard to shared assumptions for the data miners. In the short-run, if the company was able to address the weakness of the data miners, the organization would have the ability to build upon new experience and resolve the issue at hand, and new shared assumptions would be established. In that, the human technological base could be of great benefit in the short-run for the company.

Leia had a different perspective on the future of the data miners. By creating a completely computer based platform specifically catered to the company's needs and business, she believed efficiency would be increased. However, Leia explained later in the discussion that there were not many options in Indiana to create a new platform.[23] To solve this issue, Leia suggested an intern build the software or look to relocate the company where there remained an information technology cluster. Ideally, Leia wished to engage with an established technology firm to either build their software, which would be done so through relocation. Leia understood that, if hiring a new employee was too costly, relocating would at least bring with it the ability to take advantage of a region where there was a great deal of students in the technological field and capitalize on their unpaid internship program by having them build a software for the company.

The Missing Sub-Culture

Internal subcultures are an integral part of an organization because they emerge within an organization and share many of the same assumptions that the entire organization holds, but also hold their own assumptions beyond that of the organization based on their daily tasks and experiences within the organization. According to organizational theorists, there are three basic subcultures that organizations in the public and private sector must be able to identify: the operator subculture, the engineering/design subculture, and the executive subculture (Schein 2010:57). The importance of the three generic subcultures is to minimize conflict, as organizational conflicts:

> [Which] are often misdiagnosed political interdepartmental fights, power maneuvers, or personality conflicts. What can be missed in that perception is that the different groups may

[23] According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis provided by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "In 2015, the largest industry in Indiana was durable goods manufacturing. This industry accounted for 15.6 percent of Indiana GDP and had 2.8 percent real growth. The second largest industry was finance, insurance, real estate, rental, and leasing, which accounted for 14.8 percent of Indiana GDP and had 0.6 percent real growth. The largest contributor to real GDP growth in Indiana was durable goods manufacturing. This industry accounted for 0.43 percentage point of the total growth in real GDP. The second largest contributor was retail trade. This industry accounted for 0.37 percentage point of the total growth in real GDP," (Bureau of Economic Analysis 2015). This confirmed Leia's belief that Indiana was not the region for technological clusters. If the company wanted to become more technologically innovative, they needed to seek a region where technology firms clustered.

> have evolved genuinely different subcultures, that the contributions of each of these subcultures is needed for organizational effectiveness. (Schein, 2010:57)

I began to notice this with Lindsey prior to her termination. Lindsey had been a part of what organizational theorists would call the "operator" subculture. The operator subculture "is based on human interaction, and most line units learn that high levels of communication, trust, and teamwork are essential to getting work done efficiently" (Schein 2010:58). The operator subculture is aware of the unpredictability of the world, and is prepared to be innovative in order to remain efficient. Unfortunately, for Lindsey, as she began to take on a supervisory role, she became ingrained in the executive subculture. The executive subculture is comprised of the:

> Top managers in all organizations [who] shared a similar environment and similar concerns… The executive worldview is built round the necessity to maintain the financial health of the organization and is fed by the preoccupations board, of investors, and of the capital markets. (Schein 2010:57).

Lindsey believed that human interaction (i.e. the daily, hour-long meetings she was having with her team) would lead to efficiency. Leia, on the other hand, had a different belief to increasing productivity, and that was working around the clock. Lindsey lacked the same-shared assumptions as she straddled the line between executive and operator subcultures.

The idea of subcultures is seen outside of organizational theory, as well. Dick Hebdige, author of *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, shares a lucrative argument that subcultures follow the same trajectory.[24] Through the example of punk and reggae, Hebdige explains:

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[24] The ideas of subcultures differ between anthropological theory and organizational theory. Hebdige expresses subcultures as emerging out of rebellion. Organizational theorists engage with subcultures in the literal sense, a culture within, or under, the larger organization. Each, however, follows a trajectory and share a dominate ideology.

> We could say that the ridged demarcation of the line between punk and reggae is symptomatic not only of an 'identity crisis' peculiar to the punk subculture but also of those more general contradictions and tensions which inhibit the development of an open dialogue between an immigrant culture with a strong 'ethnic' character and the indigenous working-class culture which technically 'encloses' it. (Hebdige 1997:68)

Hebdige explains that the two subcultures, punk and reggae, are inhibited in their ability to have dialogue (which creates conflict) because of their contrasting ideologies. What Hebdige offers is the explanation of why Lindsey and Leia struggled to create a line of communication. As they remained in their own subcultures (operator and executive), their dialogue was inhibited by their different subcultures. More so, there was a strong divided among the way they went about work on a daily basis. In turn, this created great conflict. Additionally, what I was also being to notice was that the company lacked an engineering subculture (which the company was looking to establish by possibly hiring a new employee to engage with the creation of the computerized data mining platform). As Schein explains, without the establishment of the three generic subcultures, this can lead to great conflict as there is no other subculture to offer their input.

Revisiting the conflicts that occurred between Leia and Lindsey in the perspective of their subcultures offers background as to why the company so desperately sought the integration of new technology. This would bring in a new subculture to the company, the last subculture required to minimize conflict and continue to grow the company.

As weeks passed following the meeting that discussed either implementing technology or hiring a new employee, it became evident that the company was leaning more towards re-location. The company decided that moving to a region where technology was booming would provide more resources to capitalize on rather than continuing to hire individuals in the Indianapolis area. They believed that the labor force (with regard to technological skillsets) was more valuable in Boulder. Mary shared:

> "Leia and Ted decided they want to visit Boulder at the end of October. They're looking at some real estate. They're taking a few people in the office that they want to come with, but not everyone is invited."

I had been aware of the company's trips to Colorado. During the first weeks of my fieldwork, I was tasked with contacting hotels so the employees could travel to Colorado to hold an annual meeting for LIX, Inc. With the company having a great number of virtual employees, Colorado seemed to be the central meeting area where meeting was accessible for many to travel. As weeks went on, the meeting date drew closer, and talks about an annual meeting faded.[25] When the date came near for the meeting at the end of September, only the CEO and COO travelled to Colorado. When they came back, however, they quickly put together another trip that included a few of the employees. Leia and Ted were looking towards the future, and Boulder was it.

With some of the highest rates of startup technology companies, Boulder has grown to be one of the largest IT concentrations in the United States. According to the Boulder Economic Council:

> The IT industry in Boulder has particular concentrations in the data storage, software and integrated systems, and mobile application development sectors. The corporate presence of large companies helps feed the hot entrepreneurial and innovation scene in Boulder. (Boulder Economic Council)

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[25] I believe this occurred because the company was looking to relocate to Colorado, and employees could visit the office rather than convening at a hotel for the conference.

As LIX, Inc. sought new technology for their company, Boulder became the location most likely to have potential employees on hand to build blueprints of the company's desired software. This technological seduction comes with cultural change. As LIX, Inc. sought out computer-based software to increase efficiency with data mining, existing human data miners found themselves in precarious positions and possibly subject for termination.

The Trip to Colorado: Angel Investors

The first day back from Boulder, every employee who went[26] was raving about the trip. Interestingly enough, everyone's demeanor was more positive than it had been before leaving for Boulder. When everyone came back, work shifted into overdrive. More projects were assigned, sales goals were increased, and overall workload was packed. Nevertheless, the employees did not seem to mind the stress they were under. Everyone was excited for the move and embraced the workload challenge to come over the next four months.

When I saw Mary upon her return, we had the following conversation.

> Me: "How was the trip?"
>
> Mary: "It was great. They're all health nuts out there, so Leia and Ted obviously dig it. We looked at some property out there. One space was killer. There's a balcony and we're smack dab in the middle of Boulder so we see the entire city."
>
> Me: "Do you think it's better for business moving to Boulder?"
>
> Mary: "Oh yeah. There's tons of business out there and less hoops we have to jump through (regarding regulations for paperwork and working with claims in other states). Ted's been

[26] The only employees that went to Boulder were Mary, Leia, Ted, Jeff, and a new employee.

talking to some people. We want to make a shit ton of money within the next five years and cash out."

Me: "By cash out, you mean?"

Mary: "Hopefully I'll pay out enough to retire. I've put my share into this company."

Me: "Why would moving to Colorado benefit the company rather than staying here?"

Mary: "Angel investors."

Angel investors was a new term to me. Darian Ibrahim, author of *The (Not So) Puzzling Behavior of Angel Investors* explains angel investors as being wealthy individuals who "personally finances the same high-risk, high-growth start-ups as venture capitalists but at an earlier stage" (Ibrahim 2008:1406). These investors contribute to entrepreneurial finance by providing funds to novel ventures during a start-up's growth. During this time of growth, the entrepreneur of an establishment is able to continue building financial health through the investor's funds. For LIX, Inc., they were hoping that Boulder would bring with it wealthy investors who saw the company's niche market as a worthy market to invest in.

Reality after the Colorado Visit

In my observations of the employees after their return from Colorado, those who visited Colorado (and surprisingly, those who did not visit) seemed to be at peace with the new move. There was much to be done beforehand, but everyone embraced the same, shared assumptions that the move was financially constructive for the company, and for their own benefit. Employee's positivity increased throughout their work as well. Ciara, once being known for her discourteous manner when talking to clients, and her incompetence in her work, was now becoming a star-performer. Closing more deals in one month than I had witnessed in months prior, Ciara embraced the company's move and the importance of her role and experience. Mary also began embracing her role more. After the visit to Colorado, Mary was asked to pursue another position within the company, operations. Being a one-person human resource team, as well as and in charge of operations, I observed Mary's attitude and reactions as she approached her work. I paid close attention because, prior to the company trip to Colorado, she felt alienated from her labor, which caused her job insecurity. However, Mary surprised me with how she was able to balance both positions and understood her role in the company both presently and in the future. Overall, the company had a positive aura upon their return, with the exception of one employee.[27]

> Me: "I haven't seen Jeff around? Is he okay?"
>
> Mary: "Jeff has been having non-stop panic attacks since we came back from Colorado. He's unsure of his future. We told him to calm down and talk to us in December when he graduates."

It was Jeff's last semester in school, he had a part-time position with a company, and a full-time position promised after graduation. One would assume this would ease plenty of soon-to-be graduated seniors' worried about their financial security. I began to question what changed for Jeff after the company trip.

When I began my fieldwork, I was introduced to Jeff as the company's data miner. He was not a part of his own subculture in the office because his work fell under case management, therefore, he identified as an "operator" subculture. During meetings, when it came time to

[27] In an interview with Peter Fleming, author of *The Mythology of Work*, argues that neoliberal ideologies in the workplace are to blame for the intensification of work within our lives. He explains, "Jobs are no longer approached as an input. They are now more of an output in its own right. A firm will treat my eight hours in the office as an output, believing that it must represent productive activities," (Fleming 2015). The employees at LIX, Inc. putting in productive hours after their trip to Boulder represents the neoliberal workplace. More so, this is shaped by their experiences and intensifies their roles both in and out of the workplace.

discussion the case managers, Jeff's work was combined with the case managers as their ability to start cases relied on his ability to locate heirs. Aside from a brief recap of his take-away's during each meeting, I rarely heard Jeff join in the discussion at those meetings. I observed his behavior to be both passive and conforming, but he also had certain privileges. In the case manager's room, Jeff had his own desk to work from while the case managers had to share a large, wooden table. I wrote in my field notes:

> *The case managers have a very cramped room. Granted, there are only two or three case managers at any given time, but to have one table to share all of the files necessary for each case seems inefficient. The room has a rectangular shape, and there is a massive wooden desk in the middle. Lindsey, the main case manager, typically stands and does her work at her standing desk located near the front of the room. Out of curiosity, I asked if I could help with a case. (They willingly agreed, happy to have another individual in the office to help with their workload). I could not believe the number of times I had to get up and sit down [Their work required them to constantly be shuffling through files]. On top of that, there are wires everywhere from laptops, phones, and other technology that make this table even less functional. It is strange to me that Jeff, the data miner, has his own large desk in the back of the room. I have not seen him get up once; his job seems immobile compared to the case managers. It is strange that a large section of the room is dedicated to Jeff, a part-time employee, while the case mangers fight for space in their mobile position.*

Jeff's quiet demeanor quickly transformed as the company began to discuss expanding. Prior to the company trip, I observed Jeff embracing a managerial spirit on his own. However, in early September when the CEO and COO informed employees that either the company was looking to expand, I believe that Jeff felt he was ready for this growth. When the CEO and COO shared that they wanted to expand the company, this was a vague and uninformed announcement. In that moment, Jeff was hoping they would hire new individuals in the Indianapolis area (which is why he placed so much emphasis on engaging with the local colleges during meetings). He was not aware that the company was looking relocate. This was a common misperception among the other employees as well. They felt their competition would be regionally in Indianapolis, not in Boulder. Therefore, when growth was discussed initially (in the vague sense) employees were merely aware that they held seniority and they had to demonstrate their strength and importance within the company to hold higher positions. Jeff was the employee that I observed the most grasp the cultural change and implement himself in a position where he stood out.

As September ended, Jeff began to work closely with the CEO, Ted. They had taken on side projects that deviated from Jeff's typical daily tasks. Within a weeks' time, Jeff went from quietly sitting in company meetings to becoming an active participant. Through Jeff's newly established managerial spirit, he was awarded a portion of time during bi-weekly meetings to discuss any ongoing projects he was working on. Before, only Mary, Lindsey, and Leia were the three individuals with allotted time during meetings as they made up human resources, case management, and upper management. Now, Jeff was able to discuss his contributions after Mary concluded her portion of the meeting.

Throughout the subsequent meetings that took place, Jeff began taking on a managerial presence. The company was looking to bring in more interns for the spring semester. Jeff took it upon himself to be the leading employee behind this project. During an early October meeting, Jeff had begun working on the intern project and started discussing what he had already accomplished. He turned to Mary:

"Mary, can we get together later and put together plans for an open house? I was thinking 11AM to 1PM. I think we can open up that window for the office."

Mary had previously been responsible for interviewing and hiring interns. She had done so in a very ritualistic manner of checking internship websites or her e-mail, responding within two days, and setting an interview up by day three. Now, Mary relinquished this power to Jeff, who was thinking of new and innovative ways to bring in new faces to the company. Mary, at the time, had not been adjusting well to the cultural changes (as this was before the Colorado trip), but felt she had no choice but to relinquish the responsibility of the interns to Jeff:

"Wow, Jeff that's a great idea. I'd love to be a part of this."

The flow of thoughts did not end there. Jeff had already taken it upon himself to reach out to his university and set up a table. This table would be surrounded by others like it in the university's cafeteria, where students could stop by and become informed of the internship opportunities that LIX, Inc. had for them. During this meeting, Jeff was sharing innovative ideas and taking on an entrepreneurial approach.[28]

Prior to the Colorado trip, I would have assumed that Jeff would embrace a new, supervisory position as he approached every employee with confidence, proudly demonstrating his leadership abilities through his innovative and creative ideas and projects for the company. However, coming back from Colorado, Jeff's confidence faded. I had not seen him in the office for three weeks. Employees shared that Colorado was a competitive area with young, 'hungry,' and fresh out of college individual's ready to work. In Indianapolis, while there were young college

[28] Sadler-Smith offers insight to Jeff's actions as being entrepreneurial. They explain, "Entrepreneurship could be defined in terms of innovate behavior allied to a strategic orientation in pursuit of possibility and growth" (Sadler-Smith 2003:48). This was something I began to see in Jeff during this time.

graduated individuals ready to work, the competitive environment of Boulder was vastly different from that of Indianapolis. As the company sought to relocate because of technological needs, already Jeff's position was already at risk of termination as the company began looking to replace data mining with a software to do it for them. More so, Mary shared with me that Jeff was undergoing family issues at home, something that came about during his time in Colorado. Therefore, newly found pressures manifested once Jeff returned from Boulder and he now had to reevaluate if moving with the company would secure him a long-standing position, and be justifiable, as it would take him away from his family and problems at home.

Jeff was faced with levels of reality. An integral aspect of every culture are the assumptions about what is real, how to determine reality, and how members of a group determine the relevancy of information and how they interpret it. Different definitions of reality were presenting themselves within LIX, Inc. after the company returned from their trip. Schein explains that there are three levels of reality: external physical reality, social reality, and individual reality. While in Colorado, external physical reality presented itself as the things that could "be determined empirically by objective, or, in our Western tradition, 'scientific' tests" (Schein 2010:117). When the company visited real estate in Colorado for possible relocation, this reflected the external physical reality of space. Merely reading square footage and seeing different real estate on a map was not sufficient for deciding on the future of the company. Rather the CEO and COO wanted to take the employees out to see the space, to be in the space. External physical realities have different assumptions about what constitutes this reality. Schein explains that:

> Many of us would not regard the spirit world or extra-sensory perception as having a physical reality basis, but in other cultures, such phenomena might be regarded as very real. (Schein 2010:117)

By bringing the employees to the space, this allowed employees see the space both physically, and with their sensory perception. The use of the employee's sensory perception helped in solidifying which space the employees could envision themselves working.

Being in Colorado presented itself as the obvious physical reality; however, physical reality becomes a matter of consensus, raising the topic of social reality. Social reality is:

> The nature of human nature – the correct way for humans to relate to nature and to each other, the distribution of power and the entire political process, assumptions about the meaning of life, ideology, religion, group boundaries, and culture itself – are obviously matters of consensus, not empirically determinable. (Schein 2010:117)

In essence, if a group of people believes in something and gives it the definition of real, then it becomes reality for the group. For the employees of LIX, Inc., once finding an office space that suited their needs in Colorado, this became their new office. The space and the location became reality, as did the idea of relocation.

Individual reality presents itself as one's own learned experiences not shared with the group. Reaching a consensus for a shared social reality proves difficult as each member of an organization brings his or her own individuality. When observing at the employees of LIX, Inc., those who shared the same consensus regarding their social reality were readily willing to make the move across the country. When I asked what Mary felt about the move, she shared:

> "The lease on my house isn't up for another year. [Mary's eldest daughter] is only a sophomore in high school. There's no way she can come to Colorado. The school she's in was hard to get her into. [Mary's youngest daughter] can come because her father (and Mary's partner) is on disability, so he isn't working and can watch her while I work. I'll

> have to fly to Indy every other week to see [Mary's eldest daughter]. But, it'll work. This move is worth it."[29]

Mary shared the same consensus as the group that the company's relocation was best for financial health, despite her individual realities at home. Jeff, on the other hand, was unable to share the group's consensus due to his individual reality. Mary explained that Jeff was undergoing anxiety caused by his university and his course load. G.R. Bushe, author of *Clear Leadership* explains:

> The culture rules of the social order require us to make our own interpretations about why others do what they do. We make up stories to explain the behaviors of others because it would be rude to keep asking, "Why did you do that" or "I don't understand your behavior. (Schein 2010:119; Bushe 2009)

When I asked Mary about Jeff, she repeatedly explained his lack of presence at the office was due to his schoolwork and his feelings of insecurity. When Mary shared this with me, she did not do so with confidence, suggesting that she was merely assuming, as that would seem a logical explanation as to why he was not in the office. However, during the last few days of my fieldwork, Mary shared a new update regarding Jeff. Mary shared that he was not coming to work because of "issues at home with his father." Before, when Mary shared with me that Jeff was feeling anxious because of school, this was based on her own interpretations. However, when Jeff had shared weeks later that it was because of his father and his home life coupled with his own insecurity with the competition in Boulder, the company was introduced to his individual reality.

[29] Mary was planning to allow her ex-husband (the father of her high school aged daughter) live in the home she current has in Indianapolis, as her lease will not expire until late 2017. She was currently in the works to make this living situation a reality so she could partake in the (partial, in her case) move to Boulder.

Jeff decided to withhold this information until he felt ready to share with the organization. Jeff's individual reality of his home life caused a newfound anxiety coming back from Colorado. To move to Colorado would mean moving away from his family, his father, and he would not be able to offer his help back home. More so, he would be relocating to Boulder, halting his life in Indianapolis, and his position might be replaced with more experienced IT specialist in Boulder. There was a lot of uncertainty that surrounded Jeff and the move to Colorado. In September, when I saw Jeff taking on a strong presence within the company, his individual reality at the time was that the company might be expanding locally. However, as the social reality of the organization became relocation, Jeff's individual reality hindered his ability to share in the social reality of LIX, Inc. He was unable to maintain being a star performer and began focusing on his life in Indiana, instead. Social reality plagued the employees in various ways; some were eager to move, others were not.

Conclusion:

LIX, Inc. has since moved to Boulder, Colorado upon completion of my fieldwork. Leia, Ted, Jeff, and Mary are the four employees that were present from the beginning of my fieldwork in June of 2016 that are embracing the company's growth and making the move to west side of the United States. Since my fieldwork has concluded, the company has brought on five new employees that are additionally making the move. Within the past two months, LIX, Inc. has posted multiple job listings on recruiting sites for technologically focused positions in the Boulder area, hoping that Boulder will bring with it talent that the company requires to suit their growing needs.

What I hoped to present in my research was an in-depth timeline for LIX, Inc. In this study, I hoped to demonstrate the beginning, middle, and end stages of the company's growth, while simultaneously sharing employees' perceptions and engagement with ideas of company expansion and relocation. At the beginning of my fieldwork, LIX, Inc. was a company that fostered their family-oriented and family-like environment. Employees interacted with one another as they would their family members. Examining this workplace, however, it is easy to recognize the traces of neoliberalism within this environment. As employees perceive their workplace as a 'home away from home,' this functions as an environment that they feel comfortable spending more time in, therefore, they work longer hours. More so, as the employees are 1099 contacted workers, they are expected to act entrepreneurially (With their commission based income, the more they work, the more money they make). This environment had been established since the beginning of LIX, Inc., and it was one that employees were deeply connected to.

The turn of events that unfolded before my eyes greatly influenced my fieldwork. As the company wished to monopolize the lost assets market, they needed to grow their company in order to do so. Many ideas circulated around this idea of growth. I saw questions asked by the CEO and

COO: “Does the company hire a new employee in the Indianapolis area? Do we increase our free labor by bringing in more unpaid interns? Do we create an entirely new computer based platform that can more quickly locate heirs to assets? Do we relocate?” In a matter of months, I observed the company transition from questioning what to do, to committing to an answer. The company decided to relocate, which is an enormous company decision, and one that affected the employees in various ways.

The CEO and COO felt best that a more hierarchical environment was necessary to establish, as growth became a reality. Employees, comfortable with their informal and family-oriented environment, were expected to adapt to this change rapidly. Unfortunately, some employees were unable to do so and left the company. Other employees were reluctant to the change, and it took time to become acclaimed to the new environment. However, once employees understood the future goals (growth) of the company, many were more understanding of why the company needed to engage with these necessary changes. This understanding also brought with it employees competing for supervisory positions and becoming integral leaders for the company’s growth. Unfortunately, not all employees agreed with the company’s projected ideas of growth, and more continued to leave the company.

When I first began writing my thesis, I opened with the hope that the potential knowledge gained from this study would allow my readers and me to understand the effects of rapidly changing business philosophies, executive management practices on social relationships, human experience, and employee welfare within a small business. What I have laid out throughout this ethnography is a timeline that takes readers through the growth cycle of LIX, Inc. From both anthropological and organizational perspectives, employees’ narratives and actions can be understood in conjunction with reasoning behind the company’s need for growth.

From my own personal observations and analysis, I was able to help employees make sense of their perceptions during this time. More so, I was able to offer my findings and observations to the CEO and COO by sharing that their perceptions of growth (time horizons, shared assumptions, first-line supervisors) differed from that of their employees. I can now see that this research allowed the company to understand the human effects and cultural costs that came from the company's decision to expand, but made them aware of what the costs of growth meant for the future of their company and their employees.

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